



MISSION REPORT

Grand Bargain Localization Workstream Demonstrator Country Field Mission to Iraq 18-22 November 2018

This mission report is for public use and is primarily intended for the Grand Bargain Localization Workstream members and the various local and national organizations, donors, UN agencies, international NGOs, and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement in Federal Iraq and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq who gave their valuable time and shared their views to the Mission Team. Results and findings will be shared with interested external persons via webinar and will also be highlighted in regional workshops by early 2019.

The mission was planned and organized by the Localization Workstream co-convenors, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation (SDC), with support from REACH, Iraqi Red Crescent Society, NGO Coordination Committee Iraq, Oxfam and the Office of the UN Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator.

The views expressed in this report represent those of the mission as a whole and not necessarily those of the individual participating organizations.

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DRAFT

List of Acronyms

BCF	Barzani Charity Foundation
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DAMA	Doctors Aid Medical Activities
GBV	Gender Based Violence
HCT	Humanitarian Country Team
HFU	OCHA Humanitarian Funding Unit
HRP	Humanitarian Response Plan
ICCG	Inter Cluster Coordination Group
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDP	Internally Displaced People
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
IHF	Iraq Humanitarian Fund
INGO	International Non-Government Organization
IRCS	Iraq Red Crescent Society
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
JCC	Joint Crisis Coordination
JCMC	Joint Coordination and Monitoring Centre
KRG	Kurdistan Regional Government
NCCI	NGO Coordination Committee Iraq
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
RC/HC	UN Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator
REACH	Rehabilitation, Education and Community Health
SDC	Swiss Development Cooperation
SSDF	Sorouh for Sustainable Development Foundation
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

Executive summary

The second localization workstream demonstrator country field mission was conducted in Iraq from 18 to 22 November 2018 with the aim of promoting and facilitating the achievement of the Grand Bargain Localization (Workstream 2) commitments. The seven-member mission team co-led by the Localization Sherpas from Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC) and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) held discussions with humanitarian actors from various agencies and stakeholder groups mainly in Kurdistan Region and a short visit in Baghdad to better understand what localization means for them and identify good practices and remaining barriers.

Iraq is currently in a post-conflict situation after the end of military operations against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in December 2017. There are, however, unpredictable dynamics throughout the country that lead to new displacement and affect the return of internally displaced people (IDPs) — these include sporadic attacks by armed groups, small-scale military operations, and new sources of instability linked to rising poverty rates, lack of livelihood opportunities, and political and social tensions. The impact of the armed conflict coupled with the country's susceptibility to natural hazards such as droughts, floods, desertification and earthquakes have exacerbated the vulnerability of Iraqi people, handicapped its government's capacity, and crippled many essential services. Women and girls have been particularly affected and continue to be at risk, with protection high on the agenda of government and humanitarian agencies.

Localization is progressing in Iraq although there is uneven progress across Grand Bargain signatories and other entities, as well as across the different commitments. Local and national NGOs and civil society organizations have been on the frontline of humanitarian assistance as they had access to highly insecure, sensitive and inaccessible areas at the onset of the ISIL takeover; this was seen as their comparative advantage. On the flip side, they recognized their capacity constraints to take on a larger role and more leadership role in humanitarian programming. Both international and local/national actors acknowledged the ongoing difficulty in finding the right balance of risk-sharing between them when it comes to fiduciary and operational risks. We observed that local actors did face challenges in upholding humanitarian standards, but the Iraqi reality was much more nuanced and complex than the way in which the issue is often portrayed in headquarters debates.

Steps have been taken by international actors to address some of the partnership and capacity problems that have been identified in the Grand Bargain, but more needs to be done to walk the talk on localization. There are a number of good practices contributing to the advancement of the localization agenda, especially those seeking to maximize complementarity and working towards true partnership. Stumbling blocks remain, however, such as risk aversion that leads to lack of trust, attitudes and ways of working that are perceived by local actors as a "superiority complex", and methods of capacity strengthening that remain one way and project-delivery focused. The lack of self-organization among local and national actors, in particular civil society organizations engaged in humanitarian work to demand change and find "local solutions" was also found to be an impediment to progressing localization.

Towards a transformative localization agenda in Iraq in which local actors lead effective, principled and accountable humanitarian response, the following recommendations are put forward by team members:

1. **For institutional donors and bilateral agencies** to: (a) develop/pilot strategies on risk sharing that address fiduciary compliance and impartiality concerns for local and national actors; (b)

include provisions in partnership agreements with international partners for minimum percentage coverage for overhead costs, capacity strengthening and visibility for local and national partners; (c) support consortium projects between UN agencies/INGOs and local and national actors; (d) increase funding for capacity strengthening for local and national actors to efficiently manage the funds provided through the Iraq Humanitarian Fund and increase multi-year investments and; (e) provide more flexible, simplified and harmonized reporting requirements.

2. **For UN agencies and INGOs to:** (a) lobby donors and other international partners to accept or make use of their local partner risk assessment and create opportunities for local and national actors to demonstrate their trustworthiness; (b) hold open, honest and regular conversations with local partners on both sides' views of the risks and challenges and agree on ways forward; (c) explore multi-lateral funding and non-funding partnerships with local and national actors (d) review or develop partnership strategies and policies in cooperation with local partners; (e) support NGO Coordination Committee Iraq's work on capacity strengthening to local and national NGOs; (f) initiate regular country-based consultations and dialogue on the Grand Bargain, including its commitments on localization; (g) address specific concerns by local actors on coordination structures and meetings; (e) recognize the critical role of women's rights and women-led organizations in the reconstruction phase and intentionally engage with them, especially on protection and gender equality.
3. **For local and national actors:** (a) conduct consultations to explore the possibility of forming an alliance/coalition/network that is informed and guided by a shared understanding and vision of localization; (b) develop or strengthen organizational development strategy and prioritize capacity-strengthening initiatives that address weaknesses in governance, systems and policies; (c) explore opportunities and feasibility to undertake local fundraising activities (individually and as a collective) in support of humanitarian response work and of their own financial sustainability.

