

# IRAQ CASE STUDY

## Centering Women's Rights Organizations: Evaluative Research on Oxfam's COVID-19 Response in Iraq

### WOMEN EMPOWERMENT ORGANIZATION

Erbil, Iraq

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Oxfam has been calling for the transformation of the humanitarian system to shift power to local/national actors. Concurrent with Oxfam's dedication to local humanitarian leadership (LHL) has been a commitment to women's rights organizations (WROs). This Iraq case study examines how well Oxfam has upheld its commitments to LHL in its COVID-19 response via its WRO partnerships. The study describes the challenges WROs are facing, the ways Oxfam supports them, and the areas where Oxfam can improve. This case study is part of a larger evaluative research project that includes a synthesis report and case studies from Colombia and Kenya.

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

*Note: This case study is part of a larger evaluative research report, which includes a synthesis report and case studies from Colombia and Kenya.*

This case study highlights the role of women's organizations and women's rights organizations in the humanitarian response to the COVID-19 pandemic in Iraq and identifies the difficulties and challenges faced by these organizations in the field of humanitarian leadership. It evaluates the commitment of international organizations, including Oxfam,<sup>1</sup> to the local leadership of humanitarian work in Iraq, which means the need for local organizations to lead relief efforts and life-saving services during crises. Women's organizations can play an important role in humanitarian response during crises and can provide an added value in humanitarian work.

## RESEARCH SCOPE

The study targets women's organizations.<sup>2</sup> The study was limited to women leaders outside government institutions and did not include women in leadership roles in government institutions related to addressing the epidemic. The number of organizations that specialize in gender justice issues in the survey sample reached 97 organizations, in addition to three women-led organizations that do not specialize in women's issues.

## RESEARCH METHODS

The report merges quantitative and qualitative methods in data collection. The sampling social survey was used to obtain data that could be categorized and interpreted, while allowing for the exploration of the opinions of many organizations, which ensures confidence in the results. Individual interviews were used to reach a more in-depth understanding.

The present report provides a review of the efforts of women's organizations and WROs and the challenges they faced during the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. It relies on 20 in-depth interviews with leaders and representatives of women's organizations, three interviews with leaders of local humanitarian organizations, and a survey that included about 100 women's organizations, of which some are Oxfam partners. The study was conducted from January to the end of February 2022.

The survey relied on a questionnaire that was developed based on the objectives of the study and on Oxfam America's LHL Principles, the Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index (FHI 360 2022), and literature on LHL and humanitarian response, as well as preliminary interviews conducted with two women's organizations. The questionnaire was reviewed by Oxfam America, and the form was verified and tested on more than one organization and modified in the light of this test. Then it was presented to the organizations participating in the study for the purpose of making the necessary modifications. The questionnaire was redesigned and coded electronically and then sent via email by the Women Empowerment Organization team to the women's organizations included in the organization's database. After duplicates were removed and the data were cleaned, the number of women's organizations that responded to the form reached 100. Data collection and interviews occurred from January 15 to February 10, 2022.

## 2. WROS AND THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC RESPONSE IN IRAQ

Women's organizations and WROs faced a difficult situation in Iraq. They were already dealing with the challenges of working in conflict zones and navigating the unequal gender norms that inhibit their ability to support women in the communities in which they work, and the pandemic exacerbated these challenges and created new ones.

### GENDER NORMS

Gendered cultural norms pose challenges to women's leadership in humanitarian work in cultural environments that do not permit women to work freely and limit their ability to expand their circle of knowledge and relationships in the manner required by humanitarian work. Love and Peace Organization, an organization concerned with women's issues in the Anbar governorate, indicated that customs and traditions in the governorate curbed women's ability to access small business grants or exercise any activities related to gender justice. Women's organizations working in conflict zones shared that they must deal with security threats posed by extremist groups, which prevents their ability to grow and achieve their mission.

