



Supporting Iraqis to Recover and Rebuild their lives:

Investing in a people-centered approach to 'reconstruction'

On the December 9, 2017 Prime Minister Abadi announced victory over the Islamic State in Iraq, signalling an end to the military operation.ⁱ In the wake of the conflict the international community, the Government of Iraq, civil society and other key stakeholders will be instrumental in supporting the Iraqi people to recover and rebuild their lives. The Iraq Reconstruction Conference hosted by Kuwait in February 2018 is an important opportunity to mobilize support and sustained investment in the country. We must ensure that we build back more than just buildings and roads—supporting the Iraqi people and ensuring that national institutions are effective and accountable will be critical for promoting a peaceful and resilient Iraq.

While the International Rescue Committee (IRC) continues to respond to the ongoing humanitarian needs in Iraq, we are also committed to investing in the long-term future of the Iraqi people. IRC teams are working to promote access to sustainable solutions to conflict and displacement, revive livelihoods, foster equitable access to services, promote government accountability, enhance education, support trauma recovery, and strengthen local capacity. However, we recognize that humanitarian action is only one catalyst for this effort, and it will take the broad spectrum of development, peace-building, government, and donor stakeholders to ensure the sustainability of these initial investments over the long-term. As the international community prepares to meet at the Kuwait reconstruction conference, we provide a series of recommendations to policymakers, donors, and the Government of Iraq in support of efforts to address the needs of the Iraqi people and ensure an equitable future for women, girls, men and boys.

Sustainable Solutions to Displacement

First and foremost, reconstruction in Iraq must not come at the expense of people's safety and dignity. Indeed, an important component of long-term recovery in Iraq will be ensuring retaken areas are safe and fit for the 600,000 people who remained through the conflict, the 3.2 million people who have returned, and the tens of thousands more expected to do so in 2018ⁱⁱ. However, it is imperative that any returns to these areas do not put people in harm's way and that those who are unwilling or unable to return are supported to pursue an alternate solution to their displacement.

As the 2018 elections loom on the horizon, forced evictions from areas of displacement and other coercive actions instigating premature returns have increased - particularly in Anbar, Salah al-Din, and Baghdad governorates. This means families are being pushed back to locations where their homes remain destroyed or still contaminated with explosive remnants of war, where services are still lacking, and where they may face retribution or rejection from tribal and community leaders and intimidation, violence, and detention by armed actors. At the same time that families are uprooted, some are blocked from returning back to their homes creating further cycles of displacement. As many of these practices amount to collective punishments against marginalized minorities or civilians with perceived or alleged links to ISIS, we must act now so as not to further jeopardize prospects for social cohesion and reconciliation.

In accordance with provisions regarding freedom of movement and choice of residency in Article 44 of the Iraqi Constitution and the rights outlined in section 5 of the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, it is critical for all parties to actively facilitate the conditions and means for displaced Iraqis to return to their homes voluntarily, in safety, and with dignity, or to integrate or resettle in another location of their choosing.

The Kuwait conference organizers and participants should:

- Prioritize funding and access for clearance of explosive remnants of war, and continue to streamline the administrative process for accrediting humanitarian mine action agencies.
- Encourage Iraqi authorities to ensure that any returns to retaken areas are neither blocked nor coerced or forced.
- For displaced Iraqis who are unable or unwilling to return, support other solutions to their displacement - such as integration or settlement in another location of their choosing.
- Enhance access to services and protection, and the ability of civil society organizations to operate effectively by facilitating freedom of movement for all Iraqis and reducing the bureaucratic impediments that hinder civil society access and ability to implement.

Livelihoods

For those displaced by the conflict in Iraq, the ability to work and generate income is consistently reported as one of the greatest needs. It is also a key barrier to return as people need the means to rebuild their damaged and destroyed homes and businesses and support their families. Even after people go back to their areas of origin, they have often depleted their savings and accumulated high debt and need support to integrate into the local labor markets. These needs not only affect IDPs and returnees, but also IDP-hosting communities and remainees in retaken areas; inequitable access to livelihoods opportunities for all members of the community - particularly youth - is often a contributing factor to social tensions.

