IRAQ COUNTRY REPORT

A case study of humanitarian data
transparency from Erbil, northern Iraq

August 2020

Publish WhatYouFund
The Global Campaign for Aid Transparency

Authors:

Henry Lewis, Humanitarian Project Manager, Publish What You Fund

Gary Forster, CEO, Publish What You Fund

With additional research by:

Ruba Ishak, Ground Truth Solutions

Max Seilern, Ground Truth Solutions

Reviewer:

Dr Tariq Al-Jarrah, Doctors Aid for Medical Activities (DAMA), Iraq

Contents

Boxes, figures, graphs and tables

SECTION ONE

Research overview and approach

Project overview

The Grand Bargain[1] was launched at the World Humanitarian Summit in May 2016. Its goal of addressing the gap in humanitarian financing was to be realised through a series of commitments in nine key areas.[2] In the area of transparency, a 'Transparency Workstream' was co-convened by the Dutch government and the World Bank to support signatories in implementing their commitment to publish more timely and high-quality data on humanitarian funding and how it is allocated and used, to the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) Standard (commitment 1.1; deadline May 2018).[3] This data had to be of appropriate quality to support data analysis, including the ability to identify the distinctiveness of activities, organisations, environments, and circumstances. Signatories also committed to make use of available data in their programming and decision-making, to improve the digital platform, and to support partners to both publish and access data.

> **BOX 1:** **What is the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI)?**
>
> The standard is a set of rules and guidance for publishing standardised development and humanitarian data. Organisations can publish information on their finances (e.g. project budgets, funding allocations) and activities (e.g. project locations, project results, evaluations). Data needs to be provided in XML format.[4] A range of organisations publish to the IATI Standard, including donor governments, some UN agencies, and NGOs.

In the First phase of its activities (2017-2018) the Transparency Workstream focused on the commitment to publish data (commitment 1.1) in order to stimulate data availability, by enhancing the IATI standard to support the publication of humanitarian data and by providing support to signatories in publishing their humanitarian data. To unlock the full potential of transparent humanitarian data, it must not only be published but actively used to inform evidence-based interventions and efficiently allocate limited resources to crisis settings. Therefore, the range of stakeholders had to be broadened to include humanitarian actors on the ground, to fully track financial flows and other information.

For this reason, the Grand Bargain Transparency Workstream, with funding from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, commissioned Publish What You Fund and Ground Truth Solutions to conduct research into the information needs and challenges faced by data users on the ground in protracted humanitarian response settings.

---

1   For more information on the Grand Bargain, including the name of all signatories, please see: https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/grand-bargain
2   The Grand Bargain was signed by 61 signatories (24 member states, 21 NGOs, 12 UN agencies, two Red Cross movements, and two inter-governmental organisations). The Grand Bargain originally consisted of ten key thematic areas, but since its inception this has been reduced to nine key areas and one cross-cutting commitment.
3   When the research team talk about IATI, this includes the IATI Standard, the actual data that comes out of IATI, and the platform(s) that use IATI data (e.g. d-portal). For more information on the IATI Standard, please see: https://iatistandard.org/en/
4   XML refers to Extensible Markup Language and is a text-based format for characterizing information, such as documents and data.

BOX 2: **Grand Bargain Transparency Workstream commitments:**

1. Publish timely, transparent, harmonised and open high-quality data on humanitarian funding within two years of the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul. We consider IATI to provide a basis for the purpose of a common standard.

2. Make use of appropriate data analysis, explaining the distinctiveness of activities, organisations, environments and circumstances (for example: protection, conflict-zones).

3. Improve the digital platform and engage with the open-data standard community to help ensure:

   a. Accountability of donors and responders with open data for retrieval and analysis;

   b. Improvements in decision-making, based upon the best possible information;

   c. A reduced workload over time as a result of donors accepting a common standard data for some reporting purposes; and

   d. Traceability of donors' funding throughout the transaction chain as far as the final responders and, where feasible, affected people.

4. Support the capacity of all partners to access and publish data.

Research methodology

The team conducted a combination of desk, online survey, and key informant interview (KII) research in two countries. Iraq was selected as one of the final countries using a number of criteria (see methodology[5]). Throughout, the team endeavoured to explore the research, and then present its findings, in a way which was consistent with what it heard from the mouths of those on the ground in Iraq. As such, any omissions, for example regarding specific initiatives, should be interpreted with this understanding in mind.

The survey (109 responses) and KIIs (32 participants) provided information about the challenges faced by humanitarian responders across a range of roles and types of organisations in accessing, submitting, sharing, and using data from over 63 organisations in Iraq.[6] The number of survey and KII respondents is broken down by organisation type in the methodology document. The study was weighted in favour of national and local actors,[7] but included interviews with government ministries, UN agencies, cluster coordinators, international NGOs,[8] and donor mission offices.

---

5   Publish What You Fund humanitarian data transparency research methodology:
     https://www.publishwhatyoufund.org/projects/humanitarian-transparency/
6   Acknowledging that the limited sample size results in some challenges regarding the statistical significance of individual findings.
7   The research team defines national NGOs as operating in a single country, but in several regions of that country and local NGOs as operating in a single region within a country.
8   The research team defines international NGOs (INGOs) as organisations which work in multiple countries.

SECTION TWO

Findings and conclusion

Report purpose

This research brief explores the information needs of humanitarian actors on the ground in northern Iraq and the challenges they face in accessing and using this information for decision-making purposes. It is based on data collected via an online survey and key informant interviews undertaken during a field trip to the governorate of Erbil in August 2019.

This research brief will cover a number of different areas, including the publication of financial data to the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) Standard and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs Financial Tracking System (FTS), how organisations in the field are collecting, analysing, and using data to inform operational and programmatic decisions, what digital platforms responders are using and the challenges and opportunities they face, and how data use capacity is impacting different organisations ability to management data effectively. To address these areas, the research team first needed to understand the roles and responsibilities of different organisations across the response in Iraq, what decisions they have to make on a daily basis, how they are making these decisions, and consequently what types of data they currently use and need more of to make decisions. As a result, this brief outlines what key stakeholders on the ground highlighted as needing to change to help improve information exchange within the response. Specifically, it touches on issues of data quality, data use capacity, roles and responsibilities with regards to data management, coordination, data governance, and localisation/local engagement.

