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## International NGOs in Iraq: actors or witnesses in the evolution of the iraqi NGO sector?

Cécile Génot

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**Université Pierre Mendès France**

Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Grenoble

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**International NGOs in Iraq:  
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Master spécialisé « Organisation internationale, OIG, ONG »

Sous la direction de M. Jean-Paul Burdy

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And Muriel, my sister, who made this whole adventure possible.

## Acronyms' List

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CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
CoM	Iraqi Council of Ministries
CoR	Iraqi Council of Representatives
CPA	Coalition Provisional Authority
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
DFI	Development Fund for Iraq
DoD	US Department of Defense
EU	European Union
ICNL	International Center for Not-for-Profit Law
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDPs	Internally Displaced People
IOs	International Organisations
INGOs	International Non-Governmental Organisations
IRCS	Iraqi Red Crescent Society
IRRF	Iraq Relief and Reconstruction Fund
ISF	Iraqi Security Forces
KRG	Kurdistan Regional Government
LNGOs	Local Non-Governmental Organisations
MDM	Médecins du Monde
NCCI	NGO Coordination Committee for Iraq
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
PAO	People Aid Organisation
SIGIR	Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNOPS	United Nations Office for Project Services
USAID	US Agency for International Development

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# Introduction

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"*We will begin to responsibly leave Iraq to its people*". With these words, Barack Obama outlined his vision for Iraq during his inaugural address on January 20, 2009<sup>1</sup>.

"*Leaving Iraq*" is indeed what most American forces are currently doing. Of 144,000 troops two years ago, only 50,000 will stay in the country by the end of August, 2010. In this way, "[...] *America's combat mission in Iraq would end,*"<sup>2</sup> as President Obama recently reaffirmed in a speech to disabled American veterans in Atlanta. The remaining brigades will be trainers for the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) and are also supposed to withdraw by the end of 2011. But disengagement from Iraq is not only an American military strategy. In the aid field, donors, including states and international organisations (IOs), are presently decreasing their financial support for the reconstruction and development of Iraq. American withdrawal from Iraq is also a means for the Obama administration of refocusing its attention towards Afghanistan. Similarly, Iraq is slipping lower in the priorities of previous donors in favour of other countries. These tendencies indicate that the role and position of international actors in Iraq are in a redefining process. Even though Western states seem to be less interested in Iraq, they cannot afford—politically or economically—to abandon the country in which Iran and other Middle Eastern states have great potential influence. How will they retain their influence and act in Iraq in the future?

"*Responsibly leaving Iraq*" is also a controversial notion that is being brought into question in 2010. One of the displayed objectives of the American withdrawal is to give Iraq its full autonomy in the military field. However, the timeframe in which the American troops draw down and withdrawal is constrained does not take changing ground realities into account. Political progress is stunted by the enduring national political impasse in Iraq; Barack Obama originally counted on a new Iraqi government being in place before draw down. Yet as the political process further stalled, the departure date for American troops did not accordingly change. Instead, it followed the planned schedule without reappraisal; meanwhile, numerous Iraqi and American officials cried out that, "*It is too soon for Iraq*". A similar phenomenon can be observed in the international donors' sphere. Focusing on the improvement of the security situation and on Iraq's potential resources, they remain blind to the remaining humanitarian gaps which are still a considerable daily burden for most Iraqi

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<sup>1</sup> Obama Barack, *Inaugural Address*, White House website, [http://www.whitehouse.gov/the\\_press\\_office/President\\_Barack\\_Obamas\\_Inaugural\\_Address/](http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/President_Barack_Obamas_Inaugural_Address/) (page consulted on August 16, 2010)

<sup>2</sup> Obama Barack, *Remarks by the President at Disabled Veterans of America Conference in Atlanta, Georgia*, White House website, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-disabled-veterans-america-conference-atlanta-georgia> (page consulted on August 16, 2010)

people. Iraq is therefore forced, rather than genuinely encouraged, to become more autonomous and “sovereign.” But does Iraq have the capacities to do so?

While “*Leave Iraq to its people*” may appear as a generous thought at first glance, the meaning and the feasibility of this idea are not lucid. Democracy in Iraq is less than effective, as witnessed with the frozen process of setting up a new government. Iraqi people are more and more disillusioned about their politicians. Consequently, leaving Iraq to the current decision makers is not necessarily the same as leaving Iraq to its people. Civil society is supposed to counter-balance this inefficiency or abuse of power of the state, as a lot of Western actors have been emphasizing from the beginning of the American intervention. But does this role correspond to what civil society actually is in Iraq?

Regarding all this, Iraq is certainly entering a transition phase that will lead to uncertain results, and to the rise and fall of different actors. The Iraqi NGO sector has been keeping the hopes and expectations of the international community, as well as of the Iraqi people alive. As part of Iraqi civil society, Iraqi non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have been promoted by the international community as agents of democratization, human rights defenders and promoters, and as defense against autocratic drifting of the state. These expectations, based on an attempt to transpose a concept of civil society build in the West to Arab societies, might have not been suitable for the Iraqi context. Nevertheless, an Iraqi civil society and an Iraqi NGO sector emerged in Iraq after 2003. From that time, a mushrooming of diverse structures, conducting a wide range of activities, can be observed.

Most of the structures making up what is called the Iraqi NGO sector do not refer to themselves as ‘NGOs.’ They are, in most cases, designated as ‘associations,’ ‘leagues,’ ‘committees,’ or ‘societies.’<sup>3</sup> Their common characteristic is that they provide services to the population but these services can be of various types: health, education, sport, relief, research, citizen and human rights, women consultancy, etc. Among the organisations forming civil society, some political scientists distinguish NGOs from political parties and organisations - which are competing for political power - and from trade unions or professional associations - which seek to articulate and defend the specific interests of a specific sector of the population<sup>4</sup>. However, in this field, rigid classifications cannot apply, given the changing character of civil society and its interdependences. The composition of the Iraqi NGO sector is an accurate example of this ambiguity and diversity. Most Iraqi NGOs are small structures of two or three people, operating at a very local level; these groups are often called grass-roots organisations or community-based organisations. A small proportion

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<sup>3</sup> Carle Alexandre, Chkam Hakim, *Humanitarian action in the new security environment: policy and operational implications in Iraq*, Humanitarian Policy Group Background Paper, September 2006, p. 3

<sup>4</sup> Hilal Jamil, *Civil Society in Palestine: a Literature Review*, Research Papers for the Regional Conference on Research on Civil Society Organisations: Status and Prospects, January 2010, p. 15

of Iraqi NGOs has an adequate size to be effective and active at a national level. Links with political, religious, and/or armed groups are common and numerous structures are also business-oriented or empty shells.

Despite the oftentimes confusing impression that emerges from the description of the Iraqi NGO sector, one does not fail to notice that some of its components have been playing and are currently playing a role in the relief and reconstruction of Iraq. More in-depth observations show a strengthening and a progress of some Iraqi NGOs towards more professionalism, as well as more involvement in the building of an autonomous and stable Iraq. To which extent are these evolutions linked to American interference and more general Western involvement in the country for the past seven years? Answering this question could help Western actors find ways to effectively and '*responsibly leave Iraq to its people*,' thereby defining their future role in this country.

International NGOs (INGOs) are also a group among the international actors that have been overwhelmingly present in Iraq since 2003. As a consequence, they are caught in similar questioning about their future place and strategy in Iraq as Western states, IOs or private foreign companies. But they also currently face specific challenges, given their nature, mission and principles. INGOs, as well as all of the stakeholders involved in the recovery and development of Iraq, are entering a transition phase in this country.

The INGOs<sup>5</sup> studied here are mostly European and American due to easier access. Moreover, it seems that other foreign NGOs, especially from the Muslim world, are confronted by different issues and driven by other factors. About ten Western NGOs were operating in the country under Saddam Hussein's regime. Twenty INGOs were also active in the Kurdistan Regional Government, autonomous from the Iraqi state and under international protection since 1991. Hundreds more arrived in the country as soon as 'mission accomplished' was declared by George W. Bush at the beginning of May 2003. Due to a huge deterioration of security conditions throughout the entire country, which specifically attacked international actors and INGOs in some instances, most INGOs withdrew their expatriate staff from Iraq by the end of 2004. INGOs management teams therefore resettled in neighboring countries, such as Jordan. The operational aspects of their projects were conducted by their Iraqi staff, who remained in the field, or by partner organisations, among which there are numerous Iraqi NGOs.

Even though INGOs were mostly engaged in emergency and short-term responses in the Iraqi context, the changing environment is forcing them to reflect on their long-term

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<sup>5</sup> Activities conducted by the ICRC in Iraq are also studied here, even though the ICRC cannot be considered as an INGO strictly speaking. The ICRC is a neutral, impartial and independent organisation with a mandate to protect and assist victims of armed conflicts, conferred by States through the Geneva Conventions. Because of its specific mandate and legal status it is neither an intergovernmental agency nor a non-governmental organisation.

presence in Iraq. The obvious disengagement of Western states from the Iraqi field, in terms of military and financial contributions, is threatening the sustainability and long-term potential of humanitarian and development projects, as well as numerous INGOs' abilities to continue their operations in Iraq. A lot of American NGOs, close to American governmental agencies, are likely to desert Iraq, in accordance with the variations of the Obama administration's agenda. Other INGOs, mostly European, claim their independence but are nevertheless subjected to the choices of donors, which are usually states or inter-governmental organisations. INGOs must decide if they want to stay in Iraq and if so, for what purposes. They will also have to rethink how they maintain operations in an environment where donations and funding are dropping and development projects are becoming more useful than emergency ones.

INGOs and Iraqi NGOs are two sets of actors which have been working together on humanitarian relief and reconstruction activities in Iraq. Acting in 'remote management' since the end of 2004, INGOs had to find operators on the ground to implement their projects. Iraqi NGOs were often chosen to play this role. This cooperation between the highly structured INGOs, which generally have at least 20 or 30 years of experience in various contexts, and the newly created, often nebulously operationalized Iraqi NGOs could have been an opportunity for learning and development, particularly on the Iraqi side. The support and capacity-building of local NGOs (LNGOs) could also be a means for INGOs to maintain activities in Iraq while preparing for their final departure; in this way, INGOs could train local humanitarian and development actors who could then replace them.

Did INGOs effectively contribute to the building of the Iraqi NGO sector? Were their actions and involvement factors that significantly affected the evolution of Iraqi NGOs? Could they be key intermediaries in the realization of the international community plan to '*responsibly leaving Iraq to its people*'? In order to find answers to these questions, it is important to examine in parallel the different steps in the development of the Iraqi NGO sector and the various intervention modalities of INGOs in Iraq, which have varied across the time. The idea is to define what may be the INGOs' contributions to the growth and development of Iraqi NGOs, and if these contributions were voluntary. Did INGOs really choose to work with Iraqi NGOs as part of a long-term strategy to strengthen the Iraqi civil society, or were they forced to set up these partnerships by the uniquely constrained circumstances? What was the position of INGOs intervening in the Iraqi NGO sector post-2003 invasion: actors or witnesses? Has this changed over time? Will this position change in the future?

Questions about the influence of INGOs on the development of local NGOs and on the building of an Iraqi civil society emerged from the observations and activities of the NGO Coordination Committee for Iraq (NCCI). The NCCI is an NGO exchange platform. Created in 2003, the NCCI is comprised of about 40 INGOs and 20 Iraqi NGOs today. It has offices in Amman and in Baghdad. These offices serve as central locations for NGOs working in/for Iraq to meet in order to find solutions to the challenges of the Iraqi humanitarian field. Discussions among staff members of NGOs and other structures were the starting point of reflection for this study. Most recently, these discussions have revealed the ways in which INGOs have become more involved in capacity-building projects in Iraq, including improving LNGOs' capabilities and structures. Some recent meetings reflect humanitarian workers' concerns about the reduced funding for humanitarian aid in Iraq. Finally, another common observation among the NCCI network is the tendency of INGOs to progressively resettle their headquarters in Iraq since the late 2003-2004 exit. Change is in the air.

Research work for this study was first based on NGOs literature, humanitarian action and the Iraqi context. This helped draw guidelines for further research and provided a theoretical background to the study. Publications such as the journal *Humanitaire* of the French NGO Médecins du Monde (MDM), as well as policy briefs from the Humanitarian Policy Group, were crucial contributions. Four interviews, each lasting more than one hour, with key individuals actively working in the Iraqi humanitarian field gave more precise and practical insight into the subject. One interview was carried out with Hashim Al-Assaf, the Iraqi Coordinator of NCCI; he has the developed experience of working with both INGOs and Iraqi NGOs in Iraq since 2003. One interview was conducted with a manager from the Iraqi Mission of Médecins du Monde<sup>6</sup>. Another interview was conducted with Caroline Douilliez-Sabouba, Project Coordinator at the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)<sup>7</sup>. Finally, an INGOs Iraqi Advisor was consulted<sup>8</sup>. Iraqi NGOs that have significant experience cooperating with INGOs were contacted through the NCCI team in Baghdad. Eight of them from various locations and sectors answered a questionnaire about their specific collaboration and work with INGOs, their general perceptions of INGOs, and their opinions on the ways INGOs could better help Iraqi NGOs. In addition to this data, information were obtained through e-mail communication with an American NGO active in Iraq, participation to NCCI meetings and informal exchanges with different members of the humanitarian sphere in Iraq.

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<sup>6</sup> Referred to as Anne Gilles - All the names of the people interviewed have been modified in order to protect their anonymity, except for Hashim Al-Assaf and Caroline Douilliez-Sabouba

<sup>7</sup> The opinions expressed by Caroline Douilliez-Sabouba are her own and do not necessarily reflect the position of the ICRC

<sup>8</sup> Referred to as Omar Maktab

A synthesis of these different contributions is showing a transformation of the relationship between INGOs and Iraqi NGOs since 2003. This justifies the quasi-chronological structure of this study, even though some phenomena cannot be precisely placed in time and are often juxtaposed. The main time period of this study begins with the 2003 invasion until the present, but the Ba'ath regime period is revisited and analyzed in certain instances, when it is necessary to understand particular trends and developments post-2003 invasion. This study also includes predictions about the future of Iraq, based on current and past trends.

Two main elements underlie the INGOs' evolving position towards the Iraqi NGO sector: changes in Iraq's security conditions and in the level of funding available for humanitarian aid. The worsening security environment for INGOs caused many of them to establish partnerships with Iraqi NGOs in late 2003-2004, during a period in which billions of dollars of funding was pouring into Iraq. Improvements in the security situation and the donors' phase-out are now pushing INGOs to reconsider their cooperation with LNGOs, which may result in a more equal, balanced relationship. What is the influence of the Iraqi security situation on INGOs strategies? Does it force INGOs to cooperate with LNGOs? How the decreasing of donors' funding is encouraging LNGOs and INGOs to reconsider their collaboration today?

Therefore, the first part of this study concentrates on elements of the past which are shaping present and future relations between INGOs and Iraqi NGOs. In the first years of their presence in Iraq, INGOs strategies were often shaped and constrained by the formidable Iraqi security challenges. In leaving Iraq, INGOs involuntarily contributed to the emergence of the Iraqi NGO sector. In establishing partnerships with LNGOs, they deliberately fostered the strengthening of this sector in order to better pursue their goals in Iraq. How was Iraq's insecure environment a decisive factor in shaping the INGOs position towards supporting a booming Iraqi NGO sector? The second part of this study examines what is currently happening for INGOs and Iraqi NGOs, in a transitional phase for Iraq from emergency relief to recovery and development work. In the past months, INGOs have carefully considered adopting new operational approaches in Iraq, which could meet the needs and demands of Iraqi NGOs for more capacity-building and defined positioning towards the state and the beneficiary communities. What will be INGOs choices as they are now in a position to decide if they want to actively support and influence an emerging Iraqi civil society? Are they now reflecting on ways to leave sustainable results behind once they depart Iraq?

**Part I. IRAQ'S INSECURE ENVIRONMENT:  
INGOs CHANGING STRATEGIES TOWARDS AN  
EMERGING IRAQI NGO SECTOR**

Post-2003 Iraq has presented unexpectedly complex challenges for INGOs regarding security conditions. In no previous conflict have humanitarian workers and agencies been so targeted in attacks, kidnappings and assassinations. It was an entirely unexpected, and a historical first, when the majority of relief organisations operating in Iraq were forced to leave just a few months after their arrival in March 2003. By the end of 2004, violence in Iraq resulted in INGOs resettling long-term to neighboring countries, as they were unable to return and operate directly in Iraq. To continue their projects and address these obstacles, INGOs had to rethink their operational strategies. This led to the adoption of 'remote' approaches, in which the 'burden of implementing responses has fallen to Iraqi staff and organisations.'<sup>9</sup> It is on this basis and in this context that the first partnerships between INGOs and local Iraqi NGOs were established. From the beginning, the reliance of INGOs on local partners was required by the Iraqi security situation. Iraqi NGOs were among the few actors that always kept an access to the Iraqi population, hence the necessity and the relevance for INGOs to work with them.

The emergence of an Iraqi NGO sector occurred in parallel with the quick arrival and withdrawal of major INGOs. NGOs were almost absent in Iraqi society before the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime, except for in the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), which has been autonomous since the end of 1991. After 2003, thousands and thousands of organisations with widely different purposes and activities were created. Even if the departure of INGOs from Iraq did not prompt this boom alone, it surely gave local Iraqi NGOs a space to develop. Afterwards, cooperation with INGOs has been a reality only for a small proportion of Iraqi NGOs. For them, INGOs have been a source of funding and projects. During the process, they strengthened their operational capacities, allowing them to develop into genuine programme implementation organisations.

INGOs were more passive witnesses than direct participants in the first phase of the emergence of the Iraqi NGO sector. Their contributions to Iraqi NGOs' development were largely an involuntary result of their coping strategies with security issues, i.e. their withdrawal from Iraq. Nevertheless, they relied on the Iraqi NGO sector to pursue their activities in Iraq. The main objective for INGOs was not the development of this sector. Yet the simple fact of working together had an impact on Iraqi organisations. During the second phase of the emergence of the Iraqi NGO sector, INGOs therefore actively contributed to the strengthening of Iraqi NGOs implementation capacities, even if this capacity-building was generally a consequence of the constraints that were inherent in the poor Iraqi security situation.

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<sup>9</sup> Humanitarian Policy Group (HPG), *Humanitarian action in Iraq: putting the pieces together*, HPG Policy Brief, n°30, March 2008, p. 3



## Chapter I. Multiple Factors for the Iraqi NGO Sector Boom after 2003

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In 2006, the NGOs Directorate of Iraq reported that 10,000 NGOs were registered or awaiting registration confirmation<sup>10</sup>. This figure must be compared to the situation pre-2003, which can only be understood through testimonies; there are no official records about civil society organisations under Saddam Hussein regime. As the Iraqi coordinator of NCCI explained, “before 2003, everybody knows and many studies and papers are written on this, we didn’t have an NGO sector. We had a few organisations; some of them were officially registered and under different names, and some of them were not registered”<sup>11</sup>. Thus, from 2003, the number of Iraqi NGOs has boomed. What is propelling this phenomenon, and how can it be explained?

Various disciplines, such as political science and economics, have attempted to determine the essential factors for the development of civil societies in general. As NGOs are now considered an important part of civil society in Iraq, these theories could help explain the civil society boom in Iraq post-2003 invasion. Analysts are focusing either on macro-level forces, which can be social, economic or political and apply over long time periods, or on meso-level of analysis, which focuses on shorter time periods and has more narrowly defined actors<sup>12</sup>.

In the case of Iraq, interwoven factors lie at the origin of this national NGO sector boom. This makes it impractical to apply one single scientific hypothesis, even if some elements of the political and economic theories are relevant. The huge humanitarian needs of the Iraqi population after 2003 inspired numerous local initiatives to develop and meet these challenges, especially since the state and international actors were largely absent in this respect. The money injected in Iraq from 2003 and the support of the international community to the building of an active civil society have also been powerful incentives for the growth of National NGOs. Last but not least, NGOs have been used as a platform to exert more influence and power for some specific groups in Iraq.

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<sup>10</sup> Mofarah Kasra, *Confusion humanitaire en Irak*, Humanitaire n°20, automne/hiver 2008, p.40

<sup>11</sup> Interview with Hashim Al-Assaf, the NCCI Iraqi Coordinator in June 2010

<sup>12</sup> Brown David L., Kalegaonkar Archana, *Support Organizations and the Evolution of the NGO Sector*, Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly, 2002, p.232

## Section I. A Response to the Iraqi Population's Unmet Needs amidst in a Power Vacuum

In 2003, deprived and exhausted after 24 years of Saddam Hussein's dictatorship, the Iran-Iraq war, the Gulf war and 13 years of sanctions imposed by the United Nations (UN), Iraq was subjected to a 'preventive' war led by the American army. This invasion dismantled the Iraqi state and gradually plunged the country into chaos and ethnic conflict. The huge needs of the Iraqi population, some of which were present prior to the invasion, and some of which resulted from the international military intervention, could no longer be answered by the state. Because of poor security conditions, international relief organisations were not able to take over. This context of actors' vacuum—as INGOs had minimal ground presence in Iraq and the Iraqi state could be qualified as failed—consequently led to the development of thousands of small community-based initiatives and a few hundred structured organisations emerged in order to help Iraqi people.

### 1. Collapse of the Iraqi State

Most definitions of civil society position it towards the state, in relation or in opposition to it. Political scientist and sociologist Larry Diamond characterizes civil society as 'an intermediary entity standing between the private sphere and the state'<sup>13</sup>. This connection extends to the evolution of both entities: the '*changing nature of a non-profit sector [that] is linked to changing [...] state forces*'<sup>14</sup>. Significant civil society evolution is partially a response to the state and a change in its relationship with and power over its citizens. The autocratic nature of the Iraqi state under Saddam Hussein, and the Iraqi state's sudden drop to failed state status after 2003, may explain the transformation of a virtually non-existent Iraqi civil society to a diverse and wildly mushrooming Iraqi NGO and civil society sector.

In his article Civil Society in the Arab Region, Ziad Abdel Samad describes the obstacles that a state may impose to prevent the growth of civil society organisations (CSOs): lack of democracy, inadequate legal framework, and extreme centralization of the regime<sup>15</sup>. These features were certainly characteristic of the Iraqi state under Ba'ath party rule. The control of the ruling elites over the rest of Iraqi society was very tight, leaving no space for intermediary organisations. Committed to state socialism, the regime was

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<sup>13</sup> Diamond Larry, 'Rethinking Civil Society. Toward Democratic Consolidation,' in *Journal of Democracy* 5/3 (July 1994), p.5 quoted by Salam Nawaf, *Civil Society in the Arab World, The Historical and Political Dimensions*, Occasional Publications 3, Islamic Legal Studies Program, Harvard Law School, October 2002, p.3

<sup>14</sup> Samad Ziad Abdel, *Civil Society in the Arab Region: Its Necessary Role and the Obstacles to Fulfillment*, *The International Journal of Non-for-Profit Law*, vol. 9, n°2, April 2007, p.7

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

supposed to provide basic services to the entire Iraqi population: '*We had a heritage of the government [as the] responsible to deliver all kind of services*'<sup>16</sup>. Hence, charity and service-oriented NGOs were unnecessary. There was also no legal framework regarding NGOs under Saddam Hussein. Consequently, the only NGOs present in Iraq before 2003 were state-controlled. This was the case with the Woman's Union and the Iraqi Red Crescent Society, the latest being almost a parallel structure of the Ministry of Health<sup>17</sup>.

A major exception to these realities was the particular situation in the KRG, which was under international protection and autonomous from the Iraqi central government beginning in 1991. Numerous associations were created in the area during the 1990s. Some major organisations were linked to important Kurdish families, a tendency which can be observed in the Arabic world in general. For example, the current Iraqi first lady, Hero Talabani, created her association at the end of the 1990s<sup>18</sup>. There is also the case of the Iraqi Amal Association, founded in 1992, which operated in Kurdistan until 2003 when its leaders decided to extend their targeted beneficiaries in order to assist populations suffering in Baghdad as well<sup>19</sup>.

According to Philippe Droz-Vincent, the development of civil societies in the Middle East is a matter of survival and necessity, as the state is increasingly abandoning numerous sectors in social protection and education in particular<sup>20</sup>. Therefore, the role of local NGOs in a society could grow in parallel with the decreasing capacities of its state to provide basic services and assure social justice. The inability to provide public services is a characteristic of failed states. Accordingly, one could hypothesize that failed states are a favorable ground for the blossoming of an extensive civil society.

The Iraqi state imploded in 2003 and literally ceased to exist as the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) was put in charge of administering the country. The sectarian war from 2005 to 2007 prevented the new, fledgling Iraqi state--established by the elections and the adoption of a Constitution in 2005—from fulfilling its role. From 2005 until the present, Iraq has remained in the top ten of the World's Failed States Index according to the annual lists published by the Fund for Peace and Foreign Policy magazine<sup>21</sup>. Various organisations and structures emerged to fill the space left vacant by the state and political actors during this period. NGOs established themselves as service delivers and '*tried their*

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<sup>16</sup> Interview with Hashim Al-Assaf

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Omar Maktab, an INGOs Iraqi Advisor in June 2010

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Anne Gilles, a manager from the Iraqi Mission of Médecins du Monde in July 2010

<sup>19</sup> Jamal Al-Jawahiri, interview by Layla Al-Zubaidi and Doreen Khoury, 'Iraqi Civil Society at the Crossroads – An Interview with Activist Jamal Al-Jawahiri', Heinrich Böll Stiftung Middle East, 2009

<sup>20</sup> Droz-Vincent Philippe, *Où sont donc les « sociétés civiles » au Moyen-Orient ?*, Humanitaire n°20, automne/hiver 2008, p.57-63

<sup>21</sup> Wikipedia contributors, "Failed state," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, [http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Failed\\_state&oldid=379115631](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Failed_state&oldid=379115631) (accessed August 18, 2010)

*best to fill the gap in services that should have been provided by the government*<sup>22</sup>. A shift took place in Iraqi society, from a complete and forced reliance on the state to the building of structures likely to assume similar functions of the state in some areas. It seems that Iraqi people are vacillating between love and hate towards the notion of State: they can expect everything from it, then reject it and prefer decentralization and privatization.

With the disappearance of the state in 2003 came a time of huge freedom, during which everything seemed possible, hence, an anarchic boom of NGOs, appellation covering all types of structures. With no law on NGOs in 2003, as under Saddam Hussein, and the control capacity of the regime over associations and groupings smashed into pieces, structures could emerge without any preconditions. *'There was no legal framework – it was very chaotic. Nothing remained after the war'*<sup>23</sup>. The fall of the Ba'ath regime resulted in more freedom for the groups that were formerly repressed by it, and these groups tended to gather in NGOs. For example, in the South of the country, a lot of jails opened and released former detainees in 2003. Many detainees formed an association at this time. In 2003, MDM met former prisoners in political parties' buildings. The released prisoners organized themselves in structures, which would later be recognized for their specialization in the defense of human rights<sup>24</sup>. By a similar process, NGOs linked to religious and political groups that were banned under Saddam Hussein also emerged.

The state's weakness endures in Iraq. The present political stalemate, which has endured for more than five months since the March 2010 parliamentary elections, further demonstrates the poor capacity of the Iraqi state. Iraqi NGOs can still benefit from this political vacuum by establishing themselves as relevant actors to define Iraq's future.

## **2. Withdrawal of International Humanitarian Agencies**

A few weeks after the coalition forces reached Baghdad on April 9<sup>th</sup>, 2003, hundreds of INGOs began their relief activities in Iraq<sup>25</sup>. For example, the NCCI was created in April 2003 to bring together about 50 INGOs in the autumn of 2003. This massive arrival, in conjunction with the international military intervention, caused many Iraqi people to associate INGOs with international military actors. Misperceptions of international entities were further ingrained by memories of the economic sanctions which took a heavy toll on the Iraqi population from 1990 to 2003<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> Interview with Hashim Al-Assaf

<sup>23</sup> Jamal Al-Jawahiri, op. cit.

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Anne Gilles

<sup>25</sup> Mofarah K., op. cit.

<sup>26</sup> Interview with Omar Maktab

Since the beginning of the invasion, this assimilation between humanitarian and military actors has been cultivated by the American authorities. Not only did the coalition troops engage themselves in 'humanitarian' projects, but they were willing to take INGOs on board as structures to manage the post-conflict phase. Many INGOs became prisoners of the American will of subordination and control<sup>27</sup>.

To ensure their security, all INGOs were also put in contact with military personnel or diplomats related to the coalition forces. These contacts could be quite close, depending on the particular INGO. The majority of the INGOs tried to preserve its independence and adopted a position of pacifistic coexistence with the CPA. But some INGOs, mostly American, chose to be integrated with the CPA to varying extents. Some American INGOs worked directly with the private companies that were selected by the CPA to implement reconstruction and relief programs. These INGOs often used military escorts in order to conduct their activities and developed personal relationships--outside of the professional framework--with some CPA members<sup>28</sup>.

These various links and associations between INGOs and the coalition forces blurred their respective roles, especially in the eyes of the Iraqi population. In turn, this damaged the Iraqi public's general perceptions of INGOs, jeopardizing their legitimacy and impartiality. This also made INGOs seem as appropriate targets for some armed groups fighting against the foreign occupation of Iraq.

On August 19, 2003, the UN headquarters in Baghdad were seriously damaged in a bombing that claimed the lives of 22 individuals, including UN Special Representative in Iraq, Sérgio Vieira de Mello. One month later, a second attack resulted in the departure of the 600 UN staff members who had been present in Iraq. At the end of October 2003, the ICRC building was also an attack target, leaving 18 people dead. As a result of these three dramatic events, the ICRC and many other relief organisations scaled down their operations in Iraq and withdrew most of their expatriate staff. The phasing out of the ICRC was a clear indicator of the gravity of the situation, as the ICRC had previously operated in Iraq for 20 years with the acceptance of the regime and with a big network in the field<sup>29</sup>.

In September 2004, the Italian aid workers Simona Torretta and Simona Pari from *Un ponte per* were kidnapped and later released. In October and November of 2004, Margaret Hassan, working for CARE International in Iraq since 1991, was kidnapped and killed. These attacks deeply shocked the humanitarian community, as well as the international community

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<sup>27</sup> Salignon Pierre, *Guerre en Irak : les représentations humanitaires en question*, Humanitaire n°8, Automne 2003, p. 54

<sup>28</sup> Cantier-Aristide Elodie, *Les « liaisons dangereuses » de l'Autorité occupante et des ONG*, Humanitaire n°8, Automne 2003, p.82-83

<sup>29</sup> Interview with Anne Gilles

and the Iraqi population. Consequently, between the summer and the autumn of 2004, all INGOs closed their offices in Iraq: *'It has been a terrible trauma in 2004. It was the first time that NGOs were leaving a country in so great numbers. They all left in a few weeks'*<sup>30</sup>.

This year-long presence of INGOs in Iraq, followed by a massive withdrawal, had direct and indirect consequences on the emerging Iraqi NGO sector. Many Iraqis had worked for the UN agencies or the INGOs in 2003-2004<sup>31</sup>. Some had even been employees of these structures during the 1990s<sup>32</sup> in Iraq or as expatriates--many of whom were opponents of Saddam Hussein's regime and only returned to Iraq after 2003. Therefore, they knew the functioning of such organisations and the type of activities that they were conducting. They had competencies in the humanitarian field, and they sometimes chose to use them for the benefit of a local NGO that they would create themselves. Mercy Hands, a health-oriented Iraqi NGO, was established by former staff members of the French NGO *Première Urgence*. The director of an Iraqi NGO was working previously for MDM<sup>33</sup>. INGOs work in Iraq in 2003-2004 therefore inspired many Iraqis who were affiliated with them, even if an INGO did not, strictly speaking, directly create an LNGO.

The withdrawal of INGOs and UN agencies occurred as the Iraqi state weakened, leaving huge gaps in service and relief provisions. A lot of initiatives emerged as a means to cope with this situation, and as a means of survival. Once again, Iraqi LNGOs occupied a space that was left vacant by other actors, in this case the INGOs. The large, unprecedented scale of INGO departure from Iraq presented an opportunity for Iraqi structures to emerge, and this emergence was mostly a result of necessity. By leaving Iraq, INGOs made an involuntary and indirect contribution to the birth of the Iraqi NGO sector. INGOs' absence from the Iraqi field became more crucial for the development of the Iraqi LNGOs as abundant international funds were provided to finance reconstruction projects in Iraq post-invasion.

## **Section II. An Opportunity to Benefit from Generous International Funding for Iraqi Reconstruction**

The reconstruction of Iraq has been one of the largest international financing projects in terms of mobilization since the post-war reconstruction efforts for Europe and Japan at the end of World War II<sup>34</sup>. A lot of funds have been devoted to the rebuilding of infrastructures and to the ISF, but a significant part has also been allocated to the development of civil

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<sup>30</sup> Interview with Anne Gilles

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Interview with Hashim Al-Assaf

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Anne Gilles

<sup>34</sup> United States Institute of Peace (USIP), *Donors Activities and Civil Society Potential in Iraq*, USIP Special Report 124, July 2004, p.1

society. Many donors have contributed money to the civil society sector in hopes that this would contribute to and foster Iraq's democratization. Many Iraqis perceived this massive investment as a major opportunity, especially in the local context of economic deprivation. This has been the main reason for creating some local NGOs, but it also had an influence on the nature of the emerging Iraqi NGO sector.

## 1. Large-Scale Involvement of International Donors in Iraq

In the years following the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, Iraq became a number one priority and destination for international aid, partially due to American pressure. The variety of fund channels and the complexity of their management make it difficult to obtain a precise idea of the amounts of money spent in Iraq. Until now, accountability for funding of humanitarian relief initiatives in Iraq remains a highly controversial subject. On a basic level, one can identify four main grant sources, without taking into account the huge loans propositions made to the Iraqi state.

The first major grant source is the American Iraq Relief and Reconstruction Fund (IRRF), which mainly channeled funds to American governmental departments and agencies. As of June 30, 2007, \$18.39 billion of the IRRF had been allocated. 73% of these funds were provided for the US Department of Defense (DoD), 16% to the US Agency for International Development (USAID), and 7% to the Department of State<sup>35</sup>. Between 2003 and 2010, the amount of money that the US Congress has allocated for the reconstruction of Iraq totals about \$50 billion<sup>36</sup>.

The second source of funding for Iraq's reconstruction was the Development Fund for Iraq (DFI), created in May 2003 by the Administrator of the CPA and recognized by UN Security Council Resolution 1483. *'The DFI comprises funds from exports sales of petroleum [...], and surplus funds from the United Nations Oil-for-Food Program, as well as frozen Iraqi assets'*<sup>37</sup>. It is then estimated that \$23 billion in Iraqi money has been held in the DFI<sup>38</sup>. About \$9.1 billion has been allocated to the American DoD.

The third largest group of financial contributors to the reconstruction of Iraq was foreign states, other than the US. As of October 2007, \$3.1 billion had been provided to Iraq

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<sup>35</sup> Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction (SIGIR), *Quarterly Report and Semiannual Report to the United States Congress*, July 30, 2007, p.29

<sup>36</sup> SIGIR, *Quarterly Report and Semiannual Report to the United States Congress*, July 30, 2010, p.18

<sup>37</sup> SIGIR, *Development Fund for Iraq: Department of Defense Needs to Improve Financial and Management Controls*, July 27, 2010, p. 5

<sup>38</sup> Global Policy Forum, *Development Fund for Iraq*, <http://globalpolicy.org/iraq/humanitarian-issues-in-iraq/development-fund-for-iraq.html> (accessed August 20, 2010)

through bilateral grants, coming mainly from Japan, the European Union (EU) and the United Kingdom<sup>39</sup>.

The fourth source of funding for Iraq was multilateral aid, in the form of the International Reconstruction Fund Facility for Iraq, which was run jointly by the UN and the World Bank. As of October 2007, it had received \$2.5 billion from 36 nations. Yet only \$685 million of that total funding had been disbursed by the UN to relevant agencies, such as the World Health Organisation, the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the UN Development Programme (UNDP)<sup>40</sup>.

Based on the source, these funds were allocated to different actors in the field of Iraqi reconstruction. Following the invasion, there was a multiplying effect for intermediaries between the donors and the project implementing structures (such as UN agencies and NGOs). This large number of rapidly emerging intermediaries further complicates any attempt to track funding for Iraq's reconstruction and humanitarian sector. The IRRF benefited mostly American private firms. The World Bank generally allocated its funds to Iraqi governmental agencies. UN agencies typically selected and financed projects, which were actually implemented by contracted INGOs or LNGOs. In the beginning, the main priorities were rebuilding Iraq's infrastructure and security system.

In the final layer, the vast majority of these organisations were forced to work with Iraqi people, to employ Iraqis, to partner with Iraqi companies as sub-contractors, or to hand over the practical implementation of projects to Iraqi LNGOs. Noticeable exceptions were some American contractor companies which signed million dollar contracts and had a monopoly on reconstructing the sewage/water treatment plants and restoring the power grid and mostly employed Kuwaitis and Americans to do their projects. Even if vast amounts of money were wasted in this process of multiple interface and negotiation, there was still massive economic opportunity generated for Iraqi structures. *'A lot of associations were created following American demands. The [American] Provincial Reconstruction Teams were present since after the war and called for projects. They asked Iraqi associations to put in place projects of distribution, etc'*<sup>41</sup>. Therefore, the Iraqi LNGOs boom can also be partially attributed as a result of the large availability of funds for reconstruction in Iraq after 2003.

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<sup>39</sup> United States Government Accountability Office, *Rebuilding Iraq: International donors pledges for reconstruction efforts in Iraq*, December 18, 2007

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Interview with Anne Gilles



## 2. Supporting the Development of an Iraqi Civil Society

Apart from benefitting from the massive funds available for the relief and rebuilding of Iraq, the Iraqi NGO sector was also specifically targeted by donors as a component of civil society. In *Global Civil Society 2006/2007*, one can read that the US spent \$3 billion for “development” of the Iraqi civil society. Millions from other coalition governments, the UN, and the EU must also be added to this total<sup>42</sup>.

*‘The internationals may have high expectations of the Iraqi civil society based on their own agenda’*<sup>43</sup>. The donors’ interest in Iraqi civil society was stemming from an idea held by numerous American officials and IOs staff members that the emergence of civil society in Iraq and in the Middle East in general was a medication for regional issues. Civil society has been conceived of as a means of ‘draining the extremism swamp’<sup>44</sup>, or as a tool to counter-balance the autocratic tendencies of some states in the Middle East. *‘After 2003, the international community was keen to build a society. Because if you build the state and you don’t care about the society, you will not have a country. You will tend to the dictatorship, and so on’*<sup>45</sup>. The US, other international decision makers, and donors expected to put in place the same structures which appear to have allowed Central Europe to democratize and liberalize in the 1990s. The civil society they wanted to see emerge would be a channel for democracy, promoting citizenship over sectarian identities, and monitoring elections and state policies in general. *‘After the success of the civil society in the democratization in Central Europe, a lot of internationals tend to believe that the role of civil society in Iraq, or in a lot of Arab countries, should be based only on elections, democratization’*<sup>46</sup>. This led donors to finance numerous workshops on elections and the constitution, with remarkably little follow-up. The CPA also perceived the liberalization and the privatization of the economy as a conflict-prevention tool that CSOs could help sponsor. Accordingly, the CPA promoted civil society initiatives, supporting small and medium enterprises and endorsing micro-lending<sup>47</sup>.

The international community’s vision of the role of civil society did not only affect Iraq. One can observe the same phenomenon in Palestine during the 1990s. *‘In Palestine also, there was a period (the Oslo years) where civil society was thought to be the cure to many*

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<sup>42</sup> Kaldor Mary, Kostovicova Denisa, Said Yahia, *War and Peace: the Role of Global Civil Society in Global Civil Society 2006/7*, SAGE Publications, 2007, p.94-122

<sup>43</sup> Interview with Omar Maktab

<sup>44</sup> Droz-Vincent Philippe, *Où sont donc les « sociétés civiles » au Moyen-Orient ?*, Humanitaire n°20, automne/hiver 2008, p.58

<sup>45</sup> Interview with Hashim Al-Assaf

<sup>46</sup> Interview with Omar Maktab

<sup>47</sup> Kaldor M., Kostovicova D., Said Y., op.cit.

*political evils*<sup>48</sup>. Supporting civil society in Palestine was also thought of as a means to avoid the failure of the peace process. In Iraq, civil society was conceived of as a tool for peace-building. However, the reality and actual events that followed between 2005-2007 in Iraq and after 2000 in Palestine seem to call into question the relevance and efficacy of this approach. But in the Palestinian and Iraqi cases, the availability of external funding facilitated the mushrooming of LNGOs.

### **3. Business-Oriented NGOs, Ingenuous NGOs and Donor-Dependent NGOs**

Massive international investments in Iraq's reconstruction represented a unique financial opportunity for Iraqi people after decades of deprivation. Making a profit was the main motivation behind the creation of a number of local NGOs, which are informally referred to as 'business-oriented NGOs' or 'profit-NGOs'. *'It was a good opportunity to make money. So, people established NGOs to do business'*<sup>49</sup>. This designation may cover multiple realities, from *'the well-known crook who creates his NGO to do money'* to the *'business-oriented' guy who is maybe slightly humanitarian and is doing both*<sup>50</sup>. Some Iraqi NGOs that were created after 2003 were actually hollow and empty shells, solely designed to receive funds and use them for other, unstated purposes. Other NGOs were really implementing projects; accordingly, the money that they obtained from international donors allowed them to make some modest profits and, for example, pay higher salaries to their members. This kind of motivation in establishing LNGOs seemed to be unavoidable: *'In a country which was destroyed, which was worn out economically-speaking, it was normal that people stacked the deck in their favor'*<sup>51</sup>.

The ease of obtaining of these funds, as well as their sheer quantity initially, certainly encouraged the creation of LNGOs in general, and allowed some insincere or fake NGOs to be established. Jamal Al-Jawahiri, founder of Iraqi Al-Amal Association, one of the largest and most reputable Iraqi NGOs, gives an insight on this phenomenon: *'The US army wanted to work with Iraqi civil society and viewed it in the beginning the same way it viewed the Iraqi people – the US army asked people to form organisations and gave them projects, such as holding meetings, distributing aid, building schools, etc. This trend was problematic for civil society because a lot of the money was spent on constructing schools, infirmaries etc., which was not monitored or evaluated by any foreign or Iraqi groups. Some Iraqi groups were given*

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<sup>48</sup> Challand Benoît, *Comments on Palestinian CSOs – How to Trace Down the Impact of External Aid?*, Research Papers for the Regional Conference on Research on Civil Society Organisations: Status and Prospects, January 2010, p. 2

<sup>49</sup> Interview with Hashim Al-Assaf

<sup>50</sup> Interview with Caroline Douilliez-Sabouba

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

over \$100,000 to organize two-day conferences in Baghdad – these are horrifying numbers<sup>52</sup>. Indeed, there were few accountability mechanisms for the money managed and administered by the American-funded IRRF and the American-managed DFI. In July 2010, the Office of the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction (SIGIR) issued a report in which it revealed that the DoD is ‘unable to properly account for \$8.7 billion of the \$9.1 billion it received for reconstruction activities in Iraq’<sup>53</sup>.

This shows that structures which were not really doing work, or which were not really effective, have been financed. In the absence of neither control nor accountability, the staff members of these ineffective organisations did not build knowledge or capacity. Despite their contacts with international donors, they only came away with idea that money can be easily earned in the fields of reconstruction and humanitarian relief. This provision of funds without monitoring is denounced by both Iraqis and Western humanitarian actors. ‘I often say that the huge amount of money spent by American agencies spoiled the Iraqi communities,’<sup>54</sup> reports Hashim Al-Assaf, the Iraqi Coordinator of NCCI. ‘These money contributions from various sources who flooded Iraq with money without having any interest in ensuring its good use were destructive for NGOs, and for everybody’ says an INGO’s Project Manager.

Finally, these huge injections of money tended to create donor-dependent NGOs. The resources available for these structures in the years following 2003 could not be locally sustained. This means that the decision of a donor not to renew its funding to an NGO could signal the end of that NGO, as it is very difficult to secure financial resources from the local environment. Those LNGOs that managed to gain recognition—and even funds—at a community-level now enjoy considerable sustainability, even if they only conduct lower-scale projects<sup>55</sup>. Donor-dependency also explains the short-term characteristic of many Iraqi LNGOs. Today, the international community remains the primary source of funds for the Iraqi LNGO sector<sup>56</sup>, even though a small proportion of LNGOs actually have access to international donors. In a context where donors are losing interest in Iraq, this feature of some Iraqi NGOs is posing a real threat to LNGOs’ long-term sustainability, expansion, or even survival in Iraq.

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<sup>52</sup> Jamal Al-Jawahiri, op.cit.

<sup>53</sup> SIGIR, *Development Fund for Iraq: Department of Defense Needs to Improve Financial and Management Controls*, op. cit.

<sup>54</sup> Interview with Hashim Al-Assaf

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

### Section III. A New Means of Mobilization for Identity-Based Structures

The fall of Saddam Hussein's regime enabled various groups, bearing their own specific identities, interests, demands and ambitions, to access the Iraqi public sphere. It gave many new and emerging groups the freedom to create structures to express themselves and rally people in various identity-based structures, including political parties, religious associations, militias, and even NGOs. By working with and for the people, NGOs were perceived by politicians, religious leaders or tribal chiefs as a relevant tool to conquer 'hearts and minds.' Therefore, an important portion of the Iraqi NGO sector owes its existence to political, religious or tribal structures. These multiple affiliations are challenging Iraqi NGOs to strengthen their ability to transcend Iraqi society's many divisions and cleavages. The notion of independence, which is generally tied to the Western concept of the NGO, has to be adapted within the Iraqi context if NGOs are to successfully function.

#### 1. Religious and Political Affiliations of Iraqi NGOs

Religious movements in Iraq and the Arab world have a long history of providing direct assistance to the less fortunate. The Islamic traditions of helping, such as the practices of *zakat* and *sadaqah*, motivated and inspired the creation of numerous charity activities that have been traditionally run by mosques<sup>57</sup>. For many Iraqis, the collapse of the Iraqi state in 2003 further inspired a return to the principles and/or institutions of Islam, a tendency which had also been initiated by Saddam Hussein in the years preceding his fall<sup>58</sup>. Religious structures were often the primary source towards which people turned for aid after the American-led invasion. The long legacy of Islamic charity movements logically led to further creation and expansion of Islamic NGOs with religious affiliations, as these institutions generally had the necessary resources and public support to conduct operations in Iraq. For Jamal Al-Jawahiri, '*[There is] no doubt that the number of religious organisations is higher [than the number of secular NGOs]. They have mosques where they can assemble people freely and organize activities – they get funding through zakat and khums, as well as from overseas sources.*'<sup>59</sup> NGOs were also a means for the different religious sects to establish their presence, visually demonstrate their power, and maintain their influence in the context of major confrontations between religious movements. '*The religious [...], they discovered from the beginning how it's important to have NGOs and CSOs to mobilize community for their own benefit.*'<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Hansen Greg, *Taking Sides or Saving Lives: Existential Choices for the Humanitarian Enterprise in Iraq*, Feinstein International Center, June 2007, p.24

<sup>58</sup> Interview with Anne Gilles

<sup>59</sup> Jamal Al-Jawahiri, op. cit.

<sup>60</sup> Interview with Hashim Al-Assaf

Religious structures had therefore a major role in the creation of a significant number of NGOs but Islamic principles certainly underlie the vast bulk of initiatives to establish NGOs. Field research conducted in and around Iraq in November and December 2006 showed that a lot of interviewed Iraqis felt that there were '*strong strains of Islamic teachings and Iraqi traditions in the Fundamental Principles and the ICRC/NGO Code of Conduct.*'<sup>61</sup> Qu'ranic verses about 'good' charity are often present in the stories of those describing how they help other people during dramatic and violent events, such as terrorist attacks. In other words, most Iraqis feel that international humanitarian law and NGO standards of conduct are compatible and complementary to Islamic principles, rather than contradictory or oppositional. The importance of Islamic principles in Iraqi society makes them an essential basis for founders and staff members of many Iraqi NGOs, including many organisations which claim to be secular or unaffiliated in terms of religion.

This involvement of religious structures and principles in the creation of NGOs has had different consequences in regards to their functioning. The affiliation of an organization to a specific religious community generally affects how an NGO selects its beneficiaries. Few Iraqi NGOs work without any discrimination or preference within a community, whether it is based on religion, ethnicity or another distinction. Anne Gilles from MDM, explains that one of the INGO's partners is an association present in Kirkuk and Mosul, two cities where huge Kurdish groups are living; this local organization is mainly composed of Kurds, although there are some Arab and Turkmen volunteers. This association is also more likely to target Kurdish areas in its assistance<sup>62</sup>. On rare occasion, NGOs serve as a cover for militias—which may or may not have religious affiliations. When militias are disguised as NGOs, they can attempt to conceal offensive operations or surveillance activities behind the veneer of charity and community work<sup>63</sup>. Militias, as well as religious and political groups, can also simply use NGOs as a means to gain popularity with the local population.

*'Once the political parties established themselves in Iraq, they start also to establish NGOs'*<sup>64</sup>. Many NGOs were created after the 2003 invasion and occupation as a tool of voter mobilization in a nascent, besieged democracy. These NGOs tend to serve national, regional or local political agendas. The mechanism is similar to other interest or identity-based groups: the NGO provides services to populations in the name of a group or party; as a result, populations begin to consider this group or party as capable of fulfilling their needs and therