

## **NGO-Donor Forum on underserved needs and nexus response in Salah al-Din and Ninewa**

**Erbil, March 15<sup>th</sup> 2023**

The NGO Coordinating Committee for Iraq (NCCI) with support from the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) and European Commission Humanitarian Aid & Civil Protection (ECHO), hosted a discussion on underserved needs in Salah al-Din and Ninewa with a nexus lens.

Populations in these areas have endured ongoing protection, security and social cohesion challenges in the aftermath of ISIL occupation for years, in addition to limited public services and restrictions on freedom of movement. These impacts have been amplified by the lack of operational actors and robust coordination structures present in the areas of concern.

Participants – which included national and international NGOs and representatives from diplomatic and donor missions – heard how the required response cuts across a host of humanitarian, development and stabilization interventions, with needs spanning from access to protection services to increased basic services, livelihoods and social cohesion support in areas with mixed populations and mixed displacement patterns (e.g. areas where some populations remained and some displaced under ISIL). A broad contextual overview was provided by IMPACT/REACH, followed by panel discussions with three organizations, Action Against Hunger (ACF), Sheyaw, and Justice Center.

The forum took place in the context of an ongoing phasing out of the humanitarian response architecture transition to make way for a development response in Iraq, with a joint government transition plan being drafted by the UN. NCCI will seek to take this forward through continued engagement with government, civil society, the UN and response architecture, donors and the private sector. As the coordinating mechanism for NGOs, NCCI will also endeavor to facilitate conversations and provide space for further discourse on underserved needs in the aforementioned areas.

The key messages raised at this forum include:

### 1. Protection at the center of existing challenges

Several protection concerns in districts across Ninewa and Salah al-Din were highlighted by the forum's panelists, particularly with regard to restrictions of movement, gender-based violence, reliance on negative coping mechanisms and access to legal services. Challenges in accessing services are amplified for people with disabilities. These issues are confirmed by REACH's Multi-Cluster Needs Assessment (MCNA) data for 2022, which indicate that households appear economically less resilient than in 2021 and vulnerable groups face additional barriers. In Hatra and Baaj, these challenges are exacerbated by tribal issues and their political impacts, limited

presence of implementing actors (particularly in Hatra, which many organizations describe as a no-go area), lack of government prioritization and poor public services. ACF's recent conflict sensitivity [assessment](#) examines these challenges in detail. Similar challenges were observed in Salah al-Din, with particular issues being access limitations and a lack of government capacity in processing legal documentation.

To address these challenges, it was recommended that relevant actors support women and youth in developing their capacities to promote gender-sensitive social cohesion and resilience; invest in capacities of local civil society organizations, women-based organizations and community members to ensure sustainability of interventions (including in legal services); ensure better inclusion of people with disabilities in programming; and undertake risk assessments and risk management plans involving all of the organization's relevant protection stakeholders together with beneficiaries in appropriate contexts. Furthermore, organizations urged donors to consider allocating more funding towards supporting longer term projects on legal aid and related information management, with the understanding that such services take significant time to be established.



## 2. Local capacity and coordination are key

NGOs noted that while there are area-based coordination (ABC) groups covering Salah al-Din and Baaj, coordination challenges remain. First, there is persisting misunderstanding among local authorities that NGOs are the primary implementing actors, and therefore the primary duty bearers. Stronger advocacy is needed to ensure that this confusion is cleared up. In Baaj, most of the areas covered by the ABC are in the Baaj center, hence leaving out rural areas. Secondly, Hatra remains uncovered by coordination mechanisms, despite having one of the highest levels of unmet needs (both humanitarian and long-term development). Third, ABCs are useful in consolidating inputs



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on plans of action but there needs to be a more formal channel of communication for NGOs to improve coordination between NGOs in the area. It was also recommended that more inputs are requested from authorities on the district level.

The response required to meet needs in Ninewa and Salah al-Din cuts across a range of humanitarian, development and stabilization interventions, with resulting needs spanning from access to protection services to increased basic services, livelihoods and social cohesion support. In light of reduced funding, it was strongly recommended that focus be placed on enhancing local capacities to address the deep-rooted issues highlighted throughout the forum. As an initial step, involving local NGOs in co-creating programs would alleviate donor fears surrounding limited local NGO capacity.