This research brief forms one of two case-study country reports, with the other brief focusing on Bangladesh. As part of the wider research for this project, the findings from Iraq were combined with those from Bangladesh and interviews with global stakeholders to produce a series of four reports exploring humanitarian data transparency in protracted crises. The four reports were targeted at a global-level audience and each aligned with a commitment of the Grand Bargain Transparency Workstream:

1. Research brief 1: publication of humanitarian funding data

2. Research brief 2: data collection, analysis and use in protracted humanitarian crises

3. Research brief 3: the use, challenges and opportunities associated with digital platforms

4. Research brief 4: data use capacity in protracted humanitarian crises

Why Iraq?

Iraq has been at the centre of conflict and displacement for decades. War with Iran in the 1980s, the first Gulf war, the US-led invasion in 2003, and years of civil war and insurgency have left millions of Iraqi civilians displaced and severely impacted their lives and livelihoods. While now safer than the rest of the country, the autonomous region of Iraqi Kurdistan has still been impacted by the effects of these conflicts and the subsequent displacement of communities. The region faces its own difficulties externally, while also facing tensions between The Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) and the Central Government of Iraq in Baghdad.

The humanitarian response in Iraq has now been active for almost 17-years. The United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) was formally established in 2003. This included a Resident and Humanitrian Coordinator to help the Iraqi governtment deal with the substantial humanitarian needs arising from years of conflict and displacement. Today, UN OCHA are responsible for leading the humanitarian response. While the response has been able to address many of the immediate humanitarian needs of those displaced to date, it has suffered from a number of challenges. Some of the key challenges include limited funding as a result of donor fatigue and restricted access to substantial parts of the country as a result of security concerns and government constraint. These challenges, to an extent, have been exacerbated by Iraq's limited civil society, institutional and governmental capacity (a result of decades of conflict), complicated political landscape, sectarian divides, and conflict in neighbouring countries, including Syria, which has drawn away the focus of the humanitarian community.

Currently the country has 1.4 million internally displaced persons (IDPs),[9] with 236,496 IDPs in the governorate of Erbil.[10] The 2020 Iraq Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) requests USD$520 million[11] to help target 1.7 million people[12] across the country. While this is a slight drop from 2019,[13] both in terms of funds requested and people targeted, needs still remain high, particularly in the areas of protection, food security, and health.

As such, Iraq, specifically Iraqi Kurdistan, offered the research team the opportunity to explore a crisis characterised by persistent conflict and protracted displacement. This presented the team with the chance to explore multiple needs in terms of information, whilst having safe access to a wide variety of on the ground humanitarian organisations to understand their challenges in accessing and using this information.

9   IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix. Accessed online on 29/07/2020: http://iraqdtm.iom.int/
10   Ibid
11   UN OCHA, Iraq Humanitarian Response Plan 2020. Accessed online:
      https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/iraq_hrp_2020.pdf
12   Ibid
13   UN OCHA, Iraq Humanitarian Response Plan 2019. Accessed online:
      https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/iraq_2019_hrp_26_02_2019final_english.pdf

Findings

FINDING 1 – INFORMATION USE AND NEED DEPENDS ON THE ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES AN ORGANISATION PLAYS IN THE RESPONSE

For the purpose of this research brief, actors on the ground were split into two distinct categories – "coordinators" and "implementers". The team saw "coordinators" as recipient country governments and response-level coordination groups (e.g. UN agencies, cluster coordinators, and donors), who needed information to better understand the scale of the response and the assortment of organisations involved. They need this information to be consolidated into project and situational analysis reports, visualisations such as project and operational dashboards, and multi-sector overviews (e.g. humanitarian response plan for Iraq). Coordinators working across the response explained that they require such information to prevent duplication of programmes, identify information gaps, ensure appropriate targeting of resources, and to react in a timely manner to ensure humanitarian needs of displaced and conflict-affected populations are met.

FIGURE 1: **"COORDINATORS" VS "IMPLEMENTERS"**

"COORDINATORS"		"IMPLEMENTERS"	
Who:	country governments and coordination groups (e.g. clusters, donors, UN agencies, working groups/sub-clusters)	**Who:**	local and national NGOs (NNGOs), INGOs, and often UN agencies (act as response coordinators while also delivering services directly to vulnerable populations)
Roles:	humanitarian affairs officers, cluster coordinators, programme/policy/advocacy officers, ministry representatives, desk officer, information management officers (IMO)	**Roles:**	field officer, camp manager, project manager, information management officer (IMO)
Focus:	oversight, policy, evaluation and commissioning/funding implementers	**Focus:**	designing, sourcing funding for, and executing programmes for beneficiaries
Information needed:	scale of response, variety of actors, financing	**Information needed:**	management information (security and access information, 3/4W data, etc.), needs assessment and beneficiary data

Meanwhile, "implementers" were those who design, source funding for, and execute programmes at the local/field level while delivering assistance directly to affected communities (e.g. local and national NGOs and INGOs). They require better management information (i.e. security and access data, 3/4W[14] data) and needs assessment/beneficiary data to inform the design and implementation of their programmes and to target their services to the areas of greatest need. This is particularly important for the response in Iraq, where people have been displaced across the country. Due to the nature of their role and often the specificity of the programmes they deliver, they required this information to be timely, granular, and validated. "Implementers" said they need this type of information to ensure that their expertise is allocated where the need is greatest, minimising duplication of services/programmes, and preventing operational and implementation gaps in the response.

