Local NGO Learning Needs Assessment

Iraq and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq

Assessment Findings report

This assessment was commissioned by the NGO Coordination Committee for Iraq (NCCI), supported by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, and carried out by Gill Price and Majdi Mustafa on behalf of RedR UK. The findings expressed in this document represent the assessment team’s analysis and are not necessarily shared by NCCI.
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Commissioned by the NGO Coordination Committee for Iraq (NCCI), supported by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), this report sets out the findings from a comprehensive Learning Needs Assessment (LNA) conducted by RedR UK with local and national NGOs (LNGOs) in Iraq and Kurdistan Region of Iraq between March and May 2017. The principle objective of the LNA was to gain a better understanding of LNGO learning needs and capacity gaps, along with appropriate ways to address them in the current and evolving context. The findings will also contribute to NCCI’s work in ‘Empowering local NGOs through enhanced capacities and increased engagement in humanitarian coordination and response in Iraq’.

The complexity of the operating environment in Iraq presents a multitude of challenges for developing local humanitarian response, recovery and reconciliation capacities. With an estimated 8.7 million people in need of humanitarian assistance in Iraq, and major security, political and logistical constraints to accessing the most vulnerable, LNGOs have minimal time or resources to invest in capacity building. Despite the magnitude of suffering the level of humanitarian funding and scale of international assistance is expected to decrease over the course of the next six months leaving the country more dependent on the presence and capacity of local actors. Limitations in their ability to address these needs is further compounded by the ideology-based nature of many LNGOs within Iraqi civil society which helps facilitate their access to affected areas, but also conflicts with the requirements for accountable humanitarian action which is underpinned by the principles of impartiality, neutrality and independence.\(^1\)

Failure to invest the time and resources needed to address priority gaps in capacity will constrain the ability of LNGOs to access and manage the resources they need in addressing ongoing humanitarian needs, and compromise their ability to address growing concerns around protection and social cohesion.

The assessment design was informed by background literature relating to the humanitarian situation in the region, the history and role of LNGOs and local civil society, and previous LNGO capacity assessments and capacity building programmes, where available. 196 LNGOs completed an online survey which was sent out to 1950 registered organisations. The survey was designed to gather basic information about organisational and individual staff capacities and learning needs. The questions also covered existing opportunities and constraints to learning. 25 people took part in key informant interviews drawn from LNGOs, international NGOs (INGOs), coordination bodies, and Government of Iraq and Kurdistan Regional Government representatives. A further 10 senior LNGO staff participated in a focus group discussion in Erbil.

Principle findings from the assessment include the following:

**LNGO Learning Needs**

- Different understanding about the role of an NGO – particularly concepts of accountability and transparency – needs to be addressed. This issue will become even more critical with the shift from emergency to early recovery and a reduction in the presence of international actors. As

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1 Humanitarian Response Plan 2018, estimated People in Need Summary
2 Mercy Corps – Bridging the Gap, Evidence on the Links between Civil Society and Good Governance in Iraq, 2014
such, opportunities for interaction between local and international organisations and staff are key to the success of capacity building efforts.

- Learning needs vary depending on the role, location and pre-existing capacity of the NGO – yet, all those consulted identified the need for strengthening project finance and human resources management skills and organisational capacity. For NGOs operating in areas highly impacted by conflict, protection, social cohesion, psychosocial support and working with internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees emerged as the most pressing needs. Larger NGOs, with at least fifty staff, have more clearly defined purpose and roles and better developed systems and staff capacities.

- Gaps in the way that learning needs are identified for individual staff and severe limitations in the induction and development opportunities open to staff in many NGOs undermine capacity development and need to be taken into account in efforts to address identified learning needs.

**LNGO Capacity Building Priorities**

- Face to face methodologies are the preferred approach to learning. However, facilitating opportunities for learning and sharing of experience between international and local organisations emerged as the most important consideration in the design of learning methods.

- Self-directed learning through e-learning materials, guidelines, standards and other digital technologies offers the potential to strengthen individual and organisational capacities at minimal cost while addressing some of the other constraints to learning identified, such as accessibility and language.

- Flexible, no- or low- cost learning methodologies can address major constraints to learning, such as lack of funding, challenging locations and gaps in information about learning opportunities. Poor matching of organisations and participants to learning opportunities also undermines the efficiency and effectiveness of support provided.

- Greater continuity and follow up through partnering, coaching or mentoring arrangements and greater engagement and accountability by NGO leadership are needed to make the step from increased knowledge to improvements in individual and organisational practice.

- A supportive, enabling environment for learning and capacity building is essential to the effectiveness and sustainability of capacity building efforts. The role of international agencies as partner, mentor or coach is central to this success. Similarly, the active involvement of government and NCCI coordination mechanisms in strengthening access to information and the complementarity of learning and capacity building initiatives is also key.

- Finally, putting NGOs at the centre of the capacity building process in terms of assessment, design and delivery will contribute to greater sustainability and help strengthen the networks that they already use to support one another.
KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

In response to these findings, the report concludes with the following recommendations:

- **Empower NGOs** by designing a capacity building strategy which enhances ownership, targeting and longer-term sustainability of capacity building activities and resources.

- **Clarify capacity building objectives** for the sector from the outset to foster common understanding and commitment and enable effective targeting of activities and resources.

- **Prioritise learning needs** in line with the assessment findings and appropriate identification of NGOs that are best placed to respond to current and emerging humanitarian, recovery and development priorities.

- **Take a holistic approach** involving all relevant actors to achieve improved understanding, attitudes and behaviours in relation to the role of NGOs, humanitarian principles, transparency and accountability.

- **Promote and facilitate local-international partnerships** to maximise opportunities for practical experience and learning.

- **Tailor learning methodologies** to address the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed for different topics. Where possible, utilise existing tools and resources in Arabic and explore different approaches to facilitate face to face contact between international and local organisations and across NGO practitioners, particularly in areas such as protection, social cohesion and psychosocial support.

- **Adopt clear selection criteria** for NGOs and individual staff participating in capacity building activities to build on existing skills, capacities and commitment and ensure that resources are used as effectively as possible.

- **Foster an enabling environment for NGO improvement** through enhancing communication and coordination of learning opportunities and resources, promoting NGO involvement in all aspects of capacity building, and advocating for change to existing practices which undermine NGO capacity, such as staff poaching.
2. BACKGROUND

2.1. Iraqi Civil Society and the Role of NGOs

Iraqi society comprises of people of multiple religions (Muslims of the Shi’ite and Sunni sects, Christians, Yezidis, Mandaens, and other smaller faiths) and ethnicities (Arabs, Kurds, Turkmen, and other smaller ethnicities). These ethnic groups are not unified by faith, or confined to specific geographical regions. Charitable support and obligations such as Zakat, are a deeply imbedded practice across these groups. Additional social and cultural affiliations, including tribes and clans, class, professional, intellectual and regional identities, also cut across faith and ethnicity.

Civil society organisations (CSOs) have existed in Iraq for almost 100 years. They are traditionally community-based charitable or solidarity associations which support a specific group based on their religious or 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. Civil society revolves around and facilitates solidarity, social interaction and cohesion. This is quite different to many Western NGOs which strive to be independent from traditional social structures and the state. 3 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Simplified timeline of CSO/LNGO development in Iraq</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1921-1958</strong> Emergence of Iraqi patriotism and ideological parties in opposition to the monarchy and colonial powers, and the establishment of CSOs and associations with social and political interests that cut across ethnic, religious and tribal ties.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1958-1968</strong> Political instability and severely limited activity among CSOs, many of whom splintered along political and ethnic lines.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1968-2003</strong> Scarred by conflict, international sanctions and harsh dictatorship that stifled civil society. CSOs were highly politicised and due to economic prosperity, their importance in providing social services diminished until the 1980s. From then, due to regional conflicts and international sanction imposed in 1990, citizens in Iraq struggled to meet their basic needs. In Iraqi Kurdistan, 1991 marked the emergence of CSOs working alongside international humanitarian agencies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Post 2003</strong> Rapid creation and registration of thousands of CSOs (LNGOs) following the US military operation in Iraq and influx of international humanitarian assistance (funding and agencies). Many were formed as civil society arms of the new political parties, or in opposition to the former regime, or formed as a way to access funding.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Since 2003, much progress has been made in the development of a more independent civil society with the enacting of NGO laws in Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan in 2010. Perceptions of civil society vary across the country, dependent on the level of exposure that local communities have had to the presence of

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3 Civil Society in Perspective, NCCI, 2011
4 USAID Iraq Civil Society Assessment, 2012
LNGOs/CSOs, and on their effectiveness in advocating for, or addressing people’s basic needs.\(^5\) The onset of Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) takeover of wide swathes of territory in Iraq in 2014 again precipitated a shift in the focus of many LNGOs/CSOs to the provision of front line humanitarian assistance in highly insecure, sensitive and inaccessible areas.