Program Spotlight

The IRC recently launched a three-year project to support local markets and stimulate income generation for young women and men ages 18-30 in east Mosul. We do this through our bundled services model which supports people to start and grow their own businesses and increase their employability and access to job opportunities, stimulates income generation, and strengthens the local private sector. By ensuring that mentors and trainees are as representative of the broader community as possible and by working with local businesses to help them scale and inject new ideas into the market, it is the hope that these efforts will promote a more inclusive and equitably accessible local economy.

For example, findings from IRC's labor market assessment in east Mosulⁱⁱⁱ have shown that reconstruction needs in retaken areas are high and trade of goods and services has already resumed in many areas as more people return. If given the right technical and soft skills training, coupled with capital support, young male and female entrepreneurs can harness this potential to support their families and revitalize their communities.

While donors are recognizing the important need for livelihoods interventions and providing funding opportunities through mechanisms like the Iraq Humanitarian Fund (IHF), emergency livelihoods programming comprises less than 1% of the total allocation^{iv} and is limited to short-term, emergency interventions with limited sustainability such as Cash for Work or business training. In the 2018 Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP), an estimated 10 million USD will be made available for emergency livelihoods; however, partners initially submitted project proposals amounting to a potential 70 million USD^v. It is clear that the capacity to respond far outweighs the available funding for partners in Iraq. As Iraq moves toward early recovery and beyond, expanded and longer-term funding is also needed to grow and scale these sustainable livelihoods opportunities.

The Kuwait conference organizers and participants should:

- Increase available humanitarian funding for livelihoods programming in Iraq to 70 million USD, on par with partners indicated capacity to implement emergency livelihoods programming in 2018.
- Invest in longer-term market-based livelihoods interventions both in retaken areas and across Iraq and ensure any mechanisms are directly accessible by civil society.

Equitable Access to Services & Accountability

Civil Documentation

Documentation (such as civil ID, passport, housing card, nationality card, Public Distribution System card, birth certificate, or marriage certificate) is vital for Iraqis to recover and rebuild. Many people's existing documentation was lost or stolen during the conflict and official documentation was often never issued for those living under ISIS. At the peak of the displacement crisis, it was estimated that nearly 50% of IDP families were missing some form of civil documentation,^{vi} which is needed to register for humanitarian and governmental assistance, access education and employment opportunities, and move freely.

Program Spotlight

In the governorates of Ninewa, Kirkuk, Salah al Din, and Anbar, our mobile protection teams support vulnerable Iraqis with legal assistance to regain civil documentation, which enhances their ability to access the government social protection system – the primary assistance mechanism for support beyond the emergency phase.

Further, supporting people to regain their documentation not only mitigates protection risks, but also promotes more equitable and inclusive access to government services - particularly for vulnerable members of society such as children, female heads of household, adolescent girls, displaced Iraqis, and other marginalized populations.

Without these documents, Iraqis will be unable to rejoin Iraq's social safety net. However navigating the legal system to regain civil documentation can be difficult without support. Lack of information about how to regain documentation, the cost of legal fees and lawyers, limited freedom of movement to access courts, and insufficient court capacity to manage civil documentation caseloads all pose barriers to obtaining the documentation and government services. Additionally, a weak formal justice system coupled with the proliferation of tribal law and customary justice procedures, can mean that vulnerable Iraqis are left with limited access to due process.

Compensation

Throughout the conflict, many people have been injured, had their family members killed, or had their property damaged or destroyed and a key element of supporting people to recover is compensating them accordingly for these losses. A 2009 national law regulates compensation payments to victims of terror attacks, combat operations, and military errors, but the Iraqi government's lack of resources and political will to implement the law is undermining recovery and civilian trust in the government.

Program Spotlight

The IRC's legal team works to raise awareness around Housing Land and Property (HLP) and compensation rights and supports people through legal processes to file their claims. Enhancing people's understanding of the legal responsibilities of the Iraqi state and supporting them to take the first step in receiving the compensation that can be instrumental for rebuilding their houses and other property and realizing a durable solution for their displacement.