### FUNDING CUTS AND SHIFTS IN DONOR PRIORITIES

Organizations surveyed and interviewed for this research shared their perception that women's issues and needs were deprioritized owing to the pandemic. Donors turned away from funding women's programs and activities in favor of funding humanitarian response, which led those organizations to provide these services voluntarily or based on irregular donations—an approach that could not support effective humanitarian work that responds to the growing needs caused by the pandemic. Nearly 76% of the sample of organizations participating in the survey confirmed that feminist agendas were neutralized during the COVID-19 pandemic, as they did not represent a priority in light of emerging circumstances.

The shift in donors' agendas and priorities toward providing and securing funds for humanitarian aid had an impact on the feminist agendas of women's rights organizations in Iraq. During the interviews, at least three organizations (Gender Studies and Information Organization, Bana Organization and the Love and Peace Forum) spoke about canceled contracts (not from Oxfam) that had been signed before the pandemic to implement projects related to gender justice and shared that some were canceled at the final stage of signing. The chairperson of the Minority Gathering, which is a member of the Resolution 1325 coalition on women, security, and peace, stated that the project "Women's Voices for Peace and Prevention," which was supposed to be implemented in three governorates (Basra, Anbar, and the Nineveh Plain) and funded by the Women's Peace Fund, was suspended during the first months of the pandemic. However, a few organizations reported that donors not only continued to fund them but also allowed them to make changes to respond to the pandemic. The Baghdad Women's Association, for example, shared that the "donor allocated part of the grant to provide for relief, which includes health materials and a food basket" (interview, Baghdad Women's Association).

The results of the survey revealed that 61% of the sample of organizations faced great difficulties related to the lack of financial resources, while 31% of the organizations faced these difficulties, but to a lesser degree. Interviews with leaders of women's organizations confirmed that they faced

great difficulties in securing the administrative costs of their organizations owing to the decline in foreign funding and the withdrawal of donors or the freezing of the implementation of funded projects that had been planned before the pandemic. At least five organizations reported being unable to pay the rent on the organization's headquarters (interviews, Saad; Together for a Better Life Foundation for Human Development; Peace and Democracy Development Organization; Forum of Love and Peace for Students and Youth; and Gender Studies and Information Organization). To reduce costs, some organizations were forced to change their headquarters and rent less expensive places. The Forum of Love and Peace had to share headquarters with another organization to reduce its rent, and the head of the Together for a Better Life Foundation converted part of her home to the organization's headquarters owing to their inability to pay the rent.

## **MOVEMENT RESTRICTIONS**

The pandemic affected the freedom of movement of both people and goods/supplies. The results of the survey showed that 38% of the organizations faced difficulties in obtaining a permit to move and work during the pandemic. The restrictions and controls imposed on movement to contain the epidemic had negative effects on the space in which women's organizations operate. The Peace and Democracy Development Organization shared that it was difficult to have face-to-face meetings of members of the organizations and that only a few entities were able to access movement permits from government authorities (interview, Peace and Democracy Development Organization). The Organization for Women and Children (WAC), a woman-led women's organization, noted that restrictions on mobility prevented their staff from working with their communities (interview, WAC).

## **MINIMAL ENGAGEMENT WITH THE GOVERNMENT AND INTERNATIONAL ACTORS**

According to the survey results, women's organizations and WROs have been marginalized from the official response to COVID-19. Two-thirds of the sample reported a lack of engagement with official response efforts, and most of the women's organizations participating in the study were not able to obtain funding allocated for emergency situations and relief efforts. The field survey results indicated that 95 percent of the organizations were unable to access grants during the COVID-19 crisis.

The interview results indicated that one of the most important reasons for the weak participation of women's organizations and WROs in pandemic response is their exclusion and alienation not only by government authorities but also by international organizations. Of the survey respondents, 56% reported that their participation in response efforts was based not on an official request from government agencies but rather at the initiative of the organization itself. These organizations provided their services voluntarily to support government agencies in addressing the effects of the pandemic, without waiting for an invitation from official authorities.

Interviews with women's organizations and WROs also noted that the poor engagement with the government is related to unequal access to resources in the sector. One of the organizations in the Kurdistan Region asserts that the projects and programs implemented with the local government often do not allow space for all organizations to be partners in such projects; organizations with stronger relationships with the local government often receive priority. A similar pattern, they reported, occurs with the international community. Under these circumstances, some organizations had more access to resources at the expense of smaller organizations. Language was also indicated as a barrier facing small organizations. There was a perception that organizations run by leaders who can speak English and can better navigate the intricacies of funding applications often have greater access to funding than others who do not have the same linguistic abilities.

## DIGITAL OPPORTUNITIES AND INEQUALITIES

Like organizations all over the world, women's organizations and WROs shifted their services to a virtual world. Training workshops, legal aid services, awareness programs, and capacity building turned into online activities, and many organizations were able to provide online psychological support services to survivors of gender-based violence. Organizations set up new hotlines or relied on existing ones, established WhatsApp groups, used Facebook to spread awareness of gender-based violence, and provided remote training workshops. Although transferring programs and services to the virtual world enabled organizations to continue their work and sometimes even double the number of beneficiaries reached, the leaders of women's organizations and WROs indicated that the number of beneficiaries often quickly declined because women were uncomfortable using remote services, did not have access to the Internet, did not know how to use Zoom or Skype, or felt uncomfortable accessing services while at home and in the presence of family members (or even their abusers).

Other organizations pointed to the fatigue that afflicted the employees of women's organizations as a result of carrying out activities via the Internet. Safety within virtual spaces also became compromised, according to a woman-led women's rights organization, Together Association for the Protection of Man and the Environment. When one of their Zoom events was hacked, graphic and violent photos of ISIS were downloaded into the space. To ensure the safety of participants, the organization had to move from using a free Zoom account to paying for an account that allowed for more protection.

## STAFF WELL-BEING

Many organizations were forced to lay off employees owing to the suspension of projects and the inability to pay salaries. Among survey respondents, 35 percent were unable to maintain the full payment of their employees' wages. Interviewees also mentioned the delay in paying the salaries of employees owing to the disruption of banks. The DAK Organization for the Development of Yazidi Women, a woman-led women's organization in Duhok, stated that the delay in the arrival of funds delayed their ability to pay staff as well.

Organizations reported the challenges of dealing with staff health issues, such as psychological stress or COVID-19 illness. In the survey, 38% of the sample of women's organizations confirmed that the pandemic led to the organization's employees being exposed to exhaustion and psychological stress. Organizations reported that the burden of care and family responsibilities doubled during the epidemic crisis because of the suspension of schools and care homes and the presence of all family members at home.

## COVID-19 PANDEMIC RESPONSE BY WOMEN'S RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS IN IRAQ

In the first months of the pandemic, Iraqi women's organizations redirected their efforts to respond to the unprecedented humanitarian crisis, often at the expense of their programs on gender justice. According to the survey results, most respondents—80%—changed their activities to respond to the needs of members of their communities. Women's organizations provided basic needs such as food baskets and medicines and even paid rent for those who were unable to do so when they lost their jobs in the course of pandemic restrictions.<sup>4</sup> In an interview, a staff member from Together for a Better Life Foundation, a WRO in Nineveh, shared the following: "All our work turned into relief. We sewed masks, distributed sterilizers and food baskets with self-efforts and donations. We held awareness sessions on how to prevent catching the virus. There were many families who needed help, and we helped pay their rent."

Women's organizations also focused on raising awareness about the pandemic: 80% of survey respondents reported being involved in sanitation campaigns and distributing brochures and posters on how to prevent catching the virus. The Peace and Democracy Development organization, a woman-led organization focusing on women and youth issues, held virtual workshops with university professors, staff, and students to raise awareness of COVID-19 through WhatsApp, Telegram, and Zoom. The Baghdad Women's Association, a woman-led women's organization, created awareness brochures on COVID-19 and created a fact sheet about the increase in cases of gender-based violence occurring during the pandemic.

While most organizations involved in the study focused heavily on responding to needs created by COVID-19, several were able to continue their strategic gender work or transform that work in creative ways. Related to women's livelihood support, the Women and the Future Organization transformed its sewing project in Anbar, which aims to improve livelihoods, to focus on sewing masks and distributing them to health centers. Organizations involved in gender-based violence work shifted their services to support survivors remotely and by phone. Nearly two-thirds of the survey respondents said they continued to monitor gender-based violence incidents to capture and share data on how the pandemic exacerbated rates of violence.<sup>3</sup>

According to an interview with the director of the Bent Al-Rafedain organization, the organization realized that the government response to the pandemic—which was described as poor overall in terms of its attention to women—had a crucial gap in its lack of support for services for survivors of gender-based violence. The group therefore worked to provide food assistance and livelihood support for such survivors (interview, Alia Al-Ansari). Bent Al-Rafedain also advocated that the Babylon Provincial Council include a woman doctor in the crisis response in the governorate after realizing that all the other members were men (interview, Bent Al-Rafedain). The Baghdad Women's Association maintained a hotline for women and girls, realizing how important it was in light of women's inability to access protection services, listening centers, or counseling services under pandemic restrictions (interview, Baghdad Women's Association).

# 3. EVALUATING OXFAM'S RESPONSE IN IRAQ: WROS AT THE CORE

## PARTNERSHIP

This section pulls out several of the main themes on what worked and what did not work well in the relationship between Oxfam and its WRO partners.

### OPEN COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

Women's organizations and WROs that are partners with Oxfam conveyed that they feel able to consult with the organization and can define the scope and priorities of projects in a way that contributes to developing and building their expertise in crisis management. In interviews, at least two women's organizations confirmed that working with Oxfam is transparent, and they see a real and egalitarian partnership between them. One staff member from a woman-led WRO shared that "we [Oxfam and the WRO] worked together to develop the organization in all administrative and financial aspects, and built the capacity of staff, to help improve our leadership" (interview, Together Association for the Protection of Man and the Environment).

Oxfam's local partner organizations agreed that Oxfam has a clear advantage in its communication with local partner organizations. Oxfam's keenness to follow up on organizations' work was evident through visits carried out by Oxfam offices to organizations' headquarters, during which they discussed projects and identified their needs, but some local organizations sometimes saw this follow-up as an unacceptable intervention. These visits were sometimes not announced in advance, a practice that some organizations found to reflect an unacceptable form of censorship and mistrust.

### FLEXIBILITY REQUIRED

Although local organizations jointly determined with Oxfam the needs and the nature of projects, due to the flow of contractual risk and funds from donor contract to sub-grantees, the responsibility for selecting the partner project that receives financial support and for approving any changes or modifications during implementation sits with Oxfam, as governed by donor compliance regulations. The leaders of women's organizations point out that changes or amendments from the ground are sometimes not allowed until Oxfam approves them, based on donor restrictions, and sometimes studying and reviewing changes and amendments require complex procedures and a very long time before approval is received. Local organizations described this approach as inflexible because it hampers local organizations' ability to make necessary changes and updates based on the realities on the ground. Thus, it is important to assess needs accurately from the onset to limit the need for changes, which require a chain of approval. Sometimes approval must come from the donor itself, and Oxfam has to map out any possible implications.

### SUPPORT DURING STAFF TRANSITIONS

In line with the high turnover rates across the NGO sector and the prevalence of fixed-term contracts tied to donor funding, partners noted some challenges related to changes in focal points within the Oxfam team. Efforts were required to ensure retention of institutional and contextual knowledge where possible and continuity of programming, particularly with the turnover in project managers at the field level. Partner feedback highlights the value of having a staff team composed of both national and international staff to ensure that relationships can be built and maintained

with key stakeholders at all levels. It is useful to have local leaders at the field level; international staff may be less familiar with the local context, and this can require local partners to do additional work to add explanations in their communications with Oxfam and to translate key documents such as project reports.

