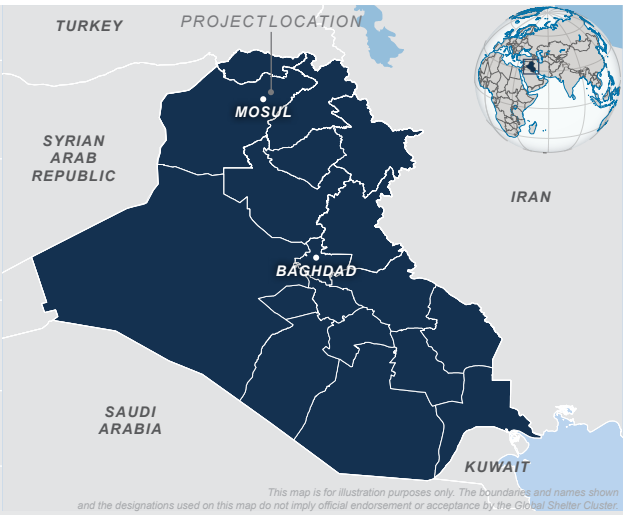
CASE STUDY

IRAQ 2017–2018 / CONFLICT

KEYWORDS: Housing repair, Vouchers, Local private sector engagement

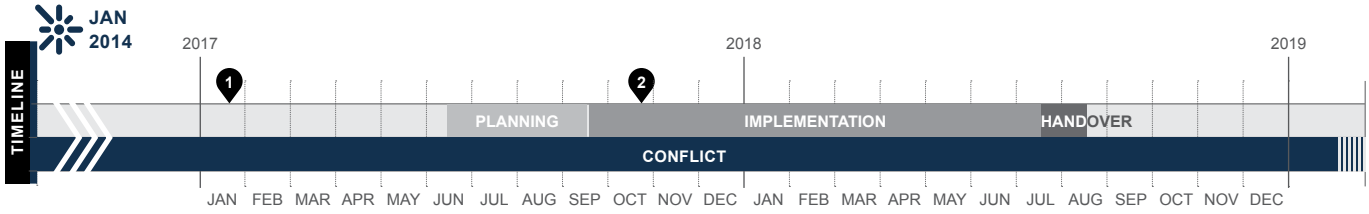
CRISIS	**Iraq conflict, Jan 2014–onwards**
TOTAL PEOPLE DISPLACED[1]	**4.3 million** internally displaced **1.9 million** returnees, as of Jan 2017
HOUSING DAMAGE[2]	65% damage rate in Ninewa governorate, as of Jan 2018. Additionally, 74% returnee households reported moderate damage and 72% reported insufficient quality of their shelter[3]
TOTAL SHELTER NEEDS[4]	**3.9 million** individuals at the start of 2017 (1.3 million in Ninewa governorate)
PROJECT LOCATION	Khorsebat village, Ninewa governorate
PROJECT BENEFICIARIES	**873 households** (4,387 individuals)
PROJECT OUTPUTS	**650 shelters** repaired **2,383 vouchers** distributed
SHELTER SIZE	Variable following Iraqi minimum standards[5]
SHELTER DENSITY	Variable (min. 5.5m² per person for the first six family members, 3.3m² thereafter)
MATERIALS COST	**USD 892** per shelter on average[6]
PROJECT COST	**USD 1,295** per shelter on average



PROJECT SUMMARY

The project repaired 650 houses in the Ninewa governorate in Iraq, benefiting displaced, returnee and local vulnerable households. It was implemented using a voucher modality. This significantly contributed to increasing livelihood opportunities within the local markets through the engagement of local suppliers. The project used a community-based approach, as beneficiaries could choose between having the organization in charge of carrying out the rehabilitation (through local contractors) or completing the agreed renovations themselves, with supervision and support.

[1] Iraq Humanitarian Needs Overview 2017, https://bit.ly/2UhHFiD.
[2] Ministry of Planning and UN-Habitat (Jan 2018). No data is available for the whole crisis. Initial satellite assessments show the following damage rates: Ninewa 65% / Anbar 20% / Salah al Din 10% / Diyala, Baghdad, Kirkuk 5%.
[3] IOM Iraq Mission (October 2016). Returnee Location Assessment Report.
[4] Iraq Humanitarian Response Plan 2017.
[5] The Iraqi minimum standards is 33m² for a family of six, with an additional 3.3m² of covered living space for every additional member. In some cases, where multiple families were in a single structure, efforts were made to maintain 5.5m² per person for additional private living space for each family.
[6] Categories of repairs for war damage in Iraq: below USD 500 = Cat 0, USD 500–1,500 = Cat 1, USD 1,500–5000 = Cat 2, USD 5,000–10,000 = Cat 3, USD 10,000+ = Cat 4 (not humanitarian). https://bit.ly/2WjRI8L.