Feedback from NGO informants during this assessment also indicated that, in some areas, they are bound by affiliations to specific groups and/or subject to interference by political parties or local militia, in order to gain acceptance and access to affected communities. At the same time, current levels of destruction of public and private infrastructure, disruption in provision of basic services by the authorities and acute humanitarian and protection needs of affected populations, compels an opportunity for enhanced civil society support for populations in need and could stimulate development of a stronger, more independent civil society.

The international community’s commitment to strengthen CSOs/LNGOs that are willing to work with different ethnic and religious groups, as well as those they are affiliated to, and without favour or influence from any political party will be essential.\(^6\) These factors can be assessed through reviewing NGO mission statements, strategies, partnership and funding arrangements to see which are independent.

### 2.2. The Current Humanitarian Situation and its Impact on LNGO Capacity

The complexity of the operating environment in Iraq presents a multitude of challenges for developing local humanitarian response, reconciliation and recovery capacities. The following factors emerged from the literature review (see ANNEX B) and need to be considered in the design of learning and capacity building activities and the selection of methodologies which are practical and appropriate to this context.

- Most pressing humanitarian needs relate to basic service provision for the most vulnerable, protection, psychosocial and mental health care, support for voluntary returns, social cohesion and resilience through stabilisation and early recovery programmes, conflict sensitivity, clearance of mines and UXOs, cash programming and livelihood opportunities.\(^7\)

- Significant territory within the country either remains under occupation by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) or is highly unpredictable and insecure, with millions of internally displaced persons (IDPs) or returnees, making access a major challenge. Wherever possible, efforts are being made to assist people within the areas which are re-taken from ISIL to avoid further displacements. This increases the need for capacity to provide life-saving services in these areas.\(^7\)

- Ninewa, Anbar, Salah ad-Din, Erbil and Kirkuk governorates continue to host the greatest numbers of people in need.\(^7\)

- Since the onset of the crisis in 2014 when ISIL began the campaign to takeover large swathes of the country, the provision of assistance has shifted from government services and religious

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\(^{5}\) Mercy Corps – Bridging the Gap, Evidence on the Links between Civil Society and Good Governance in Iraq, 2014

\(^{6}\) A Alassaf, A Fresh Analysis Of The Disaster Management Capacity In Iraq, Annex 4: Iraqi State Agencies and Local Organizations’ Capacities to Manage Humanitarian Responses, Oxfam, 2017

\(^{7}\) Humanitarian Response Plan 2017, Advanced Executive Summary
endowments to humanitarian agencies and their partners, as local assets have been exhausted.\(^8\) This has increased pressure on NGOs to help fill this gap in providing humanitarian assistance.

- Social tensions are increasing between displaced populations and host communities and in areas to which people are returning.\(^9\) This has highlighted the value of community based approaches and the importance of dialogue, trust and strengthening local institutions through the provision of humanitarian assistance.\(^10\)

- There appears to be a greater focus on relief, rather than longer term recovery and resilience activities and some difference in the operational capacity across sectors.\(^10\) Although humanitarian capacities continue to be disproportionately concentrated in Erbil, Dohuk and Sulaymaniyah, concerted efforts have been made to increase coverage in the centre and south of Iraq.\(^7\)\(^8\)

- Despite improved access and an increase in coverage and operational presence in 2016-17 in highly impacted areas, the bulk of front line services in these areas continues to be provided by national and local NGOs and CSOs.\(^7\)\(^11\)

- Access to funding has been cited as a major constraint for national and local organisations in developing their capacity and expanding their operational presence\(^16\), however many lack the levels of governance and accountability needed in managing sizeable donor funded projects.\(^12\)\(^13\)

- Historically there have been thousands of local and national NGOs and CSOs operating in Iraq\(^6\), and under 3,000 are registered.\(^14\) Less than half of NCCI members are NGOs (57 out of 152)\(^15\). Thirty-two NGOs were funded through the 2016 Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP).

- There is a significant funding shortfall in meeting the most pressing needs in Iraq and the funding for humanitarian assistance is expected to further decrease in 2018 with a shift in donor support for stabilisation and early recovery.\(^16\)\(^8\)

### 3. NCCI AND CAPACITY BUILDING

#### 3.1. Background on NCCI

The NGO Coordination Committee for Iraq (NCCI) is a member-led organisation that coordinates principled, collective NGO action in order to foster development, address humanitarian needs, and promote respect for rights in Iraq. Launched in Baghdad in 2003 as an independent platform for NGOs

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9 Humanitarian Response Plan 2016  
10 3RP Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan in response to the Syria crisis 2016-17: Iraq  
11 MRGI Humanitarian challenges in Iraq’s displacement, Dec 2016  
12 ICVA NGO Perspectives on Humanitarian Response in L3 Crises, 2015  
13 NCCI & UNHCR Organizational Capacity Assessment Report For NGOs Partners in the NGOs Empowerment Project, 2013-15  
14 Based on combined NGO Directorate databases provided for this assessment  
16 Ramos, E, Final Evaluation of NCCI project with SDC, Strategic Edge, Nov 2015
to coordinate their activities, NCCI has 152\(^{17}\) member organizations countrywide, both national and international.

In the summer of 2014 following the rapid onset of the humanitarian crisis after the fall of Mosul to ISIL, NCCI realigned its strategic objectives to ensure its activities fully reflected the needs of both its members and the effectiveness of the wider humanitarian response. The objectives were defined as follows:

- **NCCI will act as the NGO focal point for internal and external actors. This includes sharing information and facilitating contact between stakeholders.**
- **NCCI is to create the enabling environment for NGOs to advocate for the rights and needs of people in Iraq.**
- **NCCI is to provide the services, advice, and capacity building to support NGOs in order to enable development, address humanitarian needs, and promote respect for human rights in Iraq.**

Central to NCCI’s activities are its local NGO members whose reach and access, expertise, cultural understanding, buy-in and sustainability make them an integral, yet often overlooked, component of the wider humanitarian response. The added value of the LNOGs’ humanitarian work, and their involvement in NCCI’s coordination activities, is increasingly vital, as military operations to reclaim Mosul and areas under ISIL control, including in western Anbar, Telafar and Hawiga, continue, the conflict continues to have a devastating impact on civilians, and millions of people face living or returning to areas with damaged public and private infrastructure and disruption in basic services.

### 3.2. Optimising local NGO capacities

This Learning Needs Assessment contributes to Outcome 1 of the SDC funded NCCI project around **Optimizing local NGO capacities and engagement in humanitarian coordination and response.**

The project has a special focus on the needs of NGOs, both those NGO members of NCCI, and broader networks. The project overall aim and specific objective is to empower NGOs through enhanced capacities and increased engagement in the humanitarian coordination and response.

The project outcomes are:

1. **Better understanding of NGO capacity development needs and gaps**
2. **Enhanced NGO capacities providing a stronger humanitarian response**
3. **A more coordinated response between local and international actors**

The results of this LNA will inform a detailed learning and capacity building strategy and the development of training and learning materials for specialized workshops, training of trainers and governorate field-level workshops.

\(^{17}\) As of November 2017, http://www.ncciraq.org/en/about/our-members
4. ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY

Commissioned by NCCI, with support from SDC, a Learning Needs Assessment (LNA) was undertaken between March and May 2017 by two consultants (Gill Price and Majdi Mustafa) on behalf of RedR UK. The purpose and methodology, as set out in the original Terms of Reference, were further developed in an initial Inception Report with the specific objective of **assessing the learning needs and capacity gaps among NGOs, along with appropriate ways to address them in the current and evolving humanitarian situation in Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan.** A research framework was developed to guide the design of the assessment tools and collection of data (see ANNEX A) with specific consideration given to:

- Developing an assessment process and tools which are appropriate to the complexity of the operating context in Iraq;
- Differentiating between the needs, capacities and constraints across different sectors and locations, with a focus on addressing needs in areas that are highly impacted by the ongoing conflict;
- Taking account of the current and future capacity requirements in relation to managing ongoing displacements, social tensions and cohesion with host populations and returnees and the need for livelihoods and early recovery opportunities.
- Maximising input from NGOs and adopting an approach centred around understanding learning needs, opportunities and constraints from an NGO perspective;
- Recognising and exploring ways to build on relative strengths and weaknesses in capacity and collaboration across international and national humanitarian organisations;
- Considering longer term impacts of the crisis and ways to develop more sustainable local capacity,
- Presenting and communicating the assessment findings in a way that can be readily used and translated into a Training and Learning Strategy for NCCI.

