CDAC NETWORK CASE STUDY: IRAQ HUMANITARIAN COUNTRY TEAM
INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS INFORMATION CENTRE – JULY 2015

The primary logo and access information for the call centre in Arabic

What is the initiative?

A national hotline for Iraqi citizens affected by the ongoing humanitarian crisis is established by an interagency team of UN agencies and NGOs in Iraq. The call centre provides information about humanitarian services such as food distribution points, medical services, and shelter options. The centre will also register and refer needs and provide a mechanism for people in need of or receiving humanitarian relief to convey their feedback, suggestions, and concerns about the efficacy of aid programs. The call centre targets internally displaced people (IDPs) and affected communities across the whole of Iraq.

The call centre is funded by UNHCR, WFP and OCHA with partners including IOM, Norwegian Refugee Council, World Vision and Save the Children providing technical support and capacity building.

Why did it happen?

An assessment in Northern Iraq using the CDAC Network's assessment tool discovered that a lack of information was fuelling feelings of isolation, confusion and growing mistrust amongst displaced Iraqis in northern Iraq, dramatically impacting the ability of communities to cope with the growing crisis. The report followed a rapid assessment of information and communication needs carried out in northern Iraq in August 2014. Its findings reveal that displaced Iraqis currently only have limited access to conflicting and broken information regarding the provision of and access to basic services.

'We don't know the organizations or their names,' one man told the interagency team during their visit to Dohuk in Iraq's Kurdistan region. 'We have never spoken with them. We don't know anything about their work.'

According to the report, the priority information needs among displaced people are threefold: more information about their places of origin and family members who were left behind; better information on aid services; criteria and procedures for registering for assistance; and information about the future including the possibility of resettlement and asylum.
The call centre builds on the experience of a call centre initiative run in Jordan by UNHCR to support refugees.

Where is it taking place?

Wide-scale violence and armed conflict erupted in Iraq in January 2014. Initially concentrated in Anbar Governorate, with the cities of Ramadi and Falluja particularly affected, the violence and its impact quickly grew, displacing over 500,000 individuals by May. In June 2014, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), together with other armed groups, attacked and seized control of Mosul and large portions of northern Iraq, including areas of Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninewa, and Salah al-Din governorates. This has led to ongoing armed conflict, massive internal displacement, serious and systematic violations of basic human rights, interrupted access to basic services, and severe strain on host communities. As a result, Iraq is now contending with one of the largest humanitarian crises in the world, with over 8.2 million people in need of humanitarian assistance as of June 2015 .

When did it happen?

The call centre 'soft launched' in one governorate on 1 July 2015 - as such it is still very much in its pilot stage. It is funded for limited operations until the end of 2015. Further funding is required for the project to reach its full potential.

Who was involved?

As a joint interagency service, the call centre requires substantive inputs from the entire Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) and wider humanitarian community. As of this writing, UNHCR has committed USD $420,000 WFP has committed USD $250,000 to the project and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) will be committing USD $50,000. The United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) is leading the establishment and implementation of the call centre. The Norwegian Refugee Council, Save the Children and World Vision International are providing administrative and technical support. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) is leading the design and development of a linked project through the development of the Community Response Map website.

What is happening?

There are three main components to the call centre:

Information will be gathered about the provision of humanitarian services from cluster leads and agency heads and provided to call centre operators. For example, the Health and Nutrition Cluster will provide information about the locations and hours of operation of medical clinics and other health services, whereas the Food Security Cluster will be asked to provide information about distribution locations each week.

A national hotline is established to allow IDPs and affected communities to seek information about humanitarian aid, request assistance, and provide confidential feedback on the humanitarian agencies' services and outreach activities. Call centre operators are trained on protection issues. They will make use of a custom web application to access information updates, respond to inquiries from IDPs and host community members, and escalate urgent cases to supervisors as necessary. To make the humanitarian response efforts more effective, efficient, and appropriate, call operators will also gather feedback as to current needs, which will then be fed into the appropriate working groups, cluster coordinators, sector leads, the HCT, and OCHA's Humanitarian Operations Centre.

Cluster updates will be consolidated and published online using a custom-designed reporting application that builds on IOM's existing 'Community Response Map' (CRM) platform. The website will be made available to the public in English, Arabic, and Kurdish. In addition, a number of weekly and monthly information products will be provided to key stakeholders highlighting emerging trends and allowing members of the humanitarian response effort in Iraq to improve their programmes and activities. Finally, a monitoring and learning component is factored into all project activities to ensure the project can be improved and refined throughout the implementation period and serve as a model of best practices for future humanitarian crises, and to ensure relevance and accessibility across age, gender and diversity.

What did you learn?

It is still very early to show results, however, on the second day the call centre received 30 calls with only limited advertising in two camps and three drop in centres. There are three main areas of learning thus far:

1. Preparedness: there is a need to plan each activity as early as possible, including agreements between agencies and with the government. The accessing of a free phone short code has been a challenge owing to negotiations with the three mobile network providers.
2. Understanding of the information needs of the community and of the operational context. For example, owing to international sanctions it took three months to get the Cisco system required to handle the volume of calls into Iraq. Also, the knowledge of both of the government and of the mobile phone companies of issuing and then ensuring functionality of short codes was a challenge.
3. Technology development: Humanitarian actors are traditionally slow to adopt available technology and opportunities from the corporate sphere in order to solve humanitarian problems, including the use of phone systems and social media.

For further information, please contact:

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