Introduction

1. In May 2016, on the occasion of the World Humanitarian Summit, several dozen donor governments and international humanitarian organizations signed the Grand Bargain, making commitments to transform their practices in ten areas (called workstreams) in order to make the humanitarian ecosystem more efficient, more effective and more people-centred. The Localization Workstream includes commitments on **funding** local actors as directly as possible, investing in the long-term institutional **capacity** of local actors, removing barriers and obstacles to and promoting more equal **partnerships** between international and local actors, and ensuring better integration with local **coordination** mechanisms.¹
2. In order to promote and facilitate the achievement of these commitments, Grand Bargain signatories participating in the Localization Workstream have chosen three demonstrator countries for group missions designed to:
 - deepen understanding about what localization means for the various stakeholders
 - identify good practices, challenges and barriers on delivering on the four above highlighted main areas of the Grand Bargain localization commitments, as well as on integrating gender into localization efforts
 - promote progress on the localization commitments in each country.
3. The **mission to Iraq, conducted from 18 to 22 November 2018**, was the second of these series of missions. The seven-member Mission Team was composed of Headquarters representatives from donors (Germany and Switzerland), OCHA, UNICEF, International NGOs (CARE and Oxfam), and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC). The local actor member of the team from Nigeria unfortunately did not manage to secure a visa in time to join the mission. The mission took the Localization Sherpas from Swiss Development Cooperation and IFRC - who also served as mission co-leads to Baghdad – and the whole mission team to Kurdistan where discussions were held with humanitarian actors from various agencies/organizations and stakeholder groups – Federal Government and Kurdistan Regional Government, local and national NGOs including five women’s rights organizations, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, UN agencies, International NGOs, and donors. In two separate groups, the mission team spent a day to visit camps for internally displaced people and refugees (Hasansham, Hasham, Debaga and Qushtapa).
4. This report presents the Mission Team’s key observations and learning as well as recommendations that were informed or directly contributed by stakeholders during the meetings and discussions the team had during the five-day mission. Details of the programme, meetings with humanitarian actors and the list of Mission Team members are annexed at the end of this report.

¹ The full text of the Grand Bargain including the six Localization Commitments under Workstream 2 can be found in <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/grand-bargain-hosted-iasc> and https://media.ifrc.org/grand_bargain_localisation/home/

Country context

Disaster risk profile

5. Iraq has been successively ravaged by the 1980-1988 war with Iran, crippling sanctions after its invasion of Kuwait in 1990, and internal conflict after the US-led invasion of 2003. In the summer of 2014, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) captured several Iraqi cities and this resulted in more than six million cases of internal displacement as Iraqis sought to flee the violence.²
6. The human toll of four years of intensive, virtually non-stop combat has been enormous. In 2014, 2.5 million civilians were displaced inside Iraq, more than one million people fled their homes, in 2016, an additional 700,000 people fled and in 2017, 1.7 million civilians were newly displaced. The pace and scale of displacement made the Iraq crisis one of the largest and most volatile in the world and civilians were at extreme risk throughout, from aerial bombardment, artillery barrage, cross-fire, snipers, and unexploded ordnance. Tens of thousands of civilians were used as human shields and hundreds of thousands have survived siege-like conditions.³
7. Since the end of hostilities between the government of Iraq and ISIL in December 2017, an estimated 4 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) have returned to their areas of origin while approximately 1.9 million IDPs remain displaced. Women and children with perceived affiliations to extremist groups have been identified as the most vulnerable category of those who remain displaced. This population is discriminated against and segregated within IDP camps, prevented from returning to their homes, denied humanitarian aid, and subjected to sexual violence.
8. The country also faces a variety of natural hazards and risks due to its varied climate, and is increasingly susceptible to drought, floods, sandstorms, desertification, marshland ecosystem degradation, soil salination of fertile lands and earthquakes. Acute poverty, displacement and the continuing effects of conflict have exacerbated the vulnerability of the Iraqi people to natural hazards. Armed conflict and its repercussions have handicapped government capacity and crippled many essential services needed to reduce risks, manage hazards and respond to disasters.⁴

Humanitarian actors and structures

9. The Joint Coordination and Monitoring Centre in Baghdad is the Federal-level humanitarian coordinating while the Joint Crisis Coordination Centre (JCC) was established by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in Erbil to enable partners to respond to humanitarian emergencies in the Kurdistan Region.
10. The Humanitarian Country Team currently has 29 members including three national NGOs (REACH, SSDF and DAMA), together with UN agencies, INGOs and donors as well as ICRC and MSF

² IOM, Iraq Mission, [Displacement Tracking Matrix, IDPs](#)

³ [Iraq: 2018 Humanitarian Response Plan Jan -Dec 2018](#)

⁴ Iraq: Country Case Study Report, How Law and Regulation Support Disaster Risk Reduction, UNDP June 2014

as observers. An Inter-Cluster Coordination Group operates in Baghdad. The NGO Coordination Committee for Iraq (NCCI) serves as the NGO forum for both international and national NGOs and has 95 members and six observer NGOs operating in the country on both humanitarian and development work.

11. Historically, there have been thousands of local and national NGOs and civil society organizations (CSOs) operating in Iraq and close to 3,000 are registered entities. They are traditionally community-based charitable or solidarity associations which support a specific group based on their religious and ethnic identity and obligations. Iraqi civil society is strongly influenced by the diversity of its social and ethnic structures and has been further shaped by the country's political history. The onset of the ISIL takeover in 2014 again precipitated a shift in the focus of many local NGOs/CSOs to the provision of frontline humanitarian assistance in highly insecure, sensitive and inaccessible areas. Local NGOs see their strengths in terms of proximity (rather than access) as they are directly affected and have a vested interest in recovery. Weaknesses identified in recent studies⁵ relate to poor levels of governance, poor understanding of the role and purpose of NGOs, and weaknesses in accountability and transparency as well as adherence to humanitarian principles.

Disaster risk reduction

12. Within a context of successive conflict crises and multiple natural hazards, a historically weak institutional framework for disaster risk reduction has further undermined the capacity of communities and individuals to manage disaster risks. The government of Iraq has traditionally responded in a reactive manner to disasters associated with flooding, earthquakes, drought, conflict and industrial accidents. Measures introduced before 2003 that govern disaster risk management include the Emergency Use Law 1961, the Civil Defence Law 1978, the Social Care Law 1980, and the Public Health Law 1981. The institutional capacity of the state to effectively manage disaster risk was inhibited during the post-war transition.

Key observations and findings

Understanding the context

13. Iraq is considered an upper middle income country although economically the situation of vulnerability is still very real and acute in many parts of the country. The Level 3 emergency was lifted in 2017 and the humanitarian situation is referred to as **“post Mosul”, or “post-conflict transition”**. **Complex conflict crisis, mainly localized conflicts, are still happening while other areas are concurrently moving to durable solutions**. Protection remains a key concern in areas still in conflict and there is a need to uphold International Humanitarian Law and to ensure

⁵ These include: 1) *Local NGO Learning Needs Assessment, Iraq and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq*, NCCI and RedR UK; 2) *Tracking the Grand Bargain from a Field Perspective*, Ground Truth Solutions; and 3) Stakeholder survey conducted as part of the preparation of the background report for this demonstrator country mission, IFRC

adequate protection specially for women and children in the camps, minority groups, and those with a perceived affiliation to extremist groups.

14. **Humanitarian funding overall is diminishing**, leading to greater inter-agency competition. The shift to durable solutions for the 2019 Humanitarian Response Plan is likely to create a shift in the geographical focus of the response areas that are currently underserved and where access for international actors is currently limited. There is a significant reconstruction bill with most international support pledged mostly in the form of loans. National civil society organizations find it very difficult to access funding aimed at recovery/reconstruction and as such there is high reliance on humanitarian funding for durable solutions.
15. **The issue of local actors' ability to uphold humanitarian principles is more nuanced and complex in the Iraqi context than what is often portrayed in global localization dialogues.** It was heard repeatedly that local actors are steeped in local dynamics and at the mercy of political pressure, and that this makes it difficult, if not impossible, for them to be impartial and neutral. Yet, paradoxically, this proximity to the operating environment was also seen as an asset as it allows them to negotiate with authorities/armed groups and access places not reachable by international actors (e.g., in Mosul before the liberation). There needs to be more awareness of the trade-offs between gaining/negotiating access and neutrality/impartiality as *"gaining access also comes with a price"* (ICRC). Success might not be defined by staying away from government pressure and relations, but rather by how quickly one can disentangle from political pressure after gaining access. Local actors are able to withstand political pressure in many cases and the system of checks and balances provided in the humanitarian system also help to navigate these complexities.

Understanding localization

16. **The localization agenda is understood in different ways.** Some see it as a striving for complementarity between international and local action, while others understand it as a more transformative agenda where local actors will ultimately be leading the response to their own emergencies. This later vision requires more sustainable humanitarian capacity in Iraq, recognising that international actors are likely to downscale and withdraw as humanitarian funding reduces in a largely post conflict environment. In the transition context in Iraq, localization is being considered as part of the exit strategy by some international humanitarian actors.
17. Across the different groups of stakeholders, the levels of awareness of the Grand Bargain is low⁶ and more nuanced discourse on localization is needed i.e., not simply the paradigm of international vs local actors. **The focus on complementarity in the humanitarian system is essential to the localization conversation; yet equally important and valuable are the checks and balances that the mixture of international and local actors provide.** Solutions to protection issues, for instance, require a strong understanding of the culture and context (a special strength of local actors) but the presence and support of non-Iraqi organizations is also critical. In protection work, various sources relayed that women's organizations were best placed to respond to the protection needs of women and children as they have intimate knowledge of the culture and of women's needs. "In [gender-based violence], local organizations are the players" (GBV sub cluster). Yet it was evident that women's organizations and government can be at odds when responding to women's protection needs especially women and children perceived to be affiliated to ISIL, who were

⁶ The Inter Cluster Coordination Group has had discussions on the Grand Bargain and three priority workstreams were identified including localization. A draft action plan has been developed and shared with the HCT.

afforded better protection by civil society actors. It is important to not put 'local actors' in the same basket, since mandates and capacity (particularly on women's issues) vary substantially from actor to actor.

18. **Forcing or exploiting the comparative advantage of local actors may also have perverse consequences.** When areas such as in Mosul were highly insecure and inaccessible for many international actors, local organizations "get rewarded" for pushing the security boundaries. Local organizations have a great deal of access, but this means they are the first ones being exposed to insecurity and pressure. The pressure also exists for international actors; however, local organizations are more exposed. A local NGO representative noted, "*UN and INGOs know these issues and they leave it to local organizations to deal with and continue to be inflexible in reporting etc.*"
19. **According to the various international actors interviewed, when they have declined or hesitated to directly support local actors, it has been because of: (1) a perception that they may not be neutral – either due to their own bias or external pressure from political sources, (2) fiduciary risks, and (3) perceptions that they were not well placed to address Humanitarian Resource Plan objectives.** On the other hand, examples were given of how dialogue between international and local organisations on the importance of humanitarian principles produced positive results. Moreover, it was recognised that Iraqi nationals, working both within international organizations and local organizations, brave the highest levels of personal risk to provide aid. It was noted that whilst many international organizations perceive themselves as neutral, this view is not necessarily shared by the wider Iraqi society. As many organizations have Western roots and receive Western funds they too can be understood as having a bias. In line with humanitarian principles, all humanitarian actors need to constantly revisit and test themselves against the principles.
20. **Language was also cited by local organizations as a barrier to feeling as though they could engage equally.** This was not so much about Arabic/Kurdish vs. English, but rather that the jargon, acronyms and ways of making arguments that appear alien. One local actor commented "*I have been on the [Humanitarian Country Team] for 18 months, but I am still nervous to speak out. Whilst people say they are listening the body language says be quiet*". Local organizations described some of the elements of capacity assessment and due diligence as "humiliating", with "high priests" from international organizations judging them by standards to which the local organization had had no induction. Additionally, they pointed out that many of the organizations undertaking such assessments were not perfect themselves and, despite their resources, faced internal capacity constraints as well.
21. **In the post-conflict transition context of Iraq, localization is not just about efficiency, but also about harnessing the re-emergence of civil society.** There are more than 5,000 NGOs established and a process is underway to regularize and review the registration process. Out of this, between 100 to 150 NGOs are humanitarian partners most of which are heavily reliant on the international donors, UN agencies and INGOs for funding. There is a notable lack of a joint voice and influence of local actors and while there is a huge opportunity for self-organization and self-regulation that must be harnessed. In other countries, local organizations have formed alliances to demand change.

"By investing in us, you are building a nation" (Local NGO rep)

Capacity and capacity strengthening

22. Capacity constraints among local actors are widely understood as a key barrier to them taking on a larger role and more leadership within humanitarian programming. Local actors accept this to some extent and would welcome more strategic engagements between them and their international partners, with longer term, planned relationships. **Currently, relationships between international actors and local organizations are too often contractual with a duration of only a couple of months, based on a specific project grant rather than a committed accompaniment.** The nature and quality of relationships with international actors can change rapidly when there is a change in individual staff in the international partner which can happen frequently. “Drive-by capacity strengthening does not work.” It takes time, and years of committed pairing.

“The main challenge that we face as a local NGO is the financial sustainability of our organization. Donors trust only international NGOs and they give funds to them. We coordinate with INGOs to be able to implement projects. Partnership with INGOs is limited to their providing funds.” (Local NGO rep)

23. There is lack of coordination among the donors on **capacity assessments** of the local and national organizations. The **short-term project-based approach** leaves little room for a more comprehensive and strategic (organizational) capacity strengthening. Apart from the Iraq Humanitarian Fund plan to focus on capacity strengthening of national NGO partners and not just increasing funding, **very little institutional humanitarian funding** is currently dedicated to capacity strengthening.
24. **There is some debate over what capacity is actually required:** is it really the capacity to implement the project, or rather the capacity to navigate the complexity of the international system: from project and reporting formats, compliance requirements and an understanding of the humanitarian architecture, policies and processes? There is an expectation that local organizations “play our game” rather than the international community making efforts to adapt to the local and national context.
25. **Capacity strengthening is often focused on technical capacity to implement projects.** However, many local organizations need organizational development support – e.g. organizational governance, finance and IT systems, and fundraising capacities (that could generate unrestricted income through local public fundraising). These are costs that go beyond simply maintaining overheads to dedicated organizational investment.
26. **While the international localization agenda has to a large extent focused on funding, this is not the only issue of concern to local actors.** Local organizations were definitely keen to win more resources, but there were more profound concerns too. Many expressed that they would welcome indicators of partnership that go beyond the amount of funding they win to more qualitative aspects of the partnership. Transparency is considered a key issue - local organizations felt they did not understand funding decisions. Some organizations expressed frustration that they received unclear feedback on unsuccessful proposals, or no feedback at all.⁷

⁷ Feedback mechanisms are in place for both the Operational Program System of the Humanitarian Response Plan and the Iraq Humanitarian Fund Grant Management System projects. Some national NGOs may have chosen not to engage with their cluster coordinators, national NGO representatives on the clusters and Advisory Board or with the information directly online on GMS and elsewhere.