The LNA focused on assessing staff capacity and learning needs from an organisational perspective, while touching on organisational capacities around leadership, strategy, systems, and procedures where possible. However, it was beyond the scope of the LNA to undertake an in-depth assessment of organisational capacities.

4.1. Assessment Methods

The assessment was undertaken through:

- Reference to background literature and resources
- An online and email based survey
- Key informant interviews
- A focus group discussion in Erbil
- Follow up on other NGO capacity building initiatives in Iraq and the wider region
Reference was made to a range of literature including the 2016 HRP and 2017 Advance Executive Summary, NCCI project documents and evaluations from previous programmes, and background studies and learning from NGO capacity building in Iraq and the wider region. See the full list under ANNEX B.

An online and email based survey was designed to gather basic information about organisational and individual staff capacities and learning needs. The questions also covered existing opportunities and constraints to learning. The survey was disseminated in English, Arabic and Kurdish to all registered NGOs in Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan. Analysis of the survey findings was done through Survey Monkey using a number of filters to compare results for different organisations types, sectors and locations of operation. The survey template is set out in ANNEX C.

Key informant interviews were conducted with practitioners drawn from NGOs, NCCI members, representatives of clusters and coordination bodies and representatives of the Iraqi and Kurdish Regional governments. Some interviews were conducted in person in Erbil, with the remainder conducted over Skype. The interview questions were developed around the research framework above and analysed through coding by categories and sub-categories. A breakdown of the informants involved is included below but the identity of individual key informants is not included to respect confidentiality.

At the end of the assessment, a focus group discussion was conducted to further explore: the most pressing skills and capacity gaps in shifting from response to recovery programming; priorities and processes for NGO selection; and the most effective ways to address skills and capacity gaps with limited resources. Additional follow ups were conducted with organisations outside Iraq to gather information on capacity building initiatives within the wider region.

4.2. Breakdown of Participants

Following consultation with NCCI, it was agreed that the survey be sent out to all NGOs registered in Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan as the information in combined databases of the Directorates of NGOs, both Government of Iraq (GoI) and Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), and NCCI contact lists, did not provide sufficient information to accurately determine the location and sectors in which organisations were operating.

4.2.1. Breakdown of Survey Respondents

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total number of NGOs approached initially (from database)</td>
<td>2979</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of bounced emails (incorrect details etc.)</td>
<td>1029 (35%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of NGOs that received the survey</td>
<td>1950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of surveys returned</td>
<td>196 (10.1% of those sent)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of fully completed surveys</td>
<td>170 (8.7%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.2.2. Breakdown of Key Informants

The key informants were drawn from those in a sector oversight or coordination role, NCCI members and other registered NGOs (non-NCCI members). Representatives from the latter two groups were drawn at random and at least 70% of those consulted were undertaking humanitarian activities in highly impacted areas.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder Group</th>
<th>No. of informants</th>
<th>Organisation Type</th>
<th>Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Local</td>
<td>International</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordination group</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCCI members</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other NGOs</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>19 (76%)</td>
<td>6 (24%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A further 10 senior NGO staff participated in the focus group discussion in Erbil on 26th April 2017. They were all drawn from NGO NCCI members and most were operating in both Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan.

4.3. Assumptions and Constraints

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inaccuracy or absence of up to date contact information for NGOs</th>
<th>The inaccuracy and absence of contact information was a major constraint to the assessment and caused delay to implementation of the survey and arrangements for the key informant interviews. A database was developed which included NGO contacts from a number of sources, including the GOI and KRG NGO Directorates GOI, as well as NCCI contact lists. To mitigate the number of old or incorrect entries in the database, a decision was taken to consult with all NGOs listed rather than trying to sample those working in specific sectors or locations. The impact of this is referred to in the assessment findings.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Delays in receipt of information</td>
<td>There were some delays in the receipt of contact information but this was generally due to the inaccuracy of the contact data available.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff availability for key informant interview and the focus group discussion</td>
<td>Problems with key informant availability were addressed largely through use of Skype. The face to face interviews and focus group discussion in Erbil were affected by staff availability given visa constraints but this was overcome by either arranging substitutes or conducting the interviews by Skype.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bias in undertaking key informant interviews</td>
<td>Random sampling was used in selecting 70% of the key informants to help reduce the risk of bias and 70% of all those interviewed were from LNOGs. A structured guide was used for all the key informant interviews and the analysis was done using a coding system for recurring themes. The interview guide also made provision for separating any observations or opinions from the consultants, from the informant responses. Use of the research framework enabled verification of findings from multiple sources and any areas of potential bias are highlighted in the assessment findings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited response and potential bias in the assessment survey results</td>
<td>Securing a wide response to the survey was challenging due to the quality of contact data. By using an on-line and email based survey in three languages, efforts were made to accommodate responses from as many LNOGs as possible. The low response rate may mean that responses are not fully representative of the whole group and that the true values across all LNOGs are more conservative. There is no way of verifying this effect. However, as the results do suggest that LNOGs based in Baghdad and/or working in the development sector are over-represented, efforts have been made to address this through comparing results for all respondents, with those from LNOGs operating in highly impacted areas and noting any differences that emerge (see section 5.2).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delay in securing visas required for travel to Iraq</td>
<td>The original assessment design involved visits to Baghdad and Erbil to maximize the opportunity for face to face interviews. This was not possible due to delays in securing visas. However, the majority of key informant interviews were conducted as planned, using either telephone or Skype as an alternative.</td>
</tr>
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</table>

5. RESULTS AND KEY FINDINGS

5.1. Demographic Data
The survey incorporated questions covering three demographic variables (numbers of staff, length of establishment, and gender of respondent) to facilitate better understanding of how learning needs vary from one organisation or situation to another.
5.1.1. Organisational size and experience

Around one third of NGOs responding to the survey had been established for less than 3 years and 39% had been established for more than 10 years (refer to Fig 1). The results also revealed a significantly higher proportion of new organisations (under 3 years old) in Erbil and Nineveh. This expansion in NGOs in these locations correlates with the increase in humanitarian needs and availability of funding.

Fig 1: Length of Time the Organisation Has Been Established

[Diagram showing percentage distribution of time since establishment: 1.2% Less than 1 year, 7.1% 1-3 years, 24.3% 4-10 years, 29.0% Over 10 years, 38.5% Don’t know]

Two thirds of all responding organisations had 10 staff or less, with just under a third indicating no paid staff (refer to Fig 2). Subsequent results from the survey revealed that the number of staff was a factor in the nature of individual and organisational learning needs, however there was little difference in the needs for NGOs with less than 10 staff and those working predominantly with volunteers. However, the capacity in HR systems and processes was weaker in volunteer-based organisations and they had less access to funding or opportunities for learning support.

Fig 2: Number of Paid Staff In The Organisation

[Diagram showing percentage distribution of number of paid staff: 6.5% None, 4.7% 1-10, 3.5% 11-50, 18.8% 51-100, 37.6% Over 100, 28.8% Don’t know]
5.1.2. Gender

78% of the survey respondents were male and a corresponding proportion of key informants (80%). In most aspects of the survey, the results were similar across male and female respondents. However, there was also a significantly higher proportion of female respondents from organisations established for over 10 years and some interesting trends emerged in relation to areas and methods of learning which are noted in the relevant sections below.

### Summary Findings – Demographic Data

The staffing level and length of establishment of LNGOs impacts on their presence and capacity to meet humanitarian needs.

5.2. LNGO Role and Capacity

The importance of LNGO capacity in supporting the current humanitarian response and future recovery and stabilisation activities in Iraq is clearly highlighted in the Humanitarian Response Plans and was reinforced through consultation with key informants. Capacity building was seen by all informants as a high priority and there was broad recognition of the need for targeted investment. However, the history and role of LNGOs is complex, as outlined in section 2.1, and needs to inform the design and expectations for future capacity building.

5.2.1. Strengths that LNGOs Bring to Humanitarian Interventions

Most international informants assessed LNGO strengths in terms of access, knowledge of the local contexts, languages and cultures, and their relationships and contacts at community level. LNGO informants saw their strength in terms of their proximity to the crisis (rather than access) as they are directly affected and have a vested interest in recovery. This is a significant strength, but in terms of transparency and independence, can also be a weakness.

As highlighted in section 2.1, Iraqi civil society is largely based on allegiance to different ethnic, tribal or religious groups which makes it very difficult for LNGOs to separate their interests and commitments at community level from their role as a neutral, impartial and independent humanitarian organisation. These perspectives are important to consider in understanding and developing capacity in an appropriate and sustainable manner.