## FUNDING

Oxfam's funding for women's organizations and WROs during the COVID-19 pandemic was directed to projects that focus on gender, but most of these projects were short term (no longer than one year). In the humanitarian context, Oxfam lacked clarity about whether further funds would become available because donors were uncertain about how the pandemic would evolve. The local partners described Oxfam's funding as generous and covering the needs of a project but said that it did not achieve sustainability for organizations as it did not include indirect cost recovery (ICR) for local partners as per donor restrictions in many cases across the sector. The situation therefore does not guarantee the continuity of implemented projects.

Oxfam partner organizations reported that the funding provided did not consider the nature of projects related to gender-based issues or the nature of the services provided by the project. One organization that provides legal aid for women victims of violence, funded by Oxfam, reported that many suits and complaints take a long time owing to bureaucratic court procedures, which often exceed the time allocated for the project. Furthermore, there is work that remain suspended until after the end of the project, and at least two organizations mentioned that Oxfam was unable to extend projects related to reducing violence against women to achieve the desired results of the project. The matter becomes more complicated when the goal of the project is to modify prevailing trends about gender or change roles to reach gender justice. Such projects need to work for years in order to bring about change. However, it is also imperative to acknowledge that, when the prevalence of COVID-19 falls, some humanitarian response funding does not last long after the situation has been addressed. However, Oxfam does have longer-term projects ongoing, which focuses on transformative change and works in a few governorates. These longer-term projects continually support the work that was started in the previous short-term funds if they align with the project's scope.

Two organizations contrasted short-term grants with the approach of the Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation, a Swedish nongovernmental organization that supports women's rights. In an interview, one staff member from a woman-led women's organization said that though Kvinna till Kvinna granted less money to them than Oxfam did, "They have continuity in projects, and this is more important to us than the amount of the grant" (interview, Women and the Future). Another woman-led women's organization shared a similar view, saying that Kvinna till Kvinna "worked with us for six years, and continues to support us very beautifully; they take the small organization, develop it, support its administrative and financial structures, and train the staff annually" (interview, Hawa). The need for continuity was emphasized by at least three other organizations (Women's Legal Aid Organization, Peace and Democracy Development Organization, and Raja Organization for Development).

## CAPACITY SHARING

All women's organizations and WROs that were interviewed participate in the training and capacity building programs implemented by Oxfam. Capacity building is an important part of Oxfam's commitment to LHL; it has pledged to allocate resources to build capacity and support local actors to become strong organizations that continuously improve their role in participating in the overall humanitarian response. Note that the emphasis was on capacity building and not on capacity sharing; the stress was on trainings for partners, which can be useful and appreciated. Oxfam can do more, however, to ensure a continuous and mutual learning process between Oxfam and its partners.

Only 20% of organizations participating in the survey agreed that international organizations (including Oxfam) had committed to a large extent to allocating resources to support capacity building of local organizations; 34% agreed that this commitment existed to some extent. The majority of the sample, 46%, did not see an effective commitment by international organizations to allocating resources to support capacity building of their organizations. Oxfam carried out capacity building training and workshops for more than 20 local women's organizations. It was keen to involve other women's organizations (non-partners) in the trainings and held consultative meetings in an attempt to support these organizations and enhance their capabilities. Oxfam also relied on these organizations to understand the Iraqi context and identify the needs and priorities in the areas where these organizations operate.