27. Under the Country-Based Pooled Fund/Iraq Humanitarian Fund guidelines, Programme Support Costs of local (sub-implementing) partners are covered by the overall maximum 7 per cent of the approved direct expenditures incurred by the implementing (international) partner. **More often than not, very little or sometimes none is passed on from the international partner to the local partner.** Other funding mechanisms that can may be accessible to local and national actors require counterpart contribution that they do not have, and sometimes local and national actors felt unfair competition in bidding for funds.
28. **The Iraq Humanitarian Fund is the main mechanism for donors to fund local and national actors** directly or through an intermediary (UN agency or INGO). Apart from current donor policy (ECHO) or processes (OFDA, Germany) that are prohibitive of direct funding for local actors, other big challenges for donors given the context of Iraq are around finding the balance between risk taking and ensuring compliance as well as the solidity of fiduciary systems. As far as the Iraq Humanitarian Fund is concerned, these challenges are being addressed through the Risk Management Framework in place that entails activities such as field project monitoring, financial spot checks, and audits.
29. There is a broad agreement among the different stakeholder constituencies including local and national actors that **fraud and misuse of funds remain a major concern**⁸ and that capacity strengthening is an important risk management strategy to address this as well as to achieve increased funding levels to local and national actors. Long-term commitment and investment in capacity strengthening are required, and that which entails establishing trust and building relationships between local and international actors.
30. A government official noted that local government and non-government actors do not have a clear understanding of the funding tools, mechanisms and structures of international actors such as the UN agencies, NGOs and other humanitarian actors. Moreover, there is no transparent tracking system or statistics over the rate of funding to local and national actors.

Coordination, voice and influence (including women's voices)

31. **Coordination structures are dominated by international organizations and local organizations struggle to engage** for various reasons including : a) meetings were conducted in English without translation; b) agenda are too often oriented to the needs of international organizations, for example significant time has been given to issues to do with visas; c) the coordination system is complex, and even for those who were comfortable in English felt intimidated by the use of acronyms and ways of framing concerns.
32. Women's rights organizations interviewed expressed that their role and capacities were largely ignored by international actors who came to respond and that funding was captured by the international community stripping women's orgs of their (usual) resources. *"In the beginning [of the crisis], we were not taken seriously."* (women's rights organization rep). The complexity of women's issues, as they play out in the Iraqi culture, was not picked up by international actors, who *"tend to stereotype women's issues."*

⁸ Of the 11 partners selected for funding through the national NGO window, 10 were classified by the Iraq Humanitarian Fund capacity assessment as "High Risk", whilst currently of the 64 national NGOs receiving funding from the IHF, 54 are classified as high-risk partners. These risks are evidenced by the number of ongoing investigations into suspected fraud of which 75% are related to the operations of high risk partners, 87% of these being national NGOs. *IHF, Grand Bargain Workstream 2 - Localization, OCHA, October 2018*

33. According to interviews with women rights organizations, **the international community, in its humanitarian response, largely ignored existing development programmes** and efforts towards women's empowerment, which affected progress to advance the rights of women. Many of the activities for women in host communities stopped as funding went to the humanitarian response for IDPs. Interviewees suggested that this in turn resulted in reduced government investment in and funding for women activities in host communities. Many women's and gender equality advancements were badly affected.
34. **Women's voices are not sufficiently heard; predominantly men were consulted and heard by humanitarian actors/agencies in the camps.** Women's organizations asserted that the international humanitarian community failed to listen to women's voices and to integrate their special needs and capacities in needs assessments. This led to a lack of prioritization of women's issues especially for at-risk people such as children born of ISIL rapes, and Yazidi communities, especially women *"they are thousands of Nadias"* [in reference to Nadia Mourad, Nobel Peace Prize winner]
35. Women's voices make a critical contribution to stabilization, reconstruction and social cohesion – and therefore women's rights/women-led organizations, and government, have a pivotal role to play in this regard. The ask of women's organizations to donors: that a fund be allocated for women/gender-based violence issues as part of the larger stabilization fund (with preferred access given to women's organizations).
36. **A number of local actors complain that their work is not made visible or acknowledged in reports to donors.** One local NGO noted, *"Do donors even know who is actually implementing? All communication is channelled via the INGO/UN and they claim the credit for our work."*

Localization good practices

37. **Localization advances when incentives for localization exist within the system and leadership inside organizations make it a priority.** The evident progress on localization observed by the mission team was often attributed to leadership attitudes. Conversely, little progress has been made when localization is not elevated or prioritized e.g. by some donors.
38. **Representation and engagement in humanitarian coordination mechanisms** of local and national NGOs are notable good practices in Iraq. Three national NGOs (DAMA, REACH, and SSDF) are members of the Humanitarian Country Team. There are 64 national NGOs currently receiving Iraq Humanitarian Fund support and are active members of clusters and have representation in IHF Advisory Board and Technical Review Committees through which they contribute to prioritization and decision-making processes.
39. The 2019 Humanitarian Response Plan was more intentional in highlighting gender-based violence and gender issues and that there was enhanced coordination between cluster on gender issues (including role of local women's organizations)
40. **The NGO Coordination Committee for Iraq (NCCI)** is an unusual and welcome mechanism of coordination between national and international actors. It currently has 169 NGO members of which 70 are national NGOs, a Field Coordination Network which is a team of 25 national NGO partners called Focal Points who are based in all of Iraq's 18 governorates, and two out of seven members of its Executive Board come from national NGOs. It is a comprehensive coordination forum where NGOs can exchange information regarding humanitarian activities and policy decisions in Iraq. The NCCI provides various support services to its member NGOs including

capacity strengthening for local NGOs and advocacy inside and outside Iraq. It is an organization that helps to depoliticize the humanitarian space among national and international actors and is currently the only space for coordination among national NGOs/actors.

41. Since its establishment in 2015, **the Iraq Humanitarian Fund has allocated more than 22 million US dollars or 10% of its funding to national NGOs** including 3.2 million US dollars (9%) disbursed between 1 January to 31 October 2018. Additionally, the Iraq Humanitarian Funding Unit has provided training to national NGOs on proposal and budget development, the Grant Management System, and how to undergo the CBPF capacity assessment to support national NGO access to funding.
42. **The GBV Cluster decided in 2017 to promote localization and funding to local and national organizations.** Standard allocations for the cluster are prioritized for local and national organizations and partnerships between INGOs and national NGOs were made mandatory. The Emergency Livelihoods Cluster also recognized the added value of local and national organizations especially in accessing remote and insecure locations. Partnerships with international organizations have grown into on-the-job capacity strengthening for local partners and there are good indications of increased capacities. The Inter Cluster Working Group, meanwhile, recently discussed the Grand Bargain and agreed to prioritize three workstreams including localization. An action plan has been drafted, shared with the Humanitarian Country Team and inter sectoral “localization-thinking and work are in progress”.
43. Various international agencies/organizations have also made **investments in human resource capacity to localize.** Oxfam has a partnership team of seven staff, DRC has a partnership coordinator focused on evolving its direct implementation approach, and OCHA’s Humanitarian Funding Unit has increased the number of staff to support national NGOs who will be encouraged to engage more with the humanitarian architecture as a prerequisite for funding
44. There are different models of involvement, partnership and consortium between local/national actors and international actors to respond to a purpose/need. While sub-contracting short-term partnerships still exist (most commonly with UN agencies), there are also longer-term partnerships geared towards peer to peer partnership or on developing local capacity to manage humanitarian projects. **The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement partnership model** between ICRC, IFRC, Iraqi Red Crescent Society and other National Societies was seen to present major advantages such as adherence to the same code of conduct and a common regulatory body.
45. **Capacity sharing or building on the comparative advantage of others.** The sharing of local actors’ understanding of the context, language, etc and international actors’ experience in similar crises elsewhere have been useful. Positive results on this are much visible on child protection and GBV responses/activities where majority of these are now being managed by local organizations. Standard Operating Procedures, processes and systems developed by clusters are being used as reference/frameworks for many local and national NGOs. Other examples of involvement of national capacity include:
 - a. Caritas Dohuk’s good partnership experience with CRS specifically around capacity strengthening that is informed by mutually agreed strategic objectives
 - b. German Red Cross supporting the capacity strengthening of the Iraqi Red Crescent Society, including rehabilitation of its branch offices and setting up of organizational systems and procedures

- c. Women Rights' Organizations worked with UNICEF on hygiene distribution and winterization, then a collaboration with UNFPA, UNICEF and WFP to ensure that the needs of women are properly identified and addressed.
- d. UNHCR and EJCC's ongoing support for strengthening the capacity of Barzani Charity Foundation when it was tasked to take over camp coordination functions.

Gaps in information

46. The Mission Team did not have the opportunity to examine other relevant issues such as the following:
 - **Role of the diaspora** in strengthening the humanitarian response – though it was recognized that there are a number of organizations responding in Iraq, particularly those in relation to the Syria refugee crisis
 - **Role of private sector and other institutional and social sources of funding** – though local and national organizations recognize that there are funding opportunities to tap into the philanthropic culture in Iraq
 - **Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Program** – though significant funding has been committed or pledged
 - **Other hazards and how humanitarian mechanisms address them** – the Mission Team focused only on the response to the conflict crisis.

Conclusions and recommendations

47. Localization is progressing in Iraq although there is uneven progress between Grand Bargain signatories and across the various localization commitments and components. However, with the international humanitarian community currently looking to transition towards durable solutions, there is a good opportunity to push the localization agenda further. Steps have been taken by international actors to address some of the partnership and capacity issues raised in the past, but more needs to be done to “walk the talk” of localization. Barriers remain to be addressed, such as risk aversion lack of trust, attitudes and ways of working the are experienced as condescending by local actors, and an approach to capacity strengthening that is “one way” and project-delivery focused.
48. Trust is an overarching issue on all sides. To enhance trust, local and international actors need more regular, honest and systematic conversations, focused on what works and what doesn't. Systematized feedback, mutual rating and peer reviewing may be avenues to explore. A partnership culture that is based on mutual respect, evidence-based conversations, clear declarations and agreements around what can be done, what cannot, and for which reasons, needs to be strengthened. Trust-building will serve principled humanitarian aid, inclusiveness, participation at large, and most importantly accountability to affected populations.
49. The Mission Team proposes the following recommendations for consideration towards a transformative localization agenda, in which local actors are enabled to lead an effective, principled and accountable humanitarian response.

Donors (institutional and bilateral agencies)

- a. Develop and or share strategy on risk sharing/risk transfer to address both fiduciary compliance and neutrality and impartiality concerns that prevent direct funding to local and national actors, as well as those that do not support true partnerships between international and local and national actors.
- b. Include provisions in partnership agreements with international partners to ensure the following for local and national (sub) implementing partners: i) minimum percentage coverage for overhead/project support costs; ii) capacity strengthening strategy and adequate funding; iii) visibility in reporting and communication and; iv) make sure that local partners receive the same multi-year duration of funding that the international partner received
- c. Support through the Iraq Humanitarian Fund and other funding mechanisms consortium projects implemented between UN Agencies/INGOs and local and national actors as equitable partners as well as consortium projects between and among local and national actors
- d. Increase funding for capacity strengthening for local and national actors through appropriate funding mechanisms and explore/develop strategies for multi-year investments that support organizational capacity strengthening for local actors on recovery/transition and preparedness The Grand Bargain localization agenda, specifically that which relates to civil society strengthening, voice and accountability, must be linked to the development agenda (inclusive governance) and development funding.
- e. Provide more flexibility in terms of reporting requirements (e.g. more flexible deadlines, simplify language in proposals and reporting templates), use the harmonized and simplified 8+3 reporting template