“LNGOs are culturally closer to the affected populations. They know how to approach people and what should and should not be done. Expats know the rules (best practice) but this is not the same.” UN Agency representative

“The most important thing for the LNGO is that they are focused on one goal, which is building the country.” LNGO representative

5.2.2. Location of LNGO Activities

Across the 170 completed surveys, the greatest proportion of LNGOs have activities in Baghdad (refer to Fig 3). This is partly due to the inclusion of all registered LNGOs in the survey exercise since many more are located in Baghdad. The number of respondents operating in highly impacted governorates (as set out in the ToR) are: Ninewa (40 LNGOs), Anbar (23), Salah al-Din (33), Kirkuk (24). LNGOs which
have been established for 4 years or more also have a higher level of activity in Anbar, Salah al-Din and Kirkuk governorates, than newer organisations.

In analysing the wider survey results, filters have been used to compare results for all organisations, with the data for organisations that are operating in these highly impacted governorates, to ensure the needs in these areas are fully understood.

5.2.3. Sectors of Operation

Development, Capacity building and Education are the most common sectors of activity among LNGOs, due partly to their historical role in response to large scale funding after 2003, and to the inclusion of all registered LNGOs in the survey.
Aside from these sectors, around a third of LNGOs indicated activity in health or Psychosocial support, Social cohesion, Livelihoods and Food security and Protection. Much smaller numbers are engaged in technical areas such as Shelter, Camp management or Cash programming (refer to Fig 4).

A higher proportion of larger LNGOs (with more than 50 paid staff) or those established for 4 years or more, indicated activity in Psychosocial support and Protection, than the overall survey sample.

5.2.4. Beneficiary Groups
Most LNGOs are working with a number of different beneficiary groups and the survey sought to identify whether there are any groups which receive a lower level of support. The majority of LNGOs are working with: IDPs, both outside and within camps (58% and 48% respectively); host communities (49%); and returnees (39%). Within highly impacted areas, the distribution of assistance is much the same, but the proportion of LNGOs providing assistance is higher, as would be expected. There is a much lower level of support for residents in vulnerable areas and refugees, and significantly less work with residents in areas not under control of the government (around 14%).

5.2.5. Capacity Gaps or Limitations
The main concerns raised by key informants from international organizations related to poor levels of governance, poor understanding of the role and purpose of NGOs, and weaknesses in accountability and transparency. Specific gaps were identified around adherence to humanitarian principles, use of robust systems, policies and procedures for HR, financial and project management, and effective governance, management and staff practices. These issues impact directly on the ability of INGOs and donors to fund LNGOs.

“Until LNGOs understand the reason for accountability, and its importance, neither INGOs or donors will risk putting money through them, as they would be held accountable for any problems.” INGO representative

“The expectation is to see an active Board, accountable Executive Director, effective SOPs and organisational standards but these things are missing and cannot be created or learnt through training.” INGO representative

In considering adherence to humanitarian principles, the divergence in views and understandings between local and international responders emerged as a constraint. While neutrality and impartiality are fundamental to principled humanitarian action, several informants raised concern that insisting on their application risks undermining the very relationships that currently facilitate humanitarian access, and form part of community resilience. These contrasting views are partly explained by the specific nature and history of Iraqi civil society (see section 2.1).

“In Iraqi society people have to help each other. It is part of the social fabric and what has sustained the country through years of strife. Any expectation that people should stop ‘helping each other’ or ‘doing favours’ would be fundamentally destructive to this capacity to survive.” INGO representative
Limitations were also noted in relation to the analytical skills and level of innovation and initiative among some staff which affects LNGO ability to re-prioritise and respond quickly. However, there was also recognition of the staff skills, quality of leadership and level of commitment among some LNGOs, and the improvements seen in others particularly because of learning from the Mosul response.

LNGO informants were very aware of their weakness in systems, policies and procedures compared to international agencies (section 5.3 highlights the weakness in HR and staff development practices). They also cited weaknesses in strategy, clarity of roles and responsibilities, technical capacity and accountability, particularly around some aspects of humanitarian principles. However, they indicated that improvement in these areas is highly dependent on their ability to work alongside and learn from international partners, something that they acknowledge there is limited time and opportunity to do, on both sides.

“There is no proper understanding of the role of LNGOs. Many LNGOs exist without a proper knowledge of how to lead an organization. LNGOs, in general, lack the right understanding of what an “LNGO” shall do and shall not do.” LNGO representative

“There is a weak general organizational culture, here and in the Arab world, it has been more of individual rather an organizational behaviour”. LNGO representative

“The added value that INGOs bring is around their structure, processes and systems, more than the extra capacity provided by expatriate staff.” UN Agency representative

“Employees are generally part time, so they finish their work for the Government and they volunteer or do a part time work with us; they are not fully dedicated. Very recently we started to have full time staff; earlier, it was part time staff, and, in the beginning, when we started it was all volunteering.” LNGO representative

Several informants from international organisations reflected the same view, explaining that LNGO capacity was generally better in areas in northern Iraq where LNGOs have experienced greater exposure to working with international humanitarian organisations since the 1990s (see section 2.1). The need to invest in improving systems for finance, HR, assessment, M&E etc., is also dependent on funding and LNGO informants raised concern that the limited funding for operational costs is a major constraint in taking such steps (see section 5.5).

Analysis of the survey results and key informant inputs point to the fact that larger organisations with more exposure to working with international partners, have better developed systems and better-informed staff, due to access to funding, engagement in coordination, access to international standards and good practice, and investment in staff development.

5.2.6. Areas of Competency

The survey explored several specific areas of competency in key disciplines such as project management, safety and security, humanitarian response and recovery and resilience to verify the type of learning needs identified (see section 5.3), and assess the level of competency across different disciplines.
• **Project Management**

Competencies in project management are weakest in aspects relating to donor compliance, and applying for and reporting on external funding. Approximately half the survey respondents rated their organisations as having good skills in budgeting and M&E. This proportion fell to a third for project planning, proposal writing and reporting with 28% assessing their organisations as having no, or poor capacity in proposal writing and reporting.

• **Safety and Security**

Safety and security emerged as the lowest priority learning need (refer to section 5.3) yet over a third of survey respondents indicated poor or no capacity in the development and use of security plans and procedures. Higher competency ratings were given for undertaking security risk assessments and negotiating access. This reflects the general weakness in developing policy and procedures and strength in working at community level.

• **Humanitarian Response**

A higher level of competency was identified in relation to activities involving community consultation, assessment and communication, compared with more technical skills such as WASH programming and logistics. INGO staff consulted that are working in technical sectors cited problems of speed and adherence to standards as reasons that they tended to carry out their own activities, rather than partnering with NGOs. In general, NGOs working in highly impacted areas indicated greater competency in protection, social cohesion, food security and SGBV compared with those working outside these areas.

• **Recovery and Resilience**

Over 50% of survey respondents indicated good capacity in supporting community led peace and reconciliation activities. The design and delivery of training also emerged as an area of strength with over 70% of respondents indicating good or reasonable capacity. This contrasts with the fact that Training emerged as the highest area of learning need (refer to section 5.3.1). Assessment of capacities to support longer term activities such as livelihoods, market analysis, micro credit and income generation were generally low.

**5.2.7 Implications for Longer Term Recovery**

Both the survey and key informant interview outcomes suggest that there are greater gaps in NGO capacity to meet recovery needs, than for humanitarian response programming. The expectation that NGOs will need to play an even greater role in recovery was also echoed by both local and international informants.

As the humanitarian focus shifts from response to recovery, a corresponding shift will be needed in the work of NGOs from providing support in camps, to working more intensively with returnees and communities in parts of the country retaken from ISIL. Input from key informants suggests that this shift will demand targeted support for NGOs with a pre-existing level of competency and the proximity and independence to provide the type of support needed. Capacity in Protection, Psychosocial support, Social cohesion and Advocacy / Negotiation (for influencing government and community stakeholders with limited international support), are seen by informants as the most critical.
“LNGO partners need to be assisted in transitioning from humanitarian to early recovery programming. The international community needs to leave behind an empowered national capacity. We need quality, sustained responses which can only be achieved through developing the capacity of local partners.” UN Agency representative

“I am worried about the rest (LNGOs) who are struggling because they don’t have the capacity, and if we don’t help them, they won’t survive. We need them to work and perform, the region needs that and the country needs them to be better and working properly. The government will rebuild the infrastructure, streets and so on, the LNGOs are the ones to build the human beings and their potential. Government won’t be able to build the human factor alone, we need the NGOs to be of quality not only of quantity.” Government representative

Summary Findings – LNGO Role and Capacity

Different understanding about the role of an NGO – particularly concepts of accountability and transparency – needs to be addressed. This issue will become even more critical with the shift from emergency to early recovery and a reduction in the presence of international actors. Additionally, there is a significant variability in the capacity of LNGOs, as larger organisations tend to have more clearly defined purpose and staff roles, as well as better developed systems and staff.

As such, opportunities for interaction between local and international organisations and staff are key to the success of capacity building efforts.