## **VISIBILITY THROUGH PARTICIPATION**

Some local women's organizations view capacity programs such as training workshops as a way of being more visible to some international organizations. Attending training workshops and meetings is motivated by the hope of obtaining funding, which are the ultimate goals of women's organizations, as they are the only way to be sustainable. Usually, organizations that are participants in these trainings consider them part of the funding deal. Participation is not, however, open and available to all women's organizations. Some organizations that did not participate in these training courses stated that they faced difficulties accessing the capacity building and training programs implemented by Oxfam and that it was not clear how to get information about them. Although Oxfam endeavors to open up opportunities for partnership with local organizations as widely as possible and to work with large numbers of civil society actors where it can, there are limitations based on specific funding sources in terms of donor budgets, thematic priorities, due diligence requirements, and more. Thus not all opportunities are relevant or applicable to all potential partner organizations. Oxfam aims to communicate the requirements and limitations of each opportunity as clearly as possible.

## **CAPACITY ACTIVITIES**

Oxfam focused on helping partner organizations develop their financial systems and provided capacity building programs for follow-up and evaluation. It also provided two-day training on how to manage organizations, as well as training on writing reports and reaching donors. These trainings helped develop the capabilities of cadres working in local organizations. The head of the Women and Future Organization observed a significant improvement in how the organization's financial director organized financial reports after receiving trainings, which contributed to the overall development of the institution's financial system. The Environment and Human Organization also reported that the financial system adopted by Oxfam helped it develop a strong financial system.

## **AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

Interviews with organizations identified four areas of improvement for Oxfam to consider: (1) greater clarity on how Oxfam conducts its needs assessments of partners; (2) more geographic diversity in its partners; (3) more LHL-relevant content; and (4) greater integration of self-care into capacity sharing opportunities.

Oxfam partners confirmed that more can be done regarding capacity building and that Oxfam conducted an assessment of the needs of their organizations to identify gaps in skills. Based on the needs assessment, Oxfam determines what types of training their organizations need. Other organizations said that Oxfam needs to communicate more information about its training and ensure that implementation training is related to the specific needs of the targeted organizations. It can do this by coordinating the needs assessments among the different departments, which will lead to multifaceted assessments based on partners' needs (interview, Baghdad Women's Association). Oxfam provided training for local leaders on the localization of humanitarian action, but these trainings were not sufficient to develop organizations' knowledge of this concept. Most of the organizations interviewed knew little about local leadership for humanitarian action.

(interview, Bent Al-Rafedain organization). In addition, the scarce time and funding allocated to building capacities was perceived as one of the most important weak points, and shifting trainings to online platforms reduced the quality of the trainings provided.

Lastly, women's organizations and women's rights organizations interviewed flagged the need for Oxfam and other international organizations to provide support for self-care, with more provisions to respond to staff and community members' wellness and health issues (including mental health), as well recognition of their care responsibilities. Considering that women's organizations are working on difficult issues that can lead to psychological pressure, such support is crucial. Connected to the difficulties faced by women's organizations and WROs, one interviewee wished for Oxfam to support their work more explicitly, even though they are working on sensitive issues (interview, Hawa).

## INFLUENCING

One area for improvement is the need for Oxfam to share more information on its support of influencing efforts, seen more explicitly in Oxfam's public engagement work detailed in the section below. One example was clear from the interviews: the Bent Al-Rafedain organization confirmed that Oxfam's support greatly enhanced the organization's advocacy capacity. This support allowed the organization to lead advocacy efforts for the first time at the national level and transformed the organization from a partner to a leader in the field of advocacy.

## PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Oxfam has pledged to advocate for donors to make working through national actors part of its criteria for partner evaluation and calls for project proposals. Oxfam led advocacy efforts in Iraq to support coordination between local organizations and international organizations and to help local organizations participate in the dialogue on local leadership for humanitarian action. For instance, Oxfam mobilized a signature campaign to retransfer funds directly from donors to local organizations in Iraq, without going through an international organization. This change could reduce the costs of coordination and administrative expenses for international organizations that consume large amounts of grants that sometimes exceed the amounts allocated to projects and programs implemented by local organizations.