1. Sep 2017: **Initial household and technical assessments conducted, initial market assessment completed. 442 shelters identified.**
2. Nov 2017: **Comprehensive market assessment and development of standardized BoQ for repairs.**
3. Jan 2018: **Second household and technical damage assessments conducted. Total of 652 shelters identified (due to increased returns).**
4. Mar 2018: **Tendering process completed and median price set across all suppliers.**
5. Mar 2018: **First round of voucher distributions.**
6. Apr 2018: **Construction commenced**
7. Jun 2018 **Second round of voucher distributions. Budget for repairs increases due to cost savings.**
8. 31 Jul 2018: **Construction completed and verified by project engineers.**
9. Aug 2018: **Payment of suppliers and monitoring.**

STRENGTHS

+ Customization of assistance at the household level.
+ QR codes concealed prices from vouchers, which helped preventing tensions.
+ Local capacity was built and financial benefits distributed locally.
+ Gender-balanced team.
+ Multisectoral approach.

WEAKNESSES

- Houses with minor damages were targeted, meaning that less resources were available for repairing heavier damage.
- Inaccuracies in the vulnerability scoring.
- Repeated turnover of staff delayed implementation.
- Engineers did not clearly communicate structural issues and risks.

The project rehabilitated houses through a voucher scheme. Repairs included roofs and walls.

CONTEXT IN NINEWA GOVERNORATE

For more background on the Iraq crisis and shelter response, see overview A.33 in Shelter Projects 2015-2016.

The conflict between the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and the Iraq Security Forces started in late 2013 and spread to central governorates in June 2014. The Ninewa governorate was one of the most impacted by displacement, adding to the impact of previous waves of displacement and returns between 2006 and 2013.[7]

Although early assessments of the effects of the military operation to retake Mosul in October 2016 pointed towards large numbers of people moving to camps,[8] many families chose to either remain in their houses while villages were retaken, or to travel short distances from military operations to return to their villages as soon as possible.[9]

SITUATION DURING THE CRISIS

The majority of IDPs in Iraq during the crisis resided outside of formal camps. The housing situation of many families – both displaced and non-displaced – deteriorated due to depleting financial resources, rising inflation, limited income-generating opportunities and the continued arrival of newly displaced households.[10] The latter caused increased competition over available housing and forcing displaced families to reside in sub-standard conditions. Fifteen per cent of IDPs in northern Iraq lived in "critical" shelters that included public spaces, such as religious centers and schools, unfinished and abandoned buildings. Shelter issues were primarily associated with poor insulation and damage, as well as a lack of basic household items.

NATIONAL SHELTER STRATEGY

As the humanitarian crisis in Iraq entered a new phase from emergency to early recovery, the national shelter strategy prioritized rehabilitation of existing structures, particularly for returnees. During this project, the Shelter Cluster also formalized five War Damage Categories, and repair cost ranges for each.[11] The Shelter Cluster asked partners to prioritize Categories 2 (Major) and 3 (Severe) as those with the greatest need and ability for humanitarian actors to intervene, whereas Categories 0 (No damage) and 1 (Minimal) may be repairable by the households themselves. For Category 4 (Destroyed), the response should most likely come from the government and development partners. Most households targeted by this project fell into damage Categories 1, 2 and 3.

PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

The project was part of a larger multisectoral programme including shelter rehabilitation, NFI distribution and WASH infrastructure repair. The shelter component focused on rehabilitating houses in Khorsebat village – which had been damaged by airstrikes, mortars, IEDs and machine-gun fire – to facilitate recovery from the conflict and enable return.

Ninewa governorate was the most affected in terms of displacement and damage to housing.

Project engineers conducted structural assessments of houses to ensure people were not inhabiting unsafe structures and to create individualized Bills of Quantities (BoQs), taking into consideration households' unique needs and the different types and levels of damage.

The shelter team consisted of a male project manager, a female lead shelter engineer and four additional shelter officers (two men and two women), who were also engineers. This gender balance was critical to ensuring adequate access to all beneficiaries and representation of all household members' needs in the final BoQs. Due to the cultural norms of this area of Iraq, unaccompanied men or women may often not enter the home of someone of the opposite gender, or enter all rooms of the house.

As the targeted village had access to functioning markets and skilled workers, the project used restricted vouchers. In order to support and restore livelihoods in the project area, the team conducted market assessments and trader capacity assessments among small local suppliers, and then invited them to submit quotations for the items they supplied. Rather than selecting a few large suppliers, the organization selected 24 smaller suppliers near the village, and then divided BoQs for each type of work among the participating suppliers based on geographic proximity to the beneficiaries and their capacity to implement. This ensured that households worked with multiple local suppliers and increased livelihoods in the community, as well as accountability of suppliers to beneficiaries. Since a list of BoQs and beneficiary households were given to the suppliers, materials arrived directly to people's homes, improving service delivery.

To repair damage to houses, multiple small suppliers were engaged.

The vouchers used QR codes which were scannable by suppliers to conceal the total monetary value of the rehabilitation. This was important to prevent tensions within the community and to ensure that, while households were able to refuse installation of certain items, there was no financial incentive for them to do so. If there had been any incentive, households may have resorted to hiring untrained young men to do electrical and plumbing work to maximize savings. However in this case, when beneficiaries refused installation, the cost savings were pooled again, and then a second round of vouchers were issued to conduct additional rehabilitation works, targeting particularly vulnerable households.

TARGETING

The project area was selected after consultation with Shelter Cluster representatives on underserved areas, following which the project team conducted structural and vulnerability assessments. As this was the first time the project was implemented in the area, the organization prioritized a location where more than 80 per cent of the houses had minor, moderate, or severe damage and many households were particularly vulnerable. Initially, 500 structures were targeted. As the project progressed, more households returned from camps in hopes of participating in the project and the organization secured funds to cover an additional 150 structures. This meant that more than 87 per cent of households with shelter needs in the target location were reached.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The project team continually engaged with the community and the suppliers. During the initial assessment phase, the objectives of the project and the responsibilities of actors involved were shared with the community. The project team worked with the community to facilitate UXO clearance and rubble removal – which were the respective responsibilities of the government and the property owners – and shared the processes for beneficiary and supplier selection. While the construction was underway, project officers were on site every day to supervise work, provide guidance and feedback, and listen to concerns.

Engineers conducted structural assessments and developed individual BoQs.

To avoid tensions within the community when additional funds were made available, the project team reassured the community that more households would be served and that some households would receive additional assistance, as well as outlined the criteria for selection. Families were selected based on size or other vulnerabilities, and depending on the gaps between the BoQ and what had already been achieved. A feedback mechanism was also used to allow community members to raise any concerns (anonymously, if they wished).

MAIN CHALLENGES

INSECURITY AND INCREASED RETURNS. During the planning phase, the Kurdish independence referendum and resulting insecurity affected access to the project area for more than a month. Furthermore, increased returns during that time led to an increase in the number of households participating in the project, which required a second round of assessments.

HOST FAMILIES. While the households served were primarily owners, there were also many IDP families hosted by local households, increasing the amount of floor space needed to ensure that minimum standards were met. Where possible, the organization rehabilitated additional rooms to create private spaces, or enclosed additional spaces with partitions. When two households within a structure were identified as vulnerable, the organization increased the budget available.

The shelter component of the project focused on repairs to houses in category 1, 2 and 3. This was part of a wider programme including the distribution of household items and the rehabilitation of water and sanitation infrastructure.

HOUSING, LAND AND PROPERTY. In areas controlled by ISIL, the militants aggressively confiscated and resold property based on ethnic or religious affiliation. As such, multiple people may have had documentation asserting their right to a property. With guidance from the HLP Sub-Cluster, the organization allowed people to submit property ownership documents or other items which could be verified by the municipality, such as inheritance documents, utilities bills or government-issued documents noting their address. Where people lacked official documentation, their neighbours were required to formally attest that they had the right to occupy the house, and then a committee of elders from the community reviewed the claims. If approved by the community, the document was then filed with the municipality. While this system was not immune to corruption, the nature of the relatively small community meant that there were no competing claims. For areas held for a longer time under ISIL or in larger communities and cities, this problem would have likely been more challenging.

WIDER IMPACTS OF THE PROJECT

Through this project, households learnt about structural safety and how to prioritize technical repairs over beautification, with a strong emphasis on privacy and security (e.g. gates, doors, privacy walls within shared buildings) as a cultural priority.

Additionally, through the method of splitting BoQs among suppliers, the project team could spread the financial benefits of the project amongst local businesses, who then hired skilled community workers, restoring supply chains and livelihoods in the communities. As suppliers were paid after the work was completed, they were incentivized to finish major works quickly. This promoted greater employment of labourers and material orders. Suppliers also reported that because of the works they did, they gained a trustworthy reputation in the community, which brought them more contracts for further repairs beyond the scope of the project. In total, nearly USD 580,000 went to 24 local suppliers for materials and labour.

The multisectoral nature of the programme led to the rehabilitation of the pumping station serving the whole project area, as well as repairs to some individual household connections. This supported returns to areas with both adequate shelter and WASH services. Ultimately, the repairs made by this project ended the displacement of households that had been living in nearby camps for months or years. While the project was very small in scale compared to the overall needs in Iraq, its nature helped households to no longer require assistance, therefore contributing to durable solutions.

Families in conflict-affected areas also conducted repairs themselves. The image shows a self-built rehabilitation in another location.

The project repaired walls and stairs, and added handrails for safety.

NEXT STEPS

For the next iteration of the project, the organization intended to focus on Category 2 and 3 structures to ensure that more urgent needs were met effectively. It also planned to work more closely with the HLP Sub-Cluster to further refine its approach to addressing HLP issues. Additionally, the organization conducted focus group discussions in large camps to identify barriers to return and facilitate more safe and voluntary returns. The next iteration of the project, which was in the planning stage, was also going to include WASH and livelihoods components to help households recover holistically.

Using vouchers, each individual household had a customized scope of work.

ENDNOTES

[7] Prior to 2013, the Ninewa governorate had hosted the second largest IDP population post-2006 (158,721 IDPs), as well as 95,000 returnees, plus Syrian refugees and Iraqi returnees from Syria. IOM, Governorate Profile: Ninewa, April 2014, https://bit.ly/2c5sbNI.

[8] See case study A.26 in this edition for a project that set up emergency sites for households displaced by the Mosul operation.

[9] IOM Iraq Mission (October 2016). Returnee Location Assessment Report.

[10] REACH (June 2016), Multi-Cluster Needs Assessment (III) of Internally Displaced Persons Outside Camps – Iraq, Assessment report.

[11] Iraq Shelter Cluster (March 2018), Guidance Note on Emergency Repairs of War Damaged Shelters. https://bit.ly/2WjRI8L.

STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES AND LESSONS LEARNED

STRENGTHS

+ Customization at the household level. Each BoQ was adapted per individual shelter and developed in consultation with both structural engineers and the households themselves, in order to meet their unique needs and priorities.

+ Pricing data was concealed by QR codes on the BoQs, such that suppliers were aware of costs, but households could not easily directly compare the amounts received. This was **helpful in preventing potential tensions** between targeted households.

+ The selection of many local suppliers ensured that **capacity was built at the local level.** It also meant that the **financial benefits were distributed** amongst the target community and neighbouring villages (that were not selected), rather than to a larger city like Mosul. **This improved community acceptance and allowed suppliers to hire locals,** which helped many families regain secondary income.

+ The gender-balanced team allowed for engineers to speak at length with female-headed households without any issues and ensured that female family members' unique needs were considered in the development of the BoQs.

+ The multisectoral approach allowed some households with damaged water and sewage connections to have these repaired as part of the WASH component.

WEAKNESSES

- To mitigate community conflict, **many houses with minor damages were considered for repairs, leading to fewer available funds to repair more badly damaged homes.** While this was mitigated with a transfer from another portion of the project, it should be considered for the future.

- Inaccuracies in the vulnerability scoring. Certain vulnerability criteria, such as income per family, were taken as reported by the project team. However, more in-depth exposure with the community eventually revealed that some households did in fact have sources of income, affecting their vulnerability scoring.

- Repeated turnover of staff delayed project implementation. The project was without a manager for several months at the beginning, and a new project manager came in towards the end of the project. This meant that the majority of the construction works were completed in the summer, when temperatures were hot and staff and beneficiaries were fasting, slowing implementation further.

- Engineers should clearly communicate structural issues and risks to households. In some cases, households were concerned about structural integrity of certain shelters and demolished them, even though they were repairable. Having a transparent and effective system to delineate structures as repairable or not would help the community better.

Gender-balanced teams allowed to discuss needs and priorities with all household members.

The project also targeted houses with minor damage to avoid tensions within communities. However, this meant that less resources were available for heavier repairs.

LESSONS LEARNED

- In communities where long-term work is expected, **taking time to familiarize with their customs** from the beginning will improve the targeting and scoring processes.
- Where possible – and especially in conservative countries – **having female technical staff** can ensure that all community and household members' points of view are considered.
- **Colour coding vouchers can be very helpful** for non-literate populations. **Using images or pictures** is also useful to help colour-blind individuals separate different BoQs.