5.3. Learning Needs

There was broad consistency in the priority learning needs identified through the survey and key informant consultations. The way in which learning needs are identified and staff access opportunities for learning are also assumed to affect the scope and effectiveness of any capacity building support that is provided.

5.3.1. Highest Priority Learning Needs

The survey results for all LNGOs consulted reveal Training and facilitation as the highest priority learning need (refer to Fig 5). However, this result is skewed by the large proportion of survey respondents engaged in development related activity (see section 5.2 above). There are also variations depending on the age of the organisation, with a higher proportion of LNGOs established for less than 4 years identifying Working in Partnership and Leadership as priority learning needs.
The list below sets out the priority needs that were identified by survey respondents and the priorities cited most frequently during key informant interviews.

- Understanding what it means to be an NGO
- Managing funds, including proposal and report writing
- Humanitarian principles
- Accountability
- Managing finance
- HR management
- Project cycle management, including monitoring and evaluation
- Psychosocial support
- Protection, including child protection
- Working with IDPs and refugees
- Social cohesion and reconciliation
- Advocacy, communication and negotiation
- Networking and working in partnership
- Training and facilitation
- Leadership
- English language
5.3.2. Priorities among LNGOs Working in Highly Impacted Areas

Filtering of the survey responses revealed more significant priorities for organisations working in highly impacted areas around; addressing social cohesion, working with IDPs and refugees and providing psychosocial support (see Fig 6 below). Learning needs around protection, psychosocial support, social cohesion and advocacy and negotiation skills also emerged as the highest priorities in relation to supporting stabilisation and longer-term recovery.

![Fig 6: Priority Learning Needs](image)

5.3.3. How Are Individual Staff Development Needs Identified?

The survey found that the commonest way learning needs are identified in LNGOs is by staff themselves, as experienced in 60% of responding organisations. Over half (52%) indicated the use of performance management in informing learning needs and just under half indicated the use of internal assessments. However, the involvement of managers in identifying gaps was low at only 19%. In larger organisations (over 50 paid staff), two thirds indicated the use of performance management systems and internal assessments and the engagement of managers was also significantly higher at 52%

These findings highlight some of the weakness in HR systems and are likely to be a contributory factor in the poor selection of participants for historical training and capacity building activities (see section 5.5).

5.3.4. How Are Staff Development Needs Met?

Access to staff development opportunities is generally poor and among two thirds of respondents, opportunities are only open to some, or none of their staff. In principle, all staff should have an induction but inductions are only offered to ‘all staff’ in 38% of LNGOs and ‘some staff’ in a further 34%. This reinforces the concerns noted from key informants around weak organisational systems and procedures (see section 5.2).
A third of LNGOs also indicated access to in house training, on the job training, coaching/mentoring and organisational manuals and procedures for ‘all staff’, with much lower numbers having access to e-learning materials, external guidelines and standards, evaluations and lessons learned (refer to Fig 7 below). There is also a strong correlation between what organisations indicate they have access to and what they believe is effective in addressing learning needs (see section 5.4).

When filtered by the period of LNGO establishment, the picture is almost identical suggesting that the length of establishment has little impact on internal staff development. However, the picture for larger orgs is quite different with two thirds of the ‘all staff’ category having access to organisational procedures and manuals and half having access to induction and coaching/mentoring. There are also higher numbers using videos and online resources. While this might be partly explained by the need for clearer processes and procedures in larger, more complex organisations, it also supports the observation that the larger LNGOs have better developed organisational systems, policies and procedures (see section 5.2).

Externally, LNGOs access support in meeting their learning and staff development needs mainly through collaboration with each other. Key informants from LNGOs described a variety of formal and informal meetings and groups which are used to share information, experiences and learning. Formal training opportunities tend to be accessed through INGOs and other international partners and several informants mentioned government technical staff and coordination mechanisms as valuable resources in supporting capacity development.

“Our working relationship with government is excellent. They are our best partner. They have staff in place, experience, they understand the context and will ultimately have to continue. However, they lack the funds to replace infrastructure but know exactly what is needed.” INGO representative
Neither academia or the private sector are seen as viable sources of support for humanitarian learning needs, by key informants, due to the limited relevance of the training and learning opportunities available. One informant suggested that there would be value in greater direct involvement of donors, particularly on issues related to accountability and compliance.

**Summary Findings - Priority Learning Needs**

Learning needs vary depending on the role, location and pre-existing capacity of the NGO – yet, all those consulted identified the need for strengthening project, finance and human resources (HR) management skills. For NGOs operating in highly impacted areas, protection, social cohesion, psychosocial support and working with PDs and refugees emerged as the most pressing needs.

There are weaknesses in the way that learning needs are identified for individual staff and severe limitations in the induction and development opportunities open to staff in many NGOs. These need to be taken into account in efforts to address identified learning needs.

**5.4. Learning Methodologies**

The learning methodologies considered draw on traditional methods that are familiar to NGOs in the region, along with alternative online, digital and blended approaches to learning. In addition, consideration is given to other factors such as selection, facilitation and language that can facilitate or inhibit the effectiveness of learning.

**5.4.1. Preferred Ways of Learning**

Over three quarters of survey respondents and local key informants indicated a preference for face to face training and workshops as the most effective method of learning. However, international informants expressed reservations about the cost and impact of this approach and those NGO informants with direct experience in NGO capacity building advocated for the use of coaching, mentoring, and work shadowing through partnership arrangements, over a longer term.

“*Iraqi NGOs have been over-saturated and over-trained. A mechanism that puts key staff in training for 3-5 days at a time is damaging. It is seen as a perk and takes critical capacity away. Learning is marginal and there is little or no accountability on the part of those commissioning the training to see what impact has been achieved.*” **INGO representative**

“*Work on simulation as a way of training. As teachers, we know that what is given in the classroom will be forgotten; yet, what is practiced with hands will be less likely to be forgotten.*” **NGO representative**

“*Since we attended the proposal writing training a few years back, we didn’t have any challenge with securing 3-5 projects a year. The best thing about that training, in particular, is that it started from the very basics. They trained us and stayed in touch. The training didn’t finish when the training ended; we continued to be in touch and have sent so many inquiries and questions and they responded and that is very beneficial.*” **NGO representative**
Competency in training facilitation is higher across organisations operating in Baghdad but they have significantly lower access to external training or coaching and mentoring opportunities. Organisations operating in Erbil have significantly more access to group based learning activities and communities of practice than any other location which may be linked to the concentrated presence of international organisations in this location.

Interaction between local and international organisations was noted by the majority of informants as instrumental and highly valued for an effective learning process, and in facilitating shared understandings. This was further endorsed through the focus group discussion in Erbil and the outcomes of several partnership-based reports from the sector (see ANNEX B). Fig 8 below illustrates the breakdown in preferred approaches to learning.

![Fig 8: Preferred Methods for Addressing Learning Need](image)

5.4.2 Support for Self-Directed Learning

Aside from the focus on formal learning, survey respondents from larger LNGOs show greater awareness and appreciation of e-learning tools and the use of guidelines and manuals, than smaller LNGOs. This is also reflected in the low level of awareness of international guidelines and standards among smaller LNGOs, and may be linked to the limited availability of these resources in Arabic.

However, there is a growing body of freely accessible e-learning material and guidance in Arabic which could be made available to assist LNGO staff with self-directed learning. As the survey found that a significantly higher proportion of female respondents use manuals and procedures to support their learning, better access to on-line resources may be particularly useful for female staff who have limited opportunity to access some group based or one-to-one learning activities. Use of more innovative learning methods such as gaming, videos or mobile applications is limited across all organisations.
Access to the internet is quite variable with half the survey respondents indicating access to Broadband, half using mobile data, and only 5% indicating no internet access at all. The results from LNGOs with over 50 staff indicate a slightly higher level of access (58%) to broadband.

**Summary Findings - Learning Methodologies**

Face to face methodologies are the preferred approach to learning. However, facilitating opportunities for learning and sharing of experience between international and local organisations emerged as the most important consideration in the design of learning methods.

Self-directed learning – including through e-learning materials, guidelines, standards and other digital technologies – offers the potential to strengthen individual and organisational capacities at low cost while also addressing some of the other constraints to learning such as accessibility and language.

**5.5. Constraints to Individual and Organisational Learning**

Several constraints and challenges to addressing learning needs were explored through the assessment (see Fig 9 below). These are broadly comparable, irrespective of organisation size. Time emerges as a bigger constraint for larger LNGOs, whereas poor awareness of learning opportunities and the limited availability of local opportunities, are more of a concern for smaller LNGOs.