Oxfam also organized a Localization Expo in Erbil in which more than 50 organizations participated as part of the advocacy efforts undertaken by Oxfam. The conference was designed to help local organizations market themselves and present their needs to international organizations. Some of the participating organizations found it an important opportunity to get to know international organizations, but in interviews, representatives of women's organizations and WROs pointed out several weaknesses. The process of selecting participating local organizations was not always clear to them, and Oxfam could do more to clarify how decisions were made when it came to forming partnerships. Some of the attendees noted that language was a major obstacle for local organizations. Recognizing this gap, Oxfam in Iraq provides interpretation for major events in three languages (Arabic, English, and Kurdish).

## 4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Women's organizations in Iraq have led initiatives to respond to the COVID-19 crisis, yet there is still skepticism and a lack of recognition of the ability of women's organizations to intervene in emergency situations. The following are overall recommendations, related to the LHL principles, from the Iraq case study. These recommendations target international actors, such as INGOs like Oxfam, donors, and UN agencies.

### PARTNERSHIPS

- Build partnerships based on mutual trust, which is encouraged by mutual transparency and accountability efforts.
- Be more transparent about selection processes so that women's organizations and WROs understand why they get funding or not, which contributes to their overall learning.
- Shift more decision-making power to women's organizations and WRO partners.
- Improve understanding of the local context.
- Prioritize information management and handover processes at partner organizations to lessen the impact of high staff turnover in international organizations and to ensure more long-term relationship building between partners and international actors such as Oxfam.
- Create more opportunities for local organizations to share information in their own language, and/or arrange for translation/interpretation.
- Whenever possible, involve women's organizations and WROs in the very beginning of the project cycle and in the design of funding applications.
- Be bolder with support of women's organizations and WROs. Women's organizations and WROs often tackle difficult, controversial issues, and the support of international actors such as Oxfam is crucial.

### FUNDING

- Recognize the long-term nature of gender work, and as far as possible support it with multiyear, long-term funds.
- Include ICR sharing between INGOs and local partners to support the sustainability of organizations and ensure the continuity of the work.
- Advocate for more equitable access to funding opportunities based on criteria that are not solely determined by the size of an organization.

### CAPACITY SHARING

- Move from a capacity building approach to a capacity sharing one that considers the value of mutual learning.
- Increase collaboration with women's organizations and WROs to decide what capacity sharing activities are required and create them together.
- Allow for more funds and time to be allocated to capacity sharing opportunities.

- Improve transparency on what capacity building and capacity sharing opportunities are available and how organizations (both partners and non-Oxfam partners alike) can access them.
- Ensure that partners from all areas of the country can access capacity sharing opportunities.
- Integrate self-care of both staff and beneficiaries into capacity sharing opportunities. Women's organizations and WROs face serious psychosocial challenges that need to be acknowledged and addressed.

## **INFLUENCING**

- Continue to support and amplify the advocacy efforts of women's organizations and WROs so they are better able to share information across different platforms at the local, national, and even global level.

## **PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT**

- Increase opportunities to connect donors directly with women's organizations and WROs.
- Accompany women's organizations and WROs in their interactions with donors, such as by assisting with translators, so they can directly communicate with donors and other international organizations.

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# NOTES

- 1 Unless otherwise stated, by Oxfam, this case study is referring to Oxfam in Iraq.
- 2 Note that in the case of Iraq, the focus goes beyond women's rights organizations to include women's organizations and women-led organizations. Oxfam in Iraq colleagues shared that considering the context in the country, it could be dangerous for organizations to claim to focus on women's rights or feminism, and it was necessary to relax the scope accordingly.
- 3 Based on interviews with Together Association for the Protection of Man and the Environment (a woman-led WRO), Together for a Better Life Foundation for Human Development (a woman-led WRO), and Forum of Love and Peace for Students and Youth (a man-led women's organization), among others.
- 4 This includes the Women Empowerment Organization's rapid assessment study of gender-based violence during the COVID-19 crisis targeting displaced women and refugees, a case study prepared by the Women's Leadership Institute on the reality of women and girls in light of the COVID-19 pandemic during the first months of the crisis, and a report prepared by the Umm al-Orphan Foundation on the impact of COVID-19 on working women.

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