In the first half of 2017, the IRC processed 117 legal cases for compensation in Anbar and Diyala, and although every court case was successful not a single individual has been paid the amount awarded to them. The government's lack of follow-through on its commitments to its citizens is undermining recovery and civilian trust in the government. In this fragile time, the government must strive for accountability and invest in social cohesion by doing all it can to fulfil its obligations to those who have had their lives up-ended by conflict. Further, members of the Global Coalition Against ISIS who have been responsible for civilian deaths, injuries, and property destruction as a result of their military engagement should set the example by ensuring appropriate compensation is provided.

The Kuwait conference organizers and participants should:

- Encourage the Iraqi government to establish an expedited process to issue civil documentation for those who have lost or have been unable to obtain national identification documents; birth, marriage and death certificates; and property deeds.
- Encourage the Iraqi government to allocate adequate resources for programs that support vulnerable Iraqis,^{vii} including national social protection systems and compensation mechanisms.
- Strengthen and adequately resource judicial mechanisms on accountability for conflict-related crimes and ensure they in keeping with due process and not derived from customary practices.
- Facilitate equitable access to the legal system, particularly for women who historically have been unable to exercise their legal rights.
- Coalition members should provide compensation to Iraqi civilians for injuries, loss of life or property resulting from Coalition actions during the conflict.

Education

Infrastructure reconstruction and rehabilitation is critical for providing children with appropriate and safe schools to learn in, particularly given that 50% of public schools in Iraq either require rehabilitation or do not meet national school construction standards^{viii}. However, after years of disruption, integrating children back in to formal education is equally as vital for setting up the future generations of Iraq for success. By June 2017, over 3 million children were estimated as not attending school regularly and more than 1.2 million children, including 90% of children in conflict-affected areas, were out-of-school.^{ix} Lack of access to education is also a main trigger for forced and early marriage of adolescent girls and the engagement of boys in the worst forms of child labor.

Program Spotlight

In addition to IRC's necessary work to rehabilitate schools after years of conflict, the IRC is delivering a large-scale professional development program in Dohuk governorate which will train 3,000 teachers by the end of 2018. Through face-to-face training and ongoing coaching and mentoring, we support teachers both to invest in their own social-emotional wellbeing and to be able to support children in the classroom who have unique needs after experiencing prolonged trauma and toxic stress. Our contextualized education materials are emerging as the gold standard in Iraq for training teachers in this emergency environment and will soon be open source and available to all organizations engaging in teacher training across Iraq.

Education is also about more than access. The quality of learning in school is what counts, and much of this depends on adequate and qualified teachers. In the past years, the number and share of qualified teachers has decreased at all education levels except pre-school^x. This can partially be contributed to the fact that many educators have worked for years without receiving their government salaries - both in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) and Federal Iraq. As more teachers leave the workforce in favor of more economically viable opportunities, overcrowding in classrooms is a constant challenge. In fact, three out of every ten public schools in Iraq run with a multiple shift, significantly compromising learning outcomes for students in this environment.

As of 2015-2016, Iraq spends only 5.7% of its budget on education, which puts the country at the bottom of Middle East countries. Because of these gaps in investment, UNICEF estimates that billions of dollars in unrealized wages – the cost of a generation of children out-of-school– will plague the Iraqi economy for years.

The Kuwait conference organizers and participants should:

- Provide investments in school reconstruction and rehabilitation, including by easing bureaucratic impediments for partners engaging in school rehabilitation, as well as ensuring the clearance of explosive remnants of war from schools.
- Continue to support and scale ongoing teacher training and conflict-sensitive pedagogy to mitigate the negative impacts of psychosocial trauma on children.
- Support children's re-integration into the formal education system by easing barriers to entry and investing in non-formal education and accelerated learning programs.
- Support the Iraqi Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Education to ensure delivery of salary payments to teachers to improve the quantity and quality of educators and reinforce trust in government ministries.

Program Spotlight

The IRC worked intensively with one of our local GBV partners over a period of 5 years to support them with technical protection training and organizational development in key functions such as monitoring and evaluation, financial systems, and reporting. As their capacity grew, we helped to identify direct funding opportunities and provided recommendations to donors. After this successful partnership, the IRC conducted a local partners mapping to identify additional organizations for this collaboration and plan to expand the program into 2018 with the additional support of a dedicated partnership consultant.

Healing Trauma & Promoting Resilience

After years of exposure to war, insecurity and violence millions of Iraqis need to heal from the individual and collective trauma they endured. Access to education or employment is only one part of the equation for vulnerable children, women, and men; people need ongoing psychosocial support and specialized gender and age specific services in order to access and retain those opportunities. This is particularly true for survivors of torture and of gender-based violence (GBV); the reverberating effects of which continue to undermine community cohesion and further marginalize the most vulnerable members of society.

Program Spotlight

IRC supports recovery through community, family based psychosocial support interventions and focused non-specialized support in our women and girls' centers, safe healing and learning spaces for children, and parent support groups. In addition to providing a safe and stable refuge in the midst of uncertainty, IRC provides survivors of violence, those exposed to harm and women, girls, men and boys with the tools and skills that can be used to release stress, manage emotions, and replace negative coping behaviors with healthy strategies. The IRC is increasingly focusing its attention on the mental health and psychosocial support needs of men and boys in Iraq and engaging men in preventing gender based violence in order to expand our impact on the well-being of entire families.

Given the close connection between the psychological impacts of trauma, mental health, and the wider environment of social ecology and cultural values, supporting people to heal and thrive requires a range of complementary psychosocial interventions. First and foremost, providing equitable access to tailored basic services, community and family-based support systems, and focused, non-specialized care are the foundation for wellbeing.^{xi}

In addition to this, some will require further assistance through specialized support. However, clinical mental health services such as psychiatric treatment and pharmacological support are lacking across Iraq, and these gaps are exacerbated by a shortage of trained mental health professionals in the country. Investing in holistic, adequately resourced psychological support systems which offer services along the continuum of mental health and psychosocial needs is essential for ensuring a healthy and well Iraq.

The Kuwait conference organizers and participants should:

- Continue to invest in family and community-based psychosocial support approaches that offer safe spaces and support for people to address trauma safely and in community with one another.
- Encourage the Iraqi government to reduce bureaucratic barriers that inhibit the referral of GBV cases and provision of clinical care for sexual assault survivors in Department of Health facilities.
- Invest in expanding the mental health and psychosocial support practitioner workforce, and systematically support marginalized individuals such as women, children, and people with severe mental health disorders to access mental health care.

Strengthening capacity

Finally, the IRC recognizes that none of the work we do as an international NGO will be sustainable without investment in the structures and people who are best placed to champion a peaceful and inclusive Iraq: local

institutions and the Iraqi people. We do this consciously and proactively through our work on three levels: with individuals and communities, local civil society, and government institutions.

Program Spotlight

The IRC works across sectors to ensure that our relevant government counterparts are supported to carry out their obligations, for example by training ministry officials in child protection case management and record keeping, training primary health care staff at all levels - from physicians to custodians - in GBV core concepts and clinical management of rape protocols, and will soon work with justice officials such as detention center administrators and court judges to raise their awareness of international law and human rights.

At the community level, the IRC enhances the protective environment for children and women by building the capacity of allies from the community through our women and girls committees, and child protection committees. These community members are given the tools and training to identify protection risks across their communities, advocate with authorities and influencers, and promote the participation and leadership of women and children in political, economic, and social life. Further, in line with the IRC's global commitment to improving our accountability to and relationship with local partners, we are also dedicated to supporting local civil society organizations in Iraq. It is also critical that

the government institutions responsible for caring for the Iraqi people are well supported to best meet the needs of the populations who rely on them. The IRC understands that humanitarian actors cannot work in isolation and we work closely with government ministries to identify key barriers prohibiting their effective functioning and invest in their capacity as appropriate.

While INGOs are already working now to enhance the role of communities and local civil society, donors must also support local civil society directly so as to ensure an effective and sustainable continuity of services into the future. Further, INGOs' technical support to ministries and government structures can only go so far without the political will to reform and strengthen government systems from the top down and robust support from the international community to drive that will into action.

The Kuwait conference organizers and participants should:

- Channel at least 25% of funding for Iraq to local civil society organizations and remove barriers that prevent INGOs from partnering with local organizations, in line with commitments made in the Grand Bargain.
- Encourage Iraq to join the World Bank's Global Partnership for Social Accountability, through which CSOs can access additional financial support.
- Support INGOs to continue and scale ongoing capacity-building efforts with government institutions, and ensure the Government of Iraq at its highest levels invests in its own institutions, including through investments in mental health, legal, and education systems.

Conclusion

Iraq stands at a crossroads. How the international community responds in this moment – whether turning our back after the end of ISIS territorial control or re-doubling investments in Iraq and its people – will have a significant impact on the future of the country. Communities will continue to require ongoing humanitarian and protection assistance in the years to come as they seek sustainable solutions to their displacement. Substantial support will be needed from all sides to ensure investments made thus far do not go to waste, and that people are adequately supported beyond the emergency phase, as they face the decades-long task of rebuilding their lives. The Kuwait Reconstruction Conference provides a unique opportunity for the Government of Iraq, the international community, and civil society “to get it right” by ensuring the Iraqi people are kept at the heart of policies and resources.

During the planning and implementation of the conference and subsequent follow-up, the Kuwait conference organizers and participants should:

- Integrate the expertise and role of civil society and the Iraqi people into the conference through comprehensive pre-consultations, representative participation at the event, and speaking roles for international and local civil society actors and affected communities.
- Ensure that any funding mechanisms developed as a result of the conference are directly accessible by civil society.
- Commit to fully fund the 2018 Humanitarian Response Plan alongside any additional funds pledged for reconstruction, in order to continue ongoing humanitarian programming and scale to meet the needs in retaken areas and areas of displacement.
- As undertaken by DFID and the EU, all donor governments should clearly define a comprehensive strategy for their activities in Iraq moving forward, underpinned by a people-centered approach which is developed in close consultation with civil society.

International Rescue Committee in Iraq

The IRC operates in 13 of Iraq's 18 governorates with programs covering child protection, women's protection, education, legal support, protection monitoring, cash and essential items, and livelihoods. With generous support from our donors including DFID, ECHO, GIZ, Irish Aid, OFDA, PRM, One Foundation, SV, and SIDA the IRC reached over 192,000 people across Iraq in 2017.

ⁱ Iraq declares final victory over Islamic State. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-iraq-islamicstate/iraq-declares-final-victory-over-islamic-state-idUSKBN1E30B9>

ⁱⁱ 2018 Humanitarian Response Plan preliminary estimated people in need: 2.2million returnees, 600,000 remainees, 1.5 million displaced people, 3.8 million host community members, 240,000 Syrian refugees. As of October 24, 2017.

ⁱⁱⁱ East Mosul, Iraq Labor Market Assessment. IRC. <https://www.rescue.org/report/east-mosul-iraq-labor-market-assessment>.

^{iv} As of September 2017, the Emergency Livelihoods Cluster received 1.6 million USD out of a total 55.6 million USD pooled fund allocation. https://www.unocha.org/sites/unocha/files/dms/20170912_Iraq_humanitarian_Funding_Snapshot%20%28final%29.pdf

^v According to initial feedback shared by Emergency Livelihoods Cluster on November 30, 2017.

^{vi} <https://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/iraq-situation-unhcr-flash-update-6-february-2017>

^{vii} The social spending floor requirements within the 2016 IMF loan could be a potential model for this:

<https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2016/07/12/14/31/NA071416-Iraq-Gets-IMF-Loan-to-Support-Economic-Stability>.

^{viii} UNICEF. "The Cost and Benefits of Education in Iraq: An analysis of the education sector and strategies to maximize the benefits of education". May 2017. <https://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/cost-and-benefits-education-iraq-analysis-education-sector-and-strategies-maximize>

^{ix} UNICEF. "Nowhere to Go: Iraqi Children Trapped in Cycles of Violence," June 2017.

<https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/IRAQ3%20REPORT%20FINAL.pdf>

^x UNICEF. "Nowhere to Go: Iraqi Children Trapped in Cycles of Violence," June 2017.

<https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/IRAQ3%20REPORT%20FINAL.pdf>

^{xi} IASC Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings (2007). Geneva: IASC.