**Fig 9: Challenges to Addressing Learning Needs**

Analysis of these challenges highlights several possibilities for improving access to learning opportunities, maximising the effectiveness of the opportunities that are available, and sustaining these opportunities as external support diminishes.
5.5.1. Funding

The major constraint to improving staff and organisational capacity cited by most LNGOs (86%) is funding. Only 29% of survey respondents can fund capacity building from their own resources with more than half relying on international partners or funded projects to provide the opportunities or funding needed. This runs the risk that learning opportunities are badly targeted as LNGOs tend to pursue what is available, rather than what is needed. It is also unsustainable as access to learning support is likely to diminish with decreasing funding and international agency presence, at a time when the need to enhance local capacities is expected to grow.

“There is a minimum set of expectations from INGOs and donors, and LNGOs need to understand that these expectations need to be met, to access the type of support they need. It is not an ‘us and them’ but should be a ‘we together’.” INGO representative

“There is no short cut. To get funded, we needed to improve ourselves, not the other way around. Most LNGOs wait for funds to develop themselves, so no funds means no development; where we looked at it from the other side, we need to develop to secure funds. And it worked.” LNGO representative

“The INGOs take the fund (Iraq Humanitarian Pooled Fund); pay the admin costs, very high salaries for their staff – the international staff – ride the big cars and they give the rest to the LNGO to implement. The LNGO spends the money on implementation only. That’s the instructions and, if we don’t agree, the INGO will definitely find someone else to do the work.” LNGO representative

“Most LNGOs are project based. If funding is available – they will apply for it, irrespective of whether they have the skills / experience. The problems of LNGO performance are completely donor driven – it is unreasonable to blame the local organisations – they have little choice.” INGO representative

“If no funds, they (LNGOs) close or go to a political party to secure [funding for] operations. The political party would need to implement their own agenda, so it’s not a NGO anymore.” LNGO representative

5.5.2. Accessibility of Learning Opportunities

More than half the survey respondents indicated problems in getting access to learning opportunities in their locations of activity, as the next most significant constraint after funding. Similarly, around a third of respondents identified the lack of opportunities in topics that meet their needs, and lack of awareness of learning opportunities as further constraints. Despite these constraints, almost three quarters of survey respondents have some access to external face to face training and learning opportunities. However, there is limited evidence that these opportunities are defined by LNGOs themselves but tend to be offered to meet the operational needs of international partners or donors.

Many of the constraints identified to funding and accessing learning opportunities can be addressed through adjusting the way that learning opportunities are targeted and facilitated. Greater use of internet, digital, paper or video based learning materials will allow appropriate LNGO staff to access the learning content they need, in the place it is needed, and at a time that does not necessarily impact on their work. This is not a substitute for interactive or group based learning but can be an important supplement and at minimal cost where materials are already freely available.
5.5.3. Targeting and Effectiveness of Learning Opportunities

While most key informants were positive about the quality and effectiveness of the learning opportunities that are available, there were repeated concerns raised about the selection of participating organisations and individuals. Several informants mentioned the problem of a lack of specialism among LNGOs such that they take on work without the necessary internal capacity or allocate staff for training on a topic which they are unlikely to engage in beyond the term of a specific project.

“How we do it is wrong, but that’s the way we are forced to identify the needs. Normally what makes us request a training is our intention to achieve a goal or task. So, the goal at hand, or the task determines which training or which capacities we need to build.” LNGO representative

Similarly, the selection of individual staff for learning opportunities may be based on seniority, a reward system, or availability but not necessarily linked to their professional learning needs or their function within the organisation. There were strong calls for a more rigorous assessment and targeting mechanism to match LNGOs with the appropriate capacity to learning opportunities in the same discipline, and to assess and select participants based on their role and ability to put learning into practice at project and organisational levels.

“Managers must validate that they [staff] achieve their action plans and hold them accountable. [LNGOs must] send the right profile to the right training – normally, here, they always send the directors or managers, though they might not be the persons who need that skill or would not be using that skill or knowledge” LNGO representative

“They don’t announce the invitation criteria. Normally the INGO finds a good LNGO or two, and keeps working with them only, and that’s not good for the new organizations. I am not suggesting to invite all the LNGOs – yet, work with a bigger scope, wider and also with clear criteria, so that even those LNGOs whom were not invited can work and improve to be invited next time.” LNGO representative

5.5.4 Relevance of Learning Opportunities

Although not cited as one of the most significant constraints, language is a constraint to learning for 20% of survey respondents and a slightly higher proportion of key informants. The issues discussed related mainly to the language for coordination meetings and the facilitation language for training. However, the findings also indicate that there is limited availability of written materials in local language, including international guidelines and standards, and sample tools, policies and procedures which are key to enhancing organisational capacity.

“The barrier is that the INGOs don’t understand Arabic and Kurdish. Instead of asking the LNGO to learn English, why don’t we ask the INGOs and donors to hire translators to get their templates and requests translated. They have the money and abilities to do so; if we are saying that the rights holders are the focus and centre of our work, they should act accordingly.” LNGO representative
Local NGO Learning Needs Assessment - 2017

A few key informants referred to the need for better contextualisation of training content and the value and importance of using local trainers. For some, the training or workshops their staff had experienced were too complicated and the context was covered too quickly for participants to follow and fully engage with.

“We send the INGO our highly-recommended training needs; sometimes they respond and sometimes the training need we request is not available. We no longer need or are interested in the general ones [trainings], we have attended so many of those general/fit all trainings.” LNGO representative

5.5.5 Putting Learning into Practice

LNGOs experience several constraints in putting learning into practice. Several key informants stressed the need for learning methodologies to focus on practice, rather than theory. This was echoed strongly by LNGOs involved in the focus group discussion.

“We need training from a practical point of view, by someone who wrote many proposals and their proposals were approved. We don’t want a lecture.” LNGO representative

“After covering the theory part, also (INGOs) to host that trainee and practice or see the implementation part of that knowledge as how it’s being done in reality, so the trainee from the LNGO would form both a theoretical and practical knowledge and skill.” LNGO representative

Around two thirds of key informants referred to the need for better continuity and follow up after learning activities. This also links to the focus on practice and developing experience, rather than just learning theory. The use of blended learning which combine learning through face to face or e-learning with support in implementation of learning through coaching, mentoring, work shadowing or buddyng, is acknowledged as a good way of achieving this.

“Need sort of MoU Between the Trainers and Trainees, where they can follow up and make sure the new learning is being applied; and, if not, they can go back and intervene and recommend and advise – a longer term partnership rather than hit and run.” LNGO representative

The need for proper follow up by management was raised by just under half the key informants as a critical factor in supporting the implementation of learning, and in achieving changes or improvements in processes and practice within the wider organisation. Finally, concerns were expressed about the inherent weakness in LNGO systems and processes, together with limitations in LNGO capacity to accommodate and foster organisational change. This reinforces the importance of understanding capacity building as a long-term intervention for local and international organisations and donors, and not something that can simply be achieved through a series of stand-alone training or learning activities.

“More follow up is needed after the training, [including] action plans, projects and coaching – commitment to apply the learning. The training doesn’t finish by the end of the training, it actually starts with the end of the training.” LNGO representative
Summary Findings – Constraints to Individual and Organisational Learning

Greater continuity and follow up – through partnering, coaching or mentoring arrangements – as well as, greater engagement and accountability by LNGO leadership are needed to bridge the gap between increased individual knowledge to enhanced organisational practice. Appropriate matching of organisations and participants to learning opportunities increases the efficiency and effectiveness of support provided.

Flexible no- or low- cost learning modalities should be considered to mitigate against major constraints such as lack of funding, limited locations and gaps in information about learning opportunities.

5.6. Importance of an Enabling Environment

Findings from the assessment highlighted several important factors in creating an enabling environment for learning and capacity building. These are closely linked to the nature of relationships held between a LNGO and their partners or other stakeholders.

5.6.1. Form of Inter-Organisational Relationship with International Partners

The predominant arrangement between LNGOs and international partners is one of ‘service provider’ or contractor. A few INGOs partner with LNGOs under a capacity building remit, and over the longer term but this is not common. A contracting arrangement perpetuates the funding and resource constraints for LNGOs as funding is generally tied to project deliverables and LNGOs highlighted the concern that limited, if any, overhead is paid to help them cover the costs of staff and organisational development. This can leave weak or inadequate systems under an increased burden of meeting different INGO, UN or donor requirements.

“It is important to fund and support their (LNGOs) agendas, not just ours. Look into real partnerships, sub grants, capacity building and mentoring.” INGO representative

“We have to be careful not to over-burden stronger LNGOs, particularly when transitioning to early recovery. Part of the capacity building programme should be about helping them identify what they can and cannot do or take on.” UN Agency representative

Yet, this ‘contact’ between international and local organisations offers important opportunities for learning through partnering, coaching, mentoring, or workshadowing arrangements which were seen by most international informants as the most appropriate vehicles for capacity building. Enhanced capacity is also acknowledged by all informants as a critical legacy for international organisations to leave behind if they really want to assist the recovery process.

