



An Oxfam programme participant working in Diyala province, Iraq. Photo: Oriol Andres Gallart/Oxfam

INCLUDING WOMEN IN LIVELIHOODS PROGRAMMING IN IRAQ

Influencing communities and other agencies in a fragile context

The number of displaced people in Iraq now exceeds 3.3 million (10 percent of the population). Women and girls have been particularly affected, and their ability to engage in livelihoods activities disrupted. Through a series of studies and projects, Oxfam in Iraq is working towards understanding community and conflict dynamics in order to engage vulnerable conflict-affected women in economic life. A key element of this is influencing local communities and in turn, other agencies, to advocate for gender-sensitive livelihoods programming in such a fragile context.

1 INTRODUCTION

In Iraq since January 2014, more than 3.3 million people have been displaced, and over 10 million in total affected by one of the most rapidly evolving crises in the world. As in most conflict-affected territories around the world, women in Iraq are paying the heaviest price for the conflict, as they are worst affected by the lack of information, services and opportunities in areas of displacement and settlement. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM),¹ income/access to work is a priority need for vulnerable conflict-affected households in the Disputed Internal Boundaries – yet women here and across Iraq face many barriers to engaging in livelihoods activities.

In April 2015, Oxfam and the Women’s Refugee Commission (WRC) piloted the Cohort Livelihoods and Risk Analysis (CLARA) in Northern Diyala. This showed that most displaced women generally suffer from restrictions of movement, which results from an attempt by the community to ‘protect’ them. This means livelihood opportunities are very limited, and are mostly available in a setting that is deemed appropriate (i.e. in or around women’s homes).

In November and December 2015, Oxfam conducted a Gender Analysis in Northern Diyala and Kirkuk governorate. This revealed that 20 percent of women in Diyala and 40 percent of women in Kirkuk said they had no opportunities at all to access income; yet recent Oxfam assessments² showed that 100 percent of the conflict-affected households interviewed rely on market purchase – and hence access to income – for their food. The analysis confirmed perceptions of women’s reduced mobility and provided insights into the difficulties faced by women entrepreneurs, in particular in securing physical, financial or social access to markets.

Local NGOs have been at the forefront of the response, building local capacity to address the humanitarian crisis. However, they lack tailored and appropriate support to sustainably build their systems and ways of working. For over a decade in Iraq, programmes were developed to provide support to local civil society. Nevertheless, the current local humanitarian actors still struggle to efficiently link women’s empowerment to livelihoods and to promote women’s roles and resilience in their communities. Oxfam is working to ensure that women’s economic empowerment is an entry-point to address these issues, in order to build resilient and safe households and communities as well as knowledgeable NGOs in Iraq. Oxfam believes that by strengthening the capacity and empowerment of local NGOs – and engaging men, women, boys and girls through creating spaces for alternative voices to be heard – women can play an increasingly influential role in their communities and their own futures.

2 ABOUT OXFAM'S PROGRAMME

Barriers to including women in livelihoods programmes

In the context of the ongoing crisis in Iraq, both the IDP and host communities attempt to protect women, and particularly adolescent girls, by restricting their mobility – in some cases even more than before the crisis. This has limited women's ability to participate in livelihoods activities, and they are now mainly confined to their homes. In April 2015, the WRC partnered with Oxfam in the Iraq/Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) to pilot the CLARA guidance and tool. Developed by the WRC, CLARA assesses needs, risks and opportunities, and highlights mitigation strategies for safer, more responsive humanitarian assistance.

Farming and shepherding have not fared well in the crisis, and most IDP men's best livelihood options require them to travel farther away to find work, although they would prefer to stay in the host village to protect their wives and daughters. Likewise, men in the host community reported leaving their villages for work less often in order to protect their wives and daughters.