UN agencies and international NGOs

- a. Create opportunities for local and national actors to be able to demonstrate their trustworthiness such as a website where third parties can vouch for the organization, transparent rating/feedback mechanism (Airbnb for local and national actors), or audit conclusions be posted. Support/lobby for donors, other UN agencies and INGOs to accept another's local partner risk assessment.
- b. Hold open, honest, and regular conversations with local partners on the risks and operational challenges from both sides and agree on ways forward. Provide information to local actors on the (international) humanitarian system and how it works, and increase and regularize information sharing.
- c. Explore multi-lateral funding and non-funding partnerships (coalitions, consortia) with local and national actors
- d. Review/develop partnership strategy and policies in cooperation with local partners to support localization and good partnership practices⁹. At the minimum it should cover key local actors'

⁹ The [Charter for Change](#) prescribes principles of partnership. [Shifting the Power Project](#)

concerns around principles of partnership, capacity strengthening, overhead/project support costs, visibility and communications.

- e. Support NCCI's work on capacity strengthening support to local and national NGOs and building on its current database, to develop a clear and dynamic mapping of existing local and national NGOs and their capacities.
- f. Initiate regular consultations and dialogue around the Grand Bargain and localization for local and national organizations to know that they can make more demands and play a role in helping hold the wider system to account and therefore effect change.
- g. On coordination, include translators in meetings or involve Translators Without Borders and allocate more space and time for local actors' participation in these meetings.
- h. Recognize the critical role of women's rights and women-led organizations in the reconstruction phase and intentionally engage with them, especially on protection and gender equality.

Local and national actors

- a. Civil society organizations engaged in humanitarian work should come together as one voice, seek change and find "local solutions to localization"
 - b. Conduct consultations and dialogues to explore the possibility of forming an alliance/coalition/network of local and national actors that is informed and guided by a shared understanding and vision of localization.
 - c. Develop and or strengthen organizational development strategy and prioritise capacity strengthening initiatives that address weakness around governance, systems and policies.
 - d. Explore opportunities and the feasibility to undertake local fundraising activities (individually and as a collective) in support of humanitarian response work and of their own financial sustainability
50. The mission team also share the following recommendations specific to the Grand Bargain Localization Commitments as put forward by the Joint Crisis Coordination Centre in Kurdistan Region:
- a. *Transfer of funding to local and national actors (as well as international for that matter) should be accompanied by (a) transparency in decision-making to ensure that funding decisions are based on standard and objectively verifiable criteria and through mechanisms that are well known and well understood by all actors and (b) delegation of greater authority to the local responders as, too often, funds are transferred but all decisions (sometimes down to the micro*

Developed MoUs with INGOs and national NGOs that advance the Charter for Change with the [National Humanitarian Network](#) in Pakistan, and a Charter with [National Alliance of Humanitarian Actors in Bangladesh \(NAHAB\)](#).

level) are made by the international organization with the justification that national actors lack capacity. Yet micro-management only prevents capacity development and creates a climate of distrust and inefficient partnerships.

- b. *Capacity gaps should be addressed through targeted measures rather than depriving the partners of influence and authority. Capacity development has received little attention and its format and methods have remained at the discretion of each organization with no common strategies or approaches adopted even within the UN family.*
- c. *Criteria for what constitutes direct and indirect funding should be established with regard to humanitarian funding channelled to local responders. The issue of direct and indirect delivery through national actors deserves careful attention as it determines the degree of influence exercised by the recipient local actor. Across the spectrum of possible modalities for humanitarian delivery through local actors, we have seen in the case of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq that all too often the international organization retains such a level of control that the local actor is practically subdued under the international donor's systems, decision and procedures. Funds that are labelled as directly channelled through national actors can therefore present a misleading picture and ultimately establish no positive correlation between delivery through local partners and aid efficiency or effectiveness.*
- d. *Differentiating between government responders and other local actors is also another important factor that has implications for governance, accountability and sustainability. It is therefore not practically meaningful to cluster both governmental and non-governmental national and local actors without differentiation. In the KRI, international organizations are consistently reluctant to channel funds directly through government institutions and have cited a range of explanations such as lack of capacity, or mismanagement, neutrality and impartiality of humanitarian assistance and, off the record, even political position-taking. Yet the Kurdistan Regional Government has been the target of repeated calls from the international community to shoulder the responsibility for today's estimated 1.4 million IDPs and refugees while serving its own 5.5 million local population. While the KRG is sensitive and understanding of the explanations provided by the international community, the cited barriers can be addressed through joint efforts rather than being presented to justify blocking direct funding to government institutions. We therefore recommend that a minimum percentage of humanitarian funding is channelled directly through government institutions with, naturally, specific conditions attached to safeguard against common risks and fears. The UNDP's direct financial support to the JCC can be duplicated and be a model of successful partnership for direct funding mechanisms.*

Annex 1: Mission Team members

Name	Position and organization
1. Dr. Jemilah Mahmood	Under Secretary General, Partnerships - International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (headquartered in Switzerland)
2. Mr. Philippe Besson	Head, Multi-Lateral Division, Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)
3. Ms. Lea Moser	Division for Humanitarian Assistance, Federal Foreign Office, Germany
4. Mr. Nigel Timmins	Humanitarian Director, Oxfam (United Kingdom)
5. Mr. Palmer Okpako	Executive Director, Mercy Vincent Foundation, Nigeria
6. Ms. Frederique Lehoux	Humanitarian Partnerships Coordinator, CARE International (United Kingdom)
7. Mr. John Bono	Emergency Specialist, MENA Region, UNICEF (Jordan)
8. Mr. Antoine Gerard	Senior Humanitarian Affairs Adviser, Operations and Advocacy Division, OCHA (US)

IFRC support:

1. Coree Steadman, Senior Officer on Localization, IFRC
2. Atwa Jaber, Policy Intern, IFRC

Annex 2: List of organizations met

In Baghdad:

Sunday, 18 November 2018

- Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator, Ms. Marta Ruedas
- Director-General of the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Centre, Mr. Abdul Ameer Mohamed Ali
- Director-General of the NGO Directorate, Mr. Mohammed Taher Al Tamimi
- Iraqi Red Crescent Society (IRCS) President and ICRC delegation

In Erbil:

Monday, 19 November 2018

- Inter Cluster Coordination Group (ICCG) - *CWG, CCCM Cluster, Protection Cluster, CCS, OCHA, WHO, OCHA-IHF, Emergency Livelihood Cluster*
- Humanitarian Country Team - *WHO, IOM, OXFAM, DFID, DAMA, UNHCR, NCCI, REACH-Iraq, ECHO*
- Donors - *USAID/OFDA, German Consulate, ECHO, Japan, DFAT*
- UN Agencies - *UNFPA, UNICEF, UNMAS, OCHA, UN-Habitat*
- Governor of Erbil, Mr. Nawzad Hadi Mawloo
- Director of the Erbil Joint Crisis Coordination Centre, Mr. Hoshang Mohamed
- Meeting with local actors from the Kurdistan Region - *Iraqi Red Crescent Society, CNSF, CNSF, KHRW, Rwanga Fou, AAF, RNVDO, IFRC, Caritas Dukok, YAO, DAMA, Mamuzain, Al-rakeezeh, Barazani Charity Foundation, Pekawa, SIRD, PHO, PAO, Almortaqa, Al-rakeza RRD*

Tuesday, 20 November 2018

- Meeting with local actors operating on the regional and/or on the federal levels. *TAD, WRO, Hope, PeKawa, K.R.A, Al-Tadamun, UIMS, REACH-Iraq, SSDF, Justice Center, YAO*
- Meeting with Women's rights organizations. *WOLA, Sewan, WRO, WEO*
- Meeting with the ICRC sub-delegation in Erbil, the German Red Cross, and the Iraqi Red Crescent Society in Erbil.
- Meeting with the European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO).

Wednesday, 21 November 2018

- Meetings with local actors, IDPs, and refugees in the camps of Hasan Sham, Harsham, Debaga 1, Debaga 2, and Qushtapa.
- Meeting with INGOs - *PUI, HI, Mercy Corps, Oxfam, Ussom, SFO INGO, NCCI, Save the Children, Christian Aid, NRC, Intersos, CARE, CRS*

Thursday, 22 November 2018

- Debriefing Workshop for local actors, INGOs, and UN agencies at the NGO Coordination Committee for Iraq (NCCI) Erbil headquarter

Annex 3: Mission Itinerary

Day 1, Sunday (18 November 2018)		
Time	Activity	
<i>Various times</i>	<i>Mission co-leads arrive in Baghdad</i>	
<i>Various times</i>	<i>Mission team members arrive in Erbil</i>	
0830-0900	<i>in Baghdad</i>	Welcome and security briefing for mission co-leads
0900-1000		Meeting with the Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator
1030-1130		Meeting with the Director of Joint Coordination and Monitoring Centre
1200-1300		Meeting with the Director of the NGO Directorate
1330-1430		Meeting with Iraq Red Crescent Society
1430-1500		Meeting with ICRC
1700-1900	Mission co-leads travel to Erbil	
2000-2130	Mission team meeting (overview of programme, tasking and grouping)	
Day 2, Monday (19 November 2018)		
0800-0900	Welcome and security briefing for mission team	
0900-1030	Meeting with Inter Cluster Group	
1030-1230	Meeting with Humanitarian Country Team	
1330-1500	Group 1: Meeting with donors Group 2: Meeting with UN agencies	
1530-1630	Group 1: Meeting with the Governor of Erbil Group 2: Meeting with the Director of the EJCC	
1630-1830	Meeting with local actors from Kurdistan Region	
Day 3, Tuesday (20 November 2018)		
0900-1100	Meeting with local actors operating in Kurdistan region and/or federal Iraq	
1130-1300	Meeting with Women's rights organizations	
1400-1430	Briefing by NCCI for field visit on day 4	
1500-1800	Meetings with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ICRC Erbil sub-delegation, German Red Cross, and IRCS - Oxfam - ECHO 	
Day 4, Wednesday (21 November 2018)		
0800-0900	Travel to camps in and around Erbil	
0930-1230	Group 1: Hasan sham IDP camp, Harshm IDP camp Group 2: Debaga IDP and Refugee Camps, Qushtapa Refugee camp	
1530-1700	Meeting with INGOs	
Day 5, Thursday (22 November 2018)		
0900-1130	Mission team preparation for debriefing session	
1200-1500	Debriefing workshop with local actors, INGOs, and UN agencies	
<i>Various times</i>	<i>Mission team members depart Erbil</i>	