“Need to train and improve those LNGOs working within the same area (geographical or sector) as the INGOs. Some type of partnership to engage the LNGO at the implementation phase, where both INGO & LNGO would share experience, knowledge and skills.” LNGO representative
5.6.2. Coordination

Coordination platforms provide a focal point for promoting capacity building through facilitating access to information about learning opportunities and materials, and enabling coordination and collaboration in assessing and addressing priority capacity gaps. Two thirds of key informants expressed the need to link any capacity building initiatives up with both government and NCCI coordination mechanisms to assure a coordinated approach to the development and delivery of capacity building activities, and information sharing about which NGOs are being supported.

“LNGOs need to be empowered to intervene in issues such as protection (even when they are challenged, discouraged or obstructed). Any capacity building efforts will be limited if not engaging with government as well on these issues (especially beyond the emergency phase). They need to understand the importance of a strong civil society in addressing underlying issues.” UN agency representative

“We [government] need to move toward creating a partnership with NCCI and NGOs, not a supervision or monitoring relationship. We need NCCI help to build a healthier relationship, bring awareness to NGOs that the relation is a partnership. We can also be flexible about the format; yet, to make such a decision we need to hear feedback from NGOs through NCCI.” Government representative

However, participation in coordination platforms among NGOs is limited. A third of survey respondents are engaged in coordination at governorate level and a similar proportion indicated engagement with NCCI either as a member, or a non-member. Only a quarter of respondents participate in cluster meetings and 20% are not involved in coordination at all. However, among larger NGOs this picture is quite different with twice the level of engagement in NCCI coordination meetings (74%) and higher levels of engagement in cluster and governorate coordination (47%) (Refer to Fig 10 below).
The reasons given for limited involvement among most LNGOs included:

- Lack of relevance of the content and purpose of meetings to LNGO needs – there was a sense that meetings tend to focus on issues of interest to INGOs such as visas;
- Lack of understanding of the purpose of coordination;
- Meetings conducted in English which are harder to follow and reduce the likelihood that LNGOs will take an active role;
- The limited resources available to LNGOs (staff, funds, time) to facilitate regular involvement

“We used to receive email and invitations. We never responded; we never replied; we simply didn’t understand what we were supposed to do or what shall we reply, or if it would be meaningful to respond; but, after being members in the cluster, we realized that it was a mistake. And, of course, now we understand when others do not respond or reply because they don’t know, just the way we were acting before moving to Erbil.” LNGO representative

5.6.3. Staff Retention

Staff retention was cited as a major constraint by more than half of the key informants. Of most concern is the loss of more competent staff, often once they have been trained, to international organisations.

“We can’t afford to recruit seniors or [staff with] long experience, so we recruit the juniors; we work with them, develop them; they learn fast in the field and then they leave, again and again.” LNGO representative

“If you focus on a skills development programme, these people will leave their organisation. It is critical to capacitate the organisations themselves, to recruit the skilled people as and when they need them.” UN agency representative

“When we started, we have sent 25 of our staff to be trained in Jordan, and they have done amazing work, guess how many still around? Only one, the rest has left the country or killed”. LNGO representative

However, the survey results paint a slightly different picture (refer to Fig 11). Around two thirds of survey respondents indicated staff turnover in their organisation of under 10%, with only 19% indicating staff turnover above this level. These rates are higher in larger LNGOs (with more than 50 staff) but this may be linked to their own investment in staff development, and engagement in coordination so that their staff are more aware, and better placed to seek alternative employment opportunities.

While staff retention and recruitment practice is a policy issue among humanitarian actors, there are some aspects that can be taken into consideration in the design of capacity building interventions18.

- LNGOs need to identify which positions, profiles and skills are most important to them, and where turnover is most detrimental to their organisation. These priorities should be considered as part of sector capacity building efforts. Roles mentioned as critical during the assessment included core project and programme management roles, finance roles and good leaders.

18 Loquercio, D et al, Understanding and addressing staff turnover in humanitarian agencies, Network paper 55, HPN, ODI 2006
• Capacity building measures to strengthen HR or Leadership should include developing skills and systems to increase the engagement and motivation of staff with a view to not only improving staff retention but also potentially increasing productivity.

• Link up with and advocate for initiatives to build local capacity and support a locally led response including national surge capacity initiatives, and the Charter4Change commitment to stop undermining local capacity and compensate LNGOs for the loss of skilled staff.\(^{19}\)

### 5.6.4. Sustainability

A strong sense came from key informants and focus group participants, that there should be a prominent role for local organisations and institutions in capacity building to facilitate long term sustainability.

Findings from the key informant interviews reinforced the value and importance of local networks with all LNGO informants indicating that they collaborate on capacity building with other LNGOs. Either through sharing staff expertise and work shadowing, undertaking joint trainings or workshops, or sharing information. Survey respondents also identified a range of local networks and groups that they collaborate with outside the formal sector coordination mechanisms.

“We network with LNGOs and share events and activities and try to collaborate between us to cut cost or for better implementation of projects, especially if within the same interest and mandate.” LNGO representative

While contribution of academia to LNGO learning is generally perceived as limited, and the learning opportunities offered through private sector not seen as appropriate for the humanitarian sector, there is a common practice of collaboration around capacity building between LNGOs. This offers a platform

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\(^{19}\) Featherstone, A., Time to Move On: National perspectives on transforming surge capacity, 2017
to build on, particularly where there are LNGOs with a reasonable track record in capacity building that could potentially be extended, through funding, to others. There was also a general sense that having an experienced and respected local facilitator lead on capacity building activities, was preferable to someone not familiar with the Iraqi context and language(s). However, efforts to develop local trainer capacity need to be aligned with the priority learning needs identified, and hosted in organisations and areas that make them acceptable, and accessible to all.

“A lot of saving can happen if we think of durable solutions, instead of bringing 20 people from four to six cities and pay all the transportation and accommodation and hotel venue and that [training] ends there; we can create a local pool of trainers [via Training of Trainers] and then they go back to their geographical areas and start serving all the LNGOs in that area, and also use more local expert or specialist where they serve all the LNGO within that matter or expertise.” LNGO representative

A few key informants highlighted the importance of engaging a broader range of civil society actors and organisations such as unions, local community groups and leaders, professional associations, and such, in facilitating recovery and reconciliation. These groups were seen as important in representing and mobilising a cross section of society. Past experience with the growth and shrinkage of LNGOs in response to funding opportunities was also seen a constraint in relying on LNGOs as the only vehicle for providing long term assistance and driving change.

“It is very important to understand the donor perspective. Donors have tended to see LNGOs as the main representative of civil society, as other capacities, such as tribal leaders, were purposefully excluded from 2003, because of their allegiances. However, this is what makes up the country. It is not a homogenous body of people who will follow one or other doctrine. It is vital to engage with the different groups to re-kindle civil society as this is the only way to deliver change.” INGO representative

Others mentioned the importance of prioritising staff development around knowledge and skills that would be useful and valued outside the humanitarian sector in the wider job market. Several informants advocated for the use of experienced leaders – from NGOs and government – to act as ambassadors for leading attitudinal or organisational change, e.g. in what it means to be an NGO, or the requirements for accountable, principled humanitarian action (refer to section 5.2).

### Summary Findings – Importance of an Enabling Environment

The effectiveness and sustainability of capacity building efforts depends on fostering a supportive, enabling environment for learning and capacity building. The role of international agencies, as partner, mentor or coach, is focal to this success.

Similarly, the active involvement of the NCCI and government coordination mechanisms in strengthening access to information and the complementarity of learning and capacity building initiatives is also key.

Finally, putting LNGOs at the centre of the capacity building process in terms of assessment, design and delivery will contribute to greater sustainability and help strengthen the networks that they already use to support one another.
6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1. Conclusions

The learning needs and capacity gaps among NGOs consulted through this assessment vary depending on their staffing levels and length of establishment, and to some extent across different locations. There was less evidence of sectoral differences, however clear priorities emerged in relation to protection, psychosocial support, working with IDPs and refugees, and social cohesion for those NGOs working in highly impacted areas. These priorities reflect the evolving nature of the humanitarian situation with continuing demands from newly displaced and returning residents, many of whom have experienced unprecedented brutality and continue to face acute needs, and suspicion or uncertainty on returning home.

Pressing needs were also identified in relation to the understanding and attitudes of NGOs and their staff to humanitarian principles, quality standards, the NGO role, accountabilty and transparency. This is partly attributed to the historical development and nature of Iraqi civil society which is underpinned by solidarity and social interaction based on religious or ethnic identities and obligations. The concepts of independence, neutrality and impartiality and their significance in humanitarian action are consequently difficult to understand and put into practice in the context of wider social norms, and concern among some groups about Western ideologies.