The CLARA found that while displacement exacerbates vulnerabilities, and can sometimes disproportionately affect women and girls, it can also lead to changes in gender norms and the disruption of social and cultural practices – providing opportunities for promoting gender equality. Oxfam recommended through the CLARA report that, as men are the primary breadwinners in Iraq/KRI, support for their livelihoods is imperative for the recovery of both IDP and host families, as well as for gaining allies for women's livelihoods work. Male farmers and shepherds are best supported by cash or in-kind provision of seeds, tools, farm equipment and livestock. Support to re-establish supply-chain networks and mobile income-generating activities for IDPs are promising interventions for male traders.

However, teams felt that mainstreaming gender and gender risk analysis throughout the programme's duration would enable other agencies and practitioners to seize transformative opportunities and to build inclusive, safe, effective and responsive livelihood programmes. Because women tend to be confined to their homes for cultural reasons or due to insecurity, their livelihoods should be activities generally accepted as 'women's work' – for example, backyard farming; rearing cattle and chickens that do not require grazing; dairy production; and home-based businesses, particularly where in-kind provision is possible. Direct participation in cash-for-work outside the home may increase women's vulnerability; whereas enabling women to work together in partnerships and cooperatives, and assisting them with their business plans – carried out with the full engagement of men and adolescent boys – may reduce their vulnerability to gender-based violence.

Gender analysis highlights link between lack of income and increased gender-based violence

Following on from the CLARA, Oxfam engaged in a comprehensive gender analysis in both Diyala and Kirkuk governorates. A particularly worrying trend emerged: localised tensions between newly displaced people, returnees and host communities were overlapping with multiple, intertwined expressions of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) (domestic violence, rape, early/forced marriage, female genital mutilation/cutting), which were exacerbated by the depletion of assets, lack of livelihood opportunities, lack of privacy and general uncertainty. The link between lack of income and community/family violence was clearly identified and observed: high rates of income insecurity force households to resort to corrosive coping strategies and lead to stress and tension, which results in increased levels of SGBV. Another highly concerning finding from the gender analysis was of women being resigned to and 'accepting their fate' in being abused, while increasingly resorting to violence against their children. In Kirkuk governorate, 92 percent of women reported not participating in local decision making; however, the ongoing nature of the crisis meant there were few opportunities to challenge exclusion of women from economic activity and decision making at community level.

3 WHAT DID WE ACHIEVE?

With funding from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Oxfam in Iraq has been implementing recommendations from both the CLARA and gender analysis through cash-for-work activities in four villages in Northern Diyala's Disputed Internal Boundaries. In all of these areas, NGOs had previously only ever engaged men in cash-for-work programming, as communities felt that it was not appropriate for women to be labouring alongside men in physical work outdoors. As outlined in the CLARA, this perception has been exacerbated by the ongoing conflict, which has meant humanitarian interventions have been limited in terms of engaging women in meaningful livelihoods and income-generation opportunities.

Oxfam had previously implemented a cash-for-work project in Diyala in which all beneficiaries were men, as communities had refused to allow female beneficiaries to take part; women had instead nominated a male friend or relative to undertake physical labour on their behalf. However, post-distribution monitoring data revealed that most women felt they should give the nominated individual a share of the cash they received, and were therefore ultimately receiving less money than male beneficiaries. Keen to change this, Oxfam was determined to find a way to design future cash-for-work interventions in communities that included women and allowed them access to the same amount of cash as men.

Upon first engaging with the four villages of Away Gawra, Um Al Hunta, Said Madry and Hussein, Oxfam staff were told very clearly by the local leaders (*Mukhtars*) and community members that only men could engage in cash-for-work activities as women were 'unable' to work. Oxfam therefore took a different

approach, and held separate male and female focus groups to attempt to understand the specific dynamics in the communities that prevented women from participating. All women respondents said they would be interested in taking part but it would not be acceptable for them to work outside in exposed areas or to mix with men. There was also concern about how they would undertake their care work if they were involved in cash-for-work activities during the day.