To understand the challenges these stakeholder's face in accessing and using data, it is important to understand their specific data use and subsequent data needs in more detail. Figure 2, collected during the initial survey, shows the similarities in terms of the main types of data that respondents said they used on a monthly basis and what they need more of:

FIGURE 2: TYPES OF DATA USED AND NEEDED AMONG SURVEY RESPONDENTS
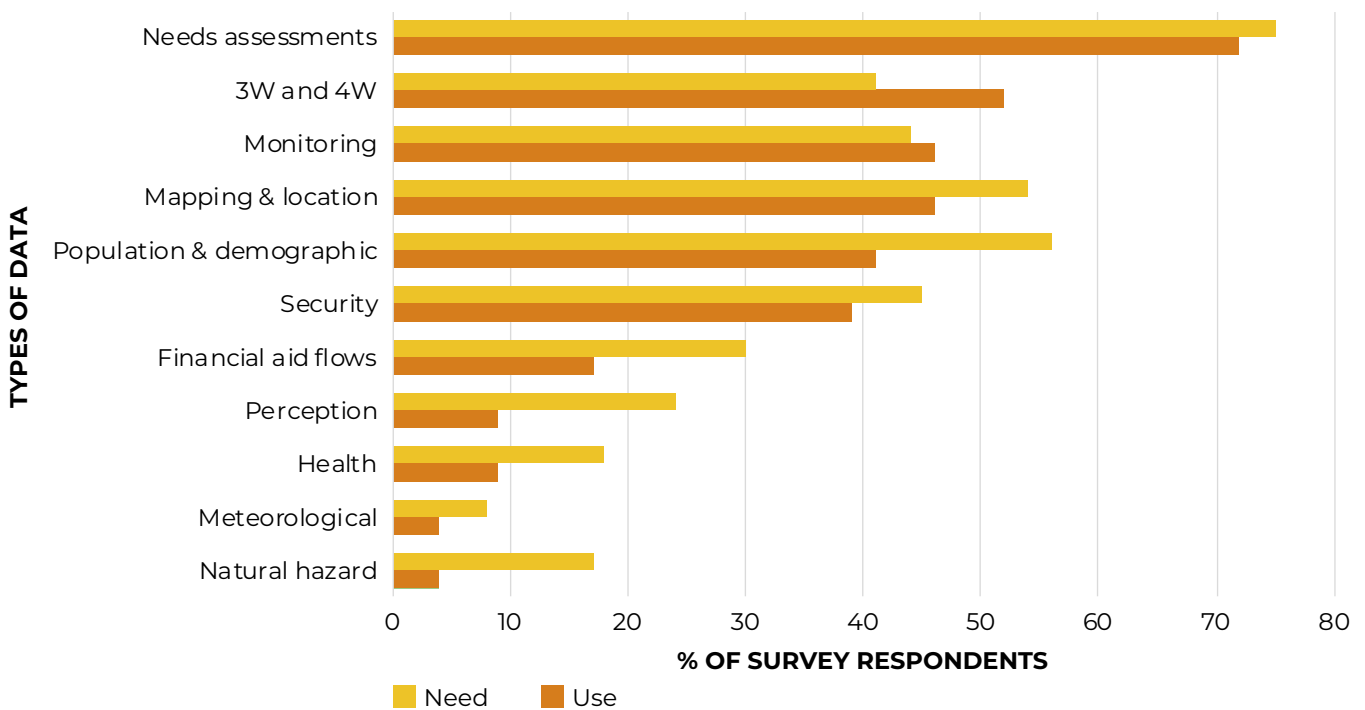
Regarding data use,[15] survey respondents explained that the data they used most frequently was that relating to needs assessments (72% of respondents), 3W and 4W (52%), monitoring (46%), mapping and location (46%), and population and demographic data (41%). Interviewees stated that they used this data to help them understand the diverse mix of needs among those displaced in camp and non-camp settings and to then design the blend of services required. Survey respondents said they first and foremost needed[16] more data related to needs assessments (75%) and population and demographic (56%) data. This was followed by mapping and location (54%), security (45%), and monitoring data (44%).

---

14   3/4W data is the who does what where (i.e. it is data that tracks the location of activities, which actors are carrying out those activities within each sector/sub-sector, levels of funding). The raw data provided is used to provide information for coordination and gap analysis. Collection of 3/4W should be led by an information management office (IMO).

15   Survey question: What type of data do you use at least once a month? (select all that apply from a list).

16   Survey question: What type of data do you need more of? (select all that apply from a list).

FINDING 2 – FINANCIAL DATA IS MORE USEFUL TO THOSE ORGANISATIONS COORDINATING THE RESPONSE, BUT DATA QUALITY NEEDS TO BE ADDRESSED URGENTLY

The research found that financial data, as reported to the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) Standard (accessible through d-portal and the query builder) and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) Financial Tracking System (FTS), is more widely used and more relevant to "coordinator" type organisations in the response. At the global level, IATI and FTS are regarded as the main reporting standards for capturing and tracking data on financial aid flows in humanitarian crises. Information on who is funding what and the funds allocated to different clusters/sectors can be found for Iraq using platforms to access this information. During the survey phase, the team found that 17% of respondents reported they used this type of data frequently. This was primarily the case with INGOs and NNGOs with a handful of UN agencies and a single coordination body. Further, 30% of respondents said they needed more financial data (see figure 2). Again, NNGOs and INGOs made up the majority of these respondents, followed by a few UN agencies and coordination entities.

One noteworthy observation of this work was the difference between the responses to the team's online survey and the in-country KII discussions. One possible explanation for this difference, discussed by the research team, is that during the survey respondents responded "on behalf of the crisis"; attempting to articulate a macro view of data use and needs rather than the perspective of their own role, organisation, and objectives which were easier to explore in person. The team found that financial data was mentioned much less frequently during the interviews themselves. When discussed, UN agencies, cluster coordinators, donors, and the central government (i.e. those organisations higher up the response hierarchy), said they require financial information to understand the scale of the response. Specifically, they sought granular financial data indicating specific sectors, actors and programmes, but also macro-level information, such as funds committed versus expended or funding coverage per sector. The government required this information to understand the level of funding coming into the country and to plan their budgets accordingly. Currently, this type of information can, to an extent, already be captured and found using IATI and FTS.

> **We use this platform [FTS] as it is an important tool for us to document financial contributions. We do not use it as a decision-making tool, but a way to look at what other organisations are doing in Iraq**
>
> **Donor**

INGOs and NNGOs (i.e. "implementers"), on the other hand, stated that while the financial data on IATI and FTS can be used for investigating potential fundraising avenues, in reality, they actually require more granular market and procurement level data, such as the cost of building and construction materials for repairing damaged houses or how much it would cost to transport non-food items (e.g. gas cookers and shelter kits) to the IDP and refugee camps across the country. This is mainly a result of the roles and responsibilities these organisations have within the response and as such they need this data to forecast future programme activities and set project-level budgets. Financial data on procurement was particularly needed by local NGOs who often deliver services and implement projects on behalf of UN agencies and INGOs. More granular market/procurement type data cannot currently be captured by either IATI or FTS. This difference in the type of financial data needed by "coordinators" and "implementers" was re-enforced by the fact that on the ground, the awareness and use of both these platforms is low. Among stakeholders in Iraq only 5% of survey respondents reported being aware of IATI and only a fraction (1%) said that they had previously used IATI data. For FTS, while awareness was higher (47%) than for IATI, use (17%) is still low. Across both platforms, the number of organisations uploading data was, again, very low at 1% of survey respondents for IATI and 13% for FTS (see figure 3).

FIGURE 3: AWARENESS, USE, AND UPLOADING OF DATA TO IATI AND FTS AMONG SURVEY RESPONDENTS
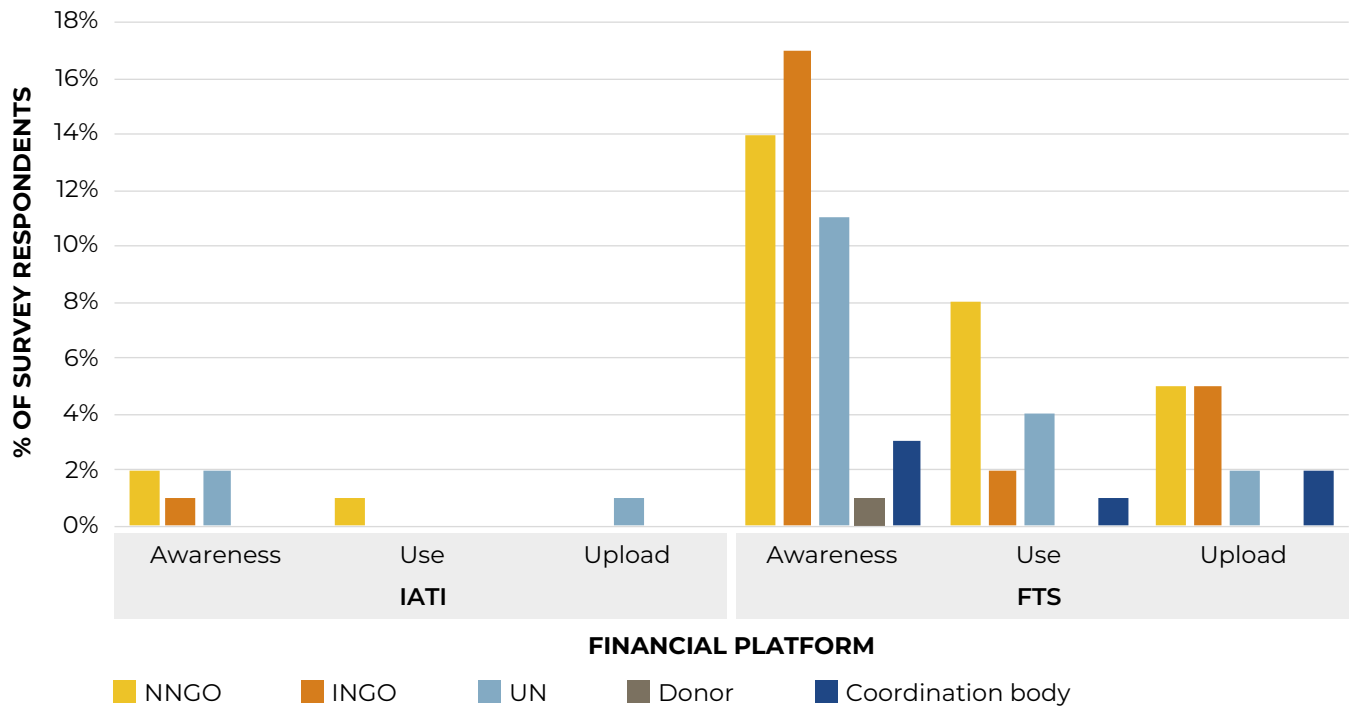
During the KIIs, when the team had the opportunity to explore this further, they found that interviewees had serious concerns with the quality of data on IATI and FTS. Specifically, users questioned the comprehensiveness, timeliness, and relevance of the data, and to what extent it is validated, and therefore, accurate. While some of these concerns could be explained by the lack of reporting to these platforms by humanitarian actors, this does not explain other concerns. For example, "coordinators" wanted to see financial flow data for both humanitarian response plan (HRP) and non-HRP flows into the country, but an issue highlighted by interviewees was the proportion of non-HRP funding which is not captured by FTS – a significant challenge for actors as Iraq starts to move away from solely a humanitarian crisis to more of a development focus. With regards to IATI, local offices of INGOs and donors highlighted that they do not always recognise the data which has been submitted by their global HQs, due to the fact that the data does not reflect the reality they see on the ground. One donor in particular highlighted that they found missing projects, incorrect start dates, and unknown implementers. These quality concerns are eroding the trust that actors hold in these data sources. As a result, the team was unable to find any use cases of IATI or FTS data for decision making on the ground. It should be noted, though, that in Iraq FTS mechanisms, reports, and monthly funding dashboards are sometimes used for information sharing in coordination meetings, including some high-level meetings.

An opportunity was presented when some interviewees, particularly those from clusters and cluster sub-working groups, did highlight a need for the non-financial data that IATI is currently capable of capturing, specifically results and evaluation data relating to current and expired programmes. Clusters, UN agencies and donors, in particular, wanted to use this data to better understand the effectiveness of programme activities implemented by INGOs and NNGOs, so they can be replicated, scaled up, or adapted in future. They also wanted the ability to learn from others' best practice. In these cases, stakeholders wanted to see outcome data in both information products (e.g. evaluation reports, briefs and visualisations, etc.) and raw form (e.g. Excel, CSV, etc.) with a detailed data collection methodology attached to gauge the reliability of the data. Again, there were concerns about data quality and the fact that this data would need to be timely if it is going to be used for decision-making.

DATA IN PRACTICE

During the in-country key informant interviews the research team heard a number of instances where actors were using FTS data. One INGO told the team that they *"use FTS as an important tool to document financial contributions"*, and that while they *"don't use it as a decision-making tool"* they found it useful for understanding what organisations are doing in the response. Another NNGO said *"we use [FTS data] when we want to analyse how the sector is being funded, understand where the gaps are, and when writing our proposals. The data is alright"*.

FINDING 3 – DATA COLLECTION, ANALYSIS AND USE ARE INHIBITED BY INEFFECTIVE DATA COORDINATION, WHILE ACTORS SEEK BETTER QUALITY AND MORE COMPREHENSIVE DATASETS

> **There are so many different organisations that publish data, it is sometimes difficult to find the right data. Some organisations are very protective with their data and don't want to share their findings. Sharing could be improved**
>
> **INGO staff member**

Ineffective data sharing, exacerbated by poor coordination, is hindering data visibility and quality, resulting in inhibited analysis and use by other organisations in the response. Over half of survey respondents in Iraq said their organisations shared data to help improve overall coordination across the response. However, once on the ground the team found that in reality data sharing agreements and Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs), particularly between UN agencies, INGOs, and the government, are inconsistently used. This has led to most organisations defaulting to only sharing data that is required for reporting and compliance purposes, and as such, has limited the visibility and availability of data within the response. Ultimately, important decisions are currently being made without having access to all the information needed to make them. As one INGO staff member said, *"Most organisations publish the minimum quality and amount of data required by their donors."* For example, the research team heard numerous times during interviews that there was an unwillingness, especially from UN agencies and some INGOs, to share assessment data. Interviewees spoken to believe this is unknowingly resulting in the duplication of needs assessments and wasting already limited resources. One local NGO staff member in particular said that even when they are asked to undertake a needs assessment for an INGO or UN agency, they are unable to see/access previous assessments in that area. Additionally, this lack of openness between organisations has led to a data sharing imbalance, whereby as part of their reporting and compliance requirements, local organisations are having to provide a substantial quantity of data upstream, while bigger organisations in the response do not share their data downstream. As a result, trust and openness between larger organisations and local NGOs is being eroded.

> **The cluster system is the means we use to get everyone to the table – if you are not part of this system then your voice is less likely to be heard**
>
> **INGO staff member**

For local NGOs, simply accessing this data can be a challenge. A number of local organisations told us that they had felt excluded from coordination meetings, specifically cluster meeting, where they would receive data and were having to rely on more informal methods to get access to the information they require. One KII participant from a local NGO put this down to the fact that many local and national NGOs do not have a proper understanding and awareness of international humanitarian architecture and the cluster approach, which they said might lead to poor participation of these organisations in cluster meetings. Attendance at cluster meetings would allow for better recognition of local and national NGOs working in the sector. Meanwhile, for those local organisations that are invited to cluster meetings there is a level of commitment required, but there are also a number of barriers, including the associated time and financial cost of returning from the field, and barriers regarding the language of the papers and discussion at the meetings.

A cross-cutting challenge which needs to be considered and further impacts information sharing, relates to the humanitarian–development nexus. As the response in Iraq starts to shift from a humanitarian to a longer-term development focus, the line between these responses is becoming blurred. This is having a particular effect on communication and information exchange between actors in the two sectors. One interviewee highlighted that they often feel that they have a broad understanding of the wider humanitarian response, but lack insight into what development actors are doing in parallel to the response. This was re-iterated by an IMO who said, *"There are no parallel systems or the infrastructure does not exist. This needs to be improved and there needs to be better talking. As the humanitarian response in Iraq shuts down, there is a disconnection with the cluster system and agencies moving towards development work."* While the UN Secretariat has established a Development Cooperation Office (DCO),[17] there is no formal mechanism at the field level for the humanitarian and development sectors to engage, which makes sharing information especially challenging.

Inadequate rules and policies around data sensitivity have led to conflicting ideas about what data can be shared, how and in what format. Sensitive data includes any personal or demographically identifiable information (e.g. the names of people receiving assistance or camp registration details). In a context such as Iraq, where protection risks to civilians and displaced populations are significant, handling sensitive data in a consistently safe way is essential. While many individual organisations have internal sensitive data policies in place, there is no common guidance on what can shared across the response. As a result, nearly a quarter of survey respondents indicated the main challenge preventing them from sharing more data relates to the sensitive nature of said data. Specifically, survey respondents said they were particularly reluctant to share security, needs assessments, mapping and location, and monitoring data (see figure 4). While this apprehensiveness naturally reflects the sensitive nature of these data types, it is important to note that these are also some of the most used and needed types of data among actors on the ground.

---

17   http://www.uniraq.com/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&layout=item&id=951&Itemid=619&lang=en

FIGURE 4: WHAT TYPE OF DATA DO YOU NOT FEEL COMFORTABLE SHARING PUBLICLY IN IRAQ?
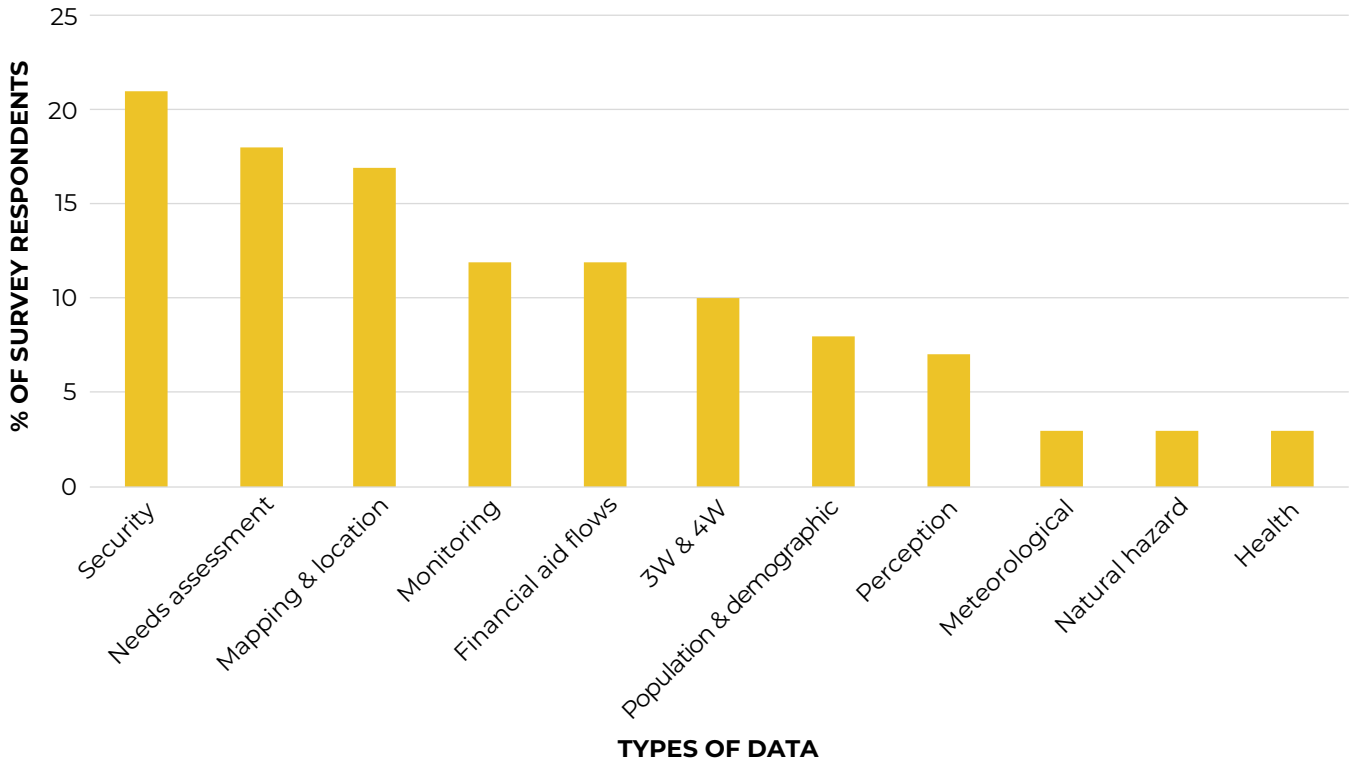
Some interviewees highlighted that INGOs and the UN are often not sharing sensitive data at all. One local NGO said that this was happening even when the data can be safely anonymised and aggregated to render it less sensitive. Some INGO interviewees suggested that being transparent on who they are working with and where, may significantly increase risk to their staff and inhibit access to specific displaced populations or camps. For example, the team did hear reports from one stakeholder of serious reprisals, including attacks on local NGO staff, as a result of funding information being made publicly available, particularly around who they were receiving funding from. While these risks should be taken seriously, and the "do no harm" principle considered, sensitive data should not be used as a catch all excuse for not sharing data at all.

DATA IN PRACTICE

One cluster in Iraq has shown the importance of IM capacity. This cluster has a dedicated IMO and data management assistant to deal with all incoming data collected in the field. This has allowed the cluster to share its data in a comprehensive and timely manner among its 49 HRP and non-HRP partners via useable infographics, maps and dashboards (as of August 2019). The cluster has made HumanitarianResponse.info the main platform for accessing and sharing data and information products. As the cluster coordinator said, *"Other clusters could learn from us. Having an IM makes our cluster more efficient and effective. This means we can be more reactive and improve the visibility of our data. This has made the cluster more realistic."*

Across the Iraq response IM capacity is low. Actors on the ground stated that there is a substantial quantity of data available, but the absence of dedicated information management officers (IMOs) at the response level and within organisations is hindering the effective analysis, use, and sharing of it. Specifically, cluster coordinators, INGOs and local organisations had concerns about the lack of IM capacity, both in terms of the number of IMOs and the authority they have, which meant there was an absence of technical skills and guidance to help improve the effective exchange of information. IMOs are seen as especially important for clusters as they are having to deal with a large quantity of data from a wide variety of partners, which then needs to be analysed, consolidated, and packaged into easy to use formats so all these partners are working from the same datasets. This point is important, as according to the survey, in Iraq clusters and working groups are the primary source of data for respondents (37%). This lack of IM capacity is creating a number of challenges for clusters, INGOs, and NNGOs, including:

I.   Staff without the necessary skills are having to pick up IM duties which, in turn, is drawing them away from the tasks they would be better placed to do;

II.   Local NGOs struggle to report to both donors and clusters in a timely and comprehensive manner. For example, clusters said they often had difficulties with local partners reporting their 3/4W data;

III.   There is a lack of oversight during the development of data collection methodologies.

Interviewees believed that IMOs are essential to the response and put a lack of these positions down to an unwillingness by donors to explicitly fund IMO positions. Cluster and NGO interviewees stated that this is especially the case as the response winds down and moves towards a post-conflict, longer-term recovery with a lower overall humanitarian-focused budget. This was re-iterated by an INGO staff member who said, *"As the Iraq response is re-categorised as less severe, data quality and breadth reduces"*.

FIGURE 5: HOW SATISFIED ARE YOU WITH THE QUALITY OF DATA THAT IS PUBLICLY AVAILABLE FOR THE IRAQ HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE?

Mean: 3.1, n=108

6	16	39	32	1	6

Results in %

- ■ Not at all satisfied
- ■ Not very satisfied
- ■ Somewhat satisfied
- ■ Mostly satisfied
- ■ Completely satisfied
- ■ Don't want to answer
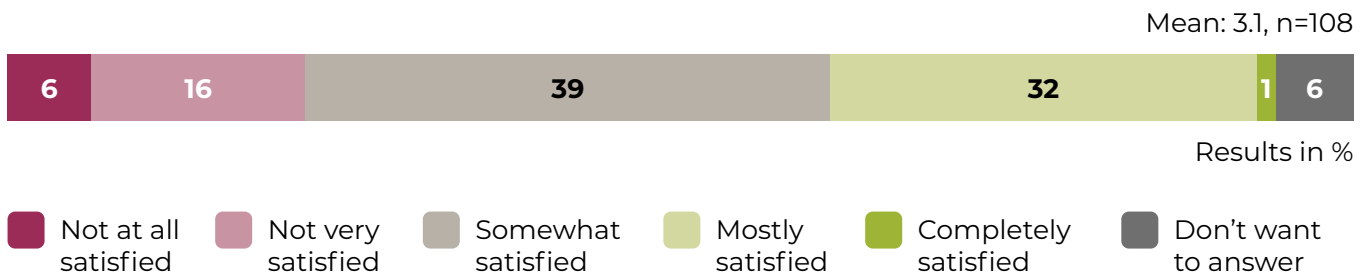
Interviewees consistently highlighted unease with data quality and, in some cases, a lack of comprehensive coverage (see figure 5). This is important as among survey respondents, all said they currently use data for evidence based-decision-making and to coordinate across clusters and organisations. If this data is of poor quality, then any response interventions could potentially be based on inaccurate or incomplete data. As such, stakeholders said there is a need to improve data collection, analysis and use to help organisations better understand and trust the data being produced and shared within the response. While work has been done to improve certain data collection coordination aspects of the response through the multi-cluster needs assessment (MCNA) and the humanitarian programme cycle (HPC), as well as the development of cross-sectoral plans such as the humanitarian response plan (HRP), stakeholders still believe that data quality issues in the response have not been sufficiently addressed.

FINDING 4 – PLATFORM USE GENERALLY REFLECTS DATA USE, BUT LIMITED TECHNICAL UNDERSTANDING AND AGREEMENT ON WHICH TO USE ARE HINDERING THEIR WIDER UPTAKE AS RESPONSE TOOLS

The research found that awareness and use tended to focus on a few specialised platforms. Across the response, 63 organisations surveyed named 26 platforms which were being used to access and/or share data. These platforms were generally used by a broad range of stakeholders, from UN agencies, to cluster coordinators, and INGOs and NNGOs. Interviewees said that the number and functionality of existing platforms was sufficient to meet their needs when developing operational and programmatic plans. Further, the use of platforms broadly reflected an organisations' role within the response and the main types of data these actors required. For "implementers" in particular, this included needs assessment, 3W and 4W, monitoring, mapping and location, and population and demographic data.

TABLE 1: **AWARENESS AND USE OF KEY PLATFORMS AMONG SURVEY RESPONDENTS (PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS)**

PLATFORM	AWARENESS	USE
IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix	77	61
ReliefWeb	74	32
HumanitarianResponse.info	69	41
REACH Resource Centre	59	33
Returns Working Group	45	10
UNHCR Operational Data Portal	43	14

Highest awareness and/or use   Lowest awareness and/or use

Due to the nature of the situation in Iraq, with large numbers of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees, IOM's DTM platform was the most cited source of information. Among the survey respondents, 77% were aware of the platform, while 61% said they used it on a frequent basis. Almost all interviewees spoken to during the KIIs, in some way, referenced the platform and highlighted their trust in the data held within it. As one stakeholder said, *"the data is fantastic and endless; you can literally get down to the number of individual returnees in different camps across the country"*. Confidence in the data is high due to the presence of 300 monitoring staff on the ground. Following the DTM, the key platforms in terms of awareness and use are ReliefWeb (74% and 32% respectively), HumanitarianResponse.info (69% and 41%), and the REACH Initiative resource centre (59% and 33%).

Outside of the DTM, stakeholders tended to use cluster assigned platforms and systems specific to their own organisational and programmatic needs. Examples of platforms mentioned include:

- Child Protection Information Management System (CPIMS+)
- Gender-Based Violence Information Management System (GBVIMS)
- WHO's Early Warning, Alert and Response System (EWARN)
- Health Management Information Systems (HMIS).
- Information Management System for Mine Action
- iMMAP Mine Action Mapping
- Joint Rapid Assessment of Markets (JRAM)
- Education Monitoring Information System (EMIS)

The Iraqi and Kurdish governments operate separate digital platforms for monitoring aid – the Iraq Development Management System (IDMS)[18] and the Kurdish Development Management System (KDMS).[19] Awareness and use for both of these platforms was very low among survey respondents. Only 9% of respondents were aware of the IDMS, while no stakeholders said they used it. In comparison, the KDMS platform had an even lower awareness rate (3%) among humanitarian organisations, with only 2% stating they had used the system previously. No interviewees mentioned either of these systems during the KIIs. A brief look at the data held within the IDMS and KDMS suggests substantial data gaps on both platforms.

While the research found that the number and functionality of platforms is sufficient to meet users' needs, a lack of agreement and guidance on which to use for uploading and sharing data was creating challenges. In Iraq, ActivityInfo[20,21] was mentioned as the main platform for uploading and sharing data. It is mainly used for monitoring and evaluation, IM, case tracking, and inter-agency coordination (i.e. 3/4W data tracking). It is especially popular in Iraq, as due to its design, it is suited for reporting activities which are geographically dispersed and implemented by multiple partners. Other key platforms that survey respondents said they uploaded and shared data through were HumanitarianResponse.info (22%), IOM DTM (17%), ReliefWeb (12%), REACH Resource Centre (12%), and UNHCR's Operational Data Portal (11%). These were followed by cluster-specific platforms. Due to the number of platforms being used for both reporting and operational purposes, interviewees, particularly those from smaller organisations, highlighted that they do not always have the staff resources/capacity to learn the technical skills needed to use all of them. As such, they were unsure of which platforms to prioritise. As there is currently no agreement at the response level on which systems to use, it is inevitably challenging to encourage stakeholders to use specific platforms.

Stakeholders across a broad range of organisations said that underlying data quality issues are inhibiting the greater use of these platforms within the response. Cluster coordinators told the research team that they face challenges with the timeliness of data they receive, such as data platforms not being updated with the latest response information (e.g. ActivityInfo and other cluster assigned platforms) and partners not submitting their data on time, only in part, or not at all. According to a majority of stakeholders spoken to during the KIIs, untimely or incomplete data risks the creation of data gaps and undermines the value and trust that users hold in it. As such, interviewees wanted to be able to access the data collection methodology to better understand its limitations and reliability, and the ability to download the raw data in accessible formats (e.g. CSV, Excel, etc.). Many data quality issues stem from a lack of organisational capacity and the technical skills of staff (see finding 5).

18   Iraq Development Management System (IDMS): https://idms.mop.gov.iq/
19   Kurdish Development Management System (KDMS): http://kdms.mopkrg.org/#/Eng/EXTERNALASSISTANCEPROJECTS/List/1_1_1_1
20   ActivityInfo was not originally included in the survey questionnaire as this was a platform discovered during the key informant interviews in-country.
21   ActivityInfo: www.activityinfo.org/about/index.html

FINDING 5 – CAPACITY BUILDING NEEDS TO FORM A CENTRAL PILLAR OF SUPPORT IN ORDER TO ADDRESS THE STRUCTURAL ISSUES INHIBITING ACCESS TO AND USE OF QUALITY DATA

Inconsistent and limited access to funding, especially for local and national NGOs, is inhibiting data management capacity. This issue was reiterated by a research agency in Iraq, who said, "Many NGOs do not have the capacities to build surveys, train enumerators, collect and analyse data". Given the nature of the context in Iraq, which can change rapidly, and a push towards development, humanitarian-focused funding is becoming limited and is often short-term. During the KIIs, local NGOs consistently said they receive only a very small proportion of response funding as it stands, whether this be directly from donors themselves or through the Iraq Humanitarian Pooled Fund (IHF). Interviewees from local NGOs put this down to the fact that most of the funding they receive is mainly project-based as a sub-contractor for an INGO or UN agency, which often does not sufficiently support core costs. Further, local organisations find it hard to meet and satisfy the increasingly strict criteria for these funding avenues. As such, many local organisations are classed as high risk and therefore are only able to access limited funding which, again, often does not include core costs for capacity building. This essentially means that as an organisation they cannot invest in and development their data management capacity. As a result, interviewees from local NGOs highlighted a number of challenges they face collecting, processing, analysing, and sharing data in a comprehensive and timely manner (internally and externally), including:

I.   A lack of dedicated funding to allocate to information management officer (IMO) positions;

II.   Unable to invest in upskilling staff on data management processes and data collection techniques (e.g. enumerator training, etc.);

III.   A lack of staff with specialised skills, such as the ability to understand open ended survey questions, how to collect data from vulnerable communities, how to ask sensitive questions in an understanding manner, and how to analyse survey data after collection;

IV.   Insufficient staff capacity/time to update internal policies on sensitive data and sharing data;

V.   Lack of staff resources to allocate to both reporting response activities to clusters and reporting on project activities for donors;

VI.   A lack of visibility on data collection methodologies combined with a lack of funding means that local NGOs do have the necessary resources to dedicate to designing their own rigorous data collection methodology.

Local organisations in Iraq are often used to collect data directly from the field and beneficiaries due to language skills and their ability to access areas of the country which INGOs and the UN struggle to, so this will have a knock-on effect in terms of data quality across the response. It is essential, therefore, that more funds are channelled into helping local organisations overcome structural barriers and develop their data management and use capacity.

> **Most donors say they won't fund needs assessments. The pooled funds do not include funding for needs assessments**
>
> **INGO staff member**

A number of implementers, mainly local actors and INGOs, shared their concern that insufficient funding for needs assessments is resulting in less reliable data on which to design project activities and interventions. During the in-country KIIs, it became clear from interviewees that donors often do not fund needs assessments directly. As one programme manager in Iraq said, *"within the humanitarian sector, they [donors] are unwilling to fund assessments which give you the data you need."* While larger INGOs are often able to fund their own needs assessments, smaller organisations are having to be conservative with the already limited resources they have to dedicate. Specifically, it means that there will not be the needed organisational resources, in terms of staff time and technical ability, to fully invest in and develop a comprehensive and rigorous methodology and/or adequate training of data collectors and enumerators on the ground for needs assessments. Additionally, as one INGO staff member in Iraq specifically stated, *"The quality and breadth of data reduces as funding reduces."* According to the online survey, needs assessment data is both the most frequently used type of data (73% of respondents) and the most frequently needed type of data in Iraq (75%), which further highlights the importance of having accurate data.

> ## There is a lack of local capacity to collect high quality information and to analyse data
>
> ### INGO staff member

During the KIIs, the research team found that INGOs and UN agencies consistently believe local NGOs as having insufficient data use capacity. While it is true that capacity challenges (organisational and technical) have a disproportionate impact on local NGOs in Iraq, local responders themselves highlighted that there is an unwillingness by donors, UN agencies, and INGOs to prioritise training around data use in their local partners. This feeling among local actors was supported by a cluster coordinator who said *"Capacity building of locals is often not prioritised in practice."* Capacity strengthening in many cases could come in the form of mentoring, which does not necessarily require the same levels of funding as trainings (e.g. INGO/UN staff could design data collection methodologies together with local actors, collect data jointly and analyse it together).

However, as the response winds down, data capacity training is being further de-prioritised. Further, local NGOs interviewed also believed that their strengths in bringing local knowledge, language skills, and access that INGOs and UN agencies do not have were being ignored. Specifically, they stated that their local knowledge was being neglected by bigger agencies/organisations.

Conclusion

The response in Iraq has been rather successful in what it has accomplished in terms of data management compared to other similar crisis contexts, but the findings presented in this research brief highlight a number of issues which still need addressing to further improve data use. Ineffective data sharing and inconsistent guidance around data sensitivity risk creating data gaps and hindering access to information that organisations in the response need to make evidence-based decisions. A lack of funding explicitly for information management officers and needs assessments risks the collection of poor quality data on which the response is built. This is especially the case as development activities take a greater precedent. Further practical steps, such as sharing data collection methodologies or increasing funding for local NGOs would help address issues around capacity and resource gaps at the field level, which in their current form, are acting as barriers to improving data quality and information exchange. While this research brief outlines the key challenges facing actors on the ground with regards to data, two cross-cutting issues first need to be addressed: engagement and coordination. Engagement with data users at the local level is necessary to understand how these local users perceive certain aspects of data management, such as what constitutes a definition of quality data within the response. This reflects an overarching issue in this research brief around data quality. While there are agreed components of quality data, this brief has not produced a definitive definition because the research illustrates the extent to which quality is largely a local construct and requires engagement and feedback loops to understand and address.

Many of the issues outlined in this research brief could potentially be addressed through an inclusive data coordination entity, which would play an advisory role and have the capability to convene organisations across the response to find solutions and problem-solve wider issues around data. This could include defining data quality as it relates to the response, providing IMO surge capacity to organisations that lack technical data staff, and developing and agreeing data sharing protocols between local and international actors. However, in order to address these issues effectively, it is essential to engage with both data producers and data users at the local level to understand what their information needs are and to help them address any challenges they face in accessing and using said information. A number of interviewees said that the types of discussions and questions the research team were having with them were just not taking place in the Iraq response. As such, UN agencies, donors and INGOs should actively seek to engage with their local partners to discern their data capacity limitations and to see if the data available to them is useful with regards to implementing projects directly to beneficiaries.