Capacity shortfalls in relation to accountability and transparency are also translated into weaknesses around securing and managing donor funding, finance and HR management, systems and procedures, and the knowledge and skills needed in planning, implementing, and learning from humanitarian projects. Although some NGOs had reasonably competent staff in these areas, consistent weaknesses were identified in the quality of systems, processes and procedures. A situation compounded by lack of funding to invest in organisational development and the absence of pre-existing tools and resources to draw on in Arabic.

The size and length of establishment of NGOs emerged as a strength as the larger, longer established organisations are more active in highly impacted areas and indicate higher levels of competency in some disciplines, notably protection, social cohesion, psychosocial support and managing and reporting on donor funding. There is also evidence of some capacity in relation to coordination, and systems and procedures for HR and finance management. A significantly higher proportion of these larger NGOs are members of NCCI and many are already favoured partners of international agencies. With the likelihood of increasing pressure on NGOs, there is a risk that the most competent will be overwhelmed. A factor that needs to be considered in the design of a NGO capacity building strategy.

The current humanitarian context severely constrains the movement and resources available for NGOs. Most are largely dependent on international partners, government or projects for the funding to cover learning and capacity building costs. While a clear preference for face to face training emerged from the assessment, this is not necessarily considered to be the best use of limited resources. Further analysis of preferred learning methods also revealed that there was more concern about having opportunities for face to face interaction with international partners, than the need for formal training. In fact, concerns were raised about the poor targeting, selection, and follow up from many training courses. Many NGOs also expressed the need for on-going support and a stronger focus on putting learning into practice.
These concerns and constraints indicate the need for a tailored and flexible approach to capacity building drawing in particular, on the skills and contextual experience of international actors. However, such an approach must also build on learning from previous NCCI work in establishing LNGO-LNGO partnerships and involve LNGOs and UN agencies with a capacity building mandate, in the design. Low cost approaches that could also be employed in remote and insecure settings include coaching, mentoring (face to face or over distance), work shadowing, communities of practice or peer support networks, and online learning. Given the limited familiarity with e-learning and internet or mobile based technologies, shown through the LNA, additional support and sensitisation would be needed in promoting these options as a viable approach to capacity building.

Failure to invest the time and resources needed to address priority gaps in capacity will constrain the ability of LNGOs to access and manage the resources they need in addressing ongoing humanitarian needs, and compromise their ability to address growing concerns around protection and social cohesion.

### 6.2. Recommendations

**1. Empower LNGOs through the capacity building agenda**

The success and sustainability of capacity building efforts will be increased if local organisations, institutions and individuals are at the centre of the process. LNGOs must to play a leading role in defining the objectives, determining selection criteria, coordinating efforts, designing and implementing activities and facilitating feedback.

LNGOs already have a culture of networking and collaboration which could be strengthened through taking ownership for capacity building. Similarly, investment in the development of local trainers and facilitators will help to sustain opportunities for learning at a relatively low cost, provided these trainers have relevant skills and experience in relation to identified needs, and are based in the locations that LNGOs need them.

**2. Clarify capacity building objectives**

The learning needs and capacity gaps among LNGOs are immense. Planned capacity building activities should be linked to a set of clearly defined objectives for the sector to ensure they will contribute to the highest priority, tangible outcomes. These objectives need to recognise the importance of supporting the development of both individual staff and organisational capacities within selected LNGOs.
3 Prioritise learning needs

Based on the assessment findings, it is recommended that the following learning needs are addressed as a priority, provided they contribute to achieving the defined capacity building objectives for the sector (as outlined above):

- **Skills and systems for project cycle management, finance and human resources**, including: staff knowledge and skills; access to relevant guidelines, standards and tools; and putting in place finance, planning, monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEAL) and human resources systems

- **Understanding and adherence to core values and principles**, including: staff knowledge, skills and attitudes around humanitarian law and principles, IDPs and refugees and ‘do no harm’; guidance materials and tools relating principles and standards to Iraqi civil society and the current context; and forums for wider stakeholder engagement on these issues

- **Technical and soft skills to respond to early recovery and stabilisation**, including: access to expertise and staff knowledge, skills and attitudes around protection, psychosocial support, social cohesion, advocacy and negotiation; guidance materials for NGOs and other stakeholders; and systems for assessment and referral

*ANNEX D* provides a more detailed breakdown of the priority needs identified through the assessment and suggested methodologies for addressing them.

4 Take a holistic approach

A holistic approach involving government, international organisations and other civil society actors is recommended to realise improved understanding and practice in relation to humanitarian principles, transparency and accountability, as well as the role of NGOs. Topics of this nature cannot easily be ‘taught’ in a workshop but, rather, depend upon bringing different actors together to establish a shared understanding of the issues and explore ways to take them forward. These important and challenging capacity gaps require attitudinal and behaviour change that goes beyond the reach of NGOs to deliver themselves.

This approach must also guard against undermining the role and value of NGOs in accessing people at local level through reciprocal understanding among international organisations about how Iraqi society functions and why.
5 Promote and facilitate local-international partnerships

International organisations and staff represent the most important source of learning for NGOs. The design of learning activities needs to maximise the opportunities for face to face interaction between international and local staff, learning through practice and on the job support from international partners, coaching and mentoring from experienced international practitioners and action based learning to see how learning is applied.

Increased support and commitment from the international community is needed to effectively address the learning needs identified – not only in terms of funding but, more significantly, in terms of genuine partnership arrangements and staff time. Learning from partnership arrangements, such as those via NCCL, Oxfam and UNDP, should be reviewed and shared to help identify the most effective approaches to take.

6 Tailor learning methodologies

More flexible and cost-effective learning methods should be considered in lieu of face to face training and workshops, which emerged as the most preferred form of learning. Some such methods, like coaching, mentoring, peer support networks or communities of practice, facilitate regular face to face interaction on a one-to-one or group basis without the financial and time costs of bringing people together and taking them away from work.

Where possible, no- or low- cost methods are recommended to address topics based largely around knowledge transfer, such as project management. Measures should be taken to address the constraints of language and access to training and learning opportunities in remote locations, through facilitating access to e-learning and on-line resources which are already available in Arabic. This could be combined with face to face or remote coaching and follow up to help translate the knowledge gained into improved practice.

Communities of practice and peer support networks can be facilitated locally, contributing to building pools of more experienced practitioners in critical locations or sectors. Coaching and mentoring is particularly relevant for topics which require longer term, hands on support. Useful learning could be drawn from Oxfam’s partner capacity building approach and the work being done by Mercy Corps under the ISHA programme in Syria.

**ANNEX D** sets out suggested methodologies for addressing the priority needs identified.

**ANNEX F** provides a list of resources sourced in Arabic.
7 Adopt clear selection criteria

Resources and funds to support capacity building are limited, requiring targeted selection of organisations and individual staff to capitalize on the investment. To do so, the selection of NGOs for capacity building activities should be based upon strict criteria, which consider past performance, areas of specialism and competency, length of establishment, size, location, leadership, independence and ability to support the development of others. Similar criteria should be adopted for the selection of individual participants. **ANNEX E** sets out suggested basic criteria to guide NGO selection.

Establishing two to three ‘tiers’ of capacity building activities, with different selection criteria for each, should be considered to enable effective targeting. This would help to allay concerns that new or less experienced organisations will be overlooked while providing clear rationale for selection. For example, the levels might include:

- **Basic** – provides general access to freely accessible tools and resources (no selection criteria – available for all registered NGOs)

- **Intermediate** – supports NGOs currently operating in the humanitarian and early recovery sector through participation in workshops/conferences/Community of Practice, and such, that are relevant to their areas of activity (selection criteria based on locations of operations and areas of sector specialism)

- **Advanced** – targets NGOs with the pre-existing capacity and experience to play a leading role in driving change and providing guidance for others (selection criteria based self-guided organisational assessment process)

8 Foster an enabling environment for NGO improvement

NCCI and the Government of Iraq Pl and KRG NGO Directorates are key to creating an enabling environment for NGO learning and capacity building. It is recommended that NCCI take a lead role in coordinating and facilitating access to learning opportunities and available resources. Both NCCI and the respective government NGO Directorates are also well placed to advocate for policy guidelines for increased commitment to partnership working among international organisations; provision of the funding and resources needed from donors to address the most pressing learning needs and responsible recruitment of staff from NGOs.

NGOs are currently heavily dependent on resources from international organisations to develop their capacity, through funds, staff expertise and access to opportunities. The NGO capacity building strategy should incorporate tactics to reduce this dependency and build a more sustainable model of learning and capacity building for the future.