For female-headed households, single women and widows, Oxfam therefore designed tailored female-only cash-for-work activities, in consultation with communities. The women in each village chose the following activities:

Village	Female cash-for-work (CFW) activities	Number of women engaged	% of total CFW beneficiaries who were women
Away Gawra	Cleaning schools/childcare	16	24%
Husseini	Painting damaged houses/childcare	9	16%
Said Madri	Cooking for male labourers/childcare	27	18%
Um Al Hunta	Cooking for male labourers/childcare	30	13%

Of the 82 women involved in the cash-for-work activities, approximately eight percent were solely tasked with caring for children (one to two children per day in each location). Crucially, these women were paid the same as the other women undertaking the work, and therefore the same as the men who were undertaking the separate male-only cash for work.

4 WHAT HAS OXFAM LEARNED?

Following the implementation of the cash-for-work programme, Oxfam undertook focus groups with 47 women across the four targeted communities. These revealed the following:

- The vast majority of women said that doing the work and being able to earn some money for their families gave them a sense of pride and self-worth.
- Women also stated that they appreciated the work being indoors and not too far for their homes, as this was acceptable to others in their community.
- The women who undertook the painting said they were excited to learn a new skill, while those who did cooking and cleaning said they appreciated the familiarity of the tasks.
- All focus-group discussion participants said that the activities were well designed and organized.
- All of the women said that designating a few women to care for others' small children facilitated participation. Some women commented that despite this support, the timings of the activities were not always ideal because they had to

collect older children from school.

- It was generally felt that consulting with women in communities before a similar project took place again was a good idea, and all women said they would happily take part in such cash-for-work activities in future.
- No women faced difficulties from male villagers or others in the community as a result of their involvement in the project, and the few women who had spouses said they were supportive of their participation.
- The most common use by the women of the money earned was: 1) to pay debts and 2) to pay hospital/medical fees. Other expenditures included water filters, fuel, washing machines, food, clothes and school supplies for children, and home repairs.

Influence at community level

It was felt that the model was acceptable and replicable, and that the childcare element meant it was easy for women to take part. Similarly, male respondents to PDMs were satisfied with allowing women to take part in the activities chosen; this demonstrates successful influencing at the community level, as men had originally refused to allow women to take part.

Influence on wider humanitarian practice in Iraq

Oxfam has also been able to influence the humanitarian community in Iraq with its gendered livelihoods work, through financing from the UNDP. As the Chair of the Emergency Livelihoods and Social Cohesion Cluster in Iraq, the UNDP has extensive influence and reach in the livelihoods programming sector. Oxfam has been approached by the UNDP to lead a workshop for local and international actors on including women in livelihoods programming, as all other UNDP partners have thus far been unsuccessful in engaging women in cash-for-work and other livelihoods programming.

Oxfam staff have also been able to influence other clusters in their cash-for-work approaches, such as the Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) Cluster,³ whose members were keen to understand best practice in cash-for-work programming in camp situations. As a member of the Erbil-based Cash Working Group, Oxfam was able to present its gender-sensitive approaches to cash for work and advise the CCCM Cluster on how to ensure women are included in a meaningful and appropriate way in any planned cash-for-work activities, including taking into account their care responsibilities.

5 CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

Women in male-headed households were not targeted in this cash-for-work

activity, as all of the households chose to let the male head-of-household take part rather than his wife. This should be reviewed for future interventions to find innovative ways to incentivise the participation of women from male-headed households. A significant effort will be required to persuade communities that married women can also meaningfully contribute to household economic activities; however – based on Oxfam’s success in transforming community attitudes to women working at all – this could be achieved.

Furthermore, Oxfam is planning to undertake a Rapid Care Analysis in Northern Diyala in March 2016, to build upon the results of the gendered livelihoods work and improve our understanding of the impact of care responsibilities on women in the communities we work in. All of this should lead to future emergency livelihoods work in Iraq – hopefully including women in an appropriate and equitable way which fosters their economic empowerment.

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NOTES

¹ IOM, Kirkuk Governorate Profile, June 2015 and Diyala Governorate Profile, May 2015

² Oxfam Needs Assessment, Diyala Governorate, February 2016

³ The Global CCCM Cluster is composed of a number of partner agencies. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) co-lead the Global CCCM Cluster for natural disaster and conflict-induced IDP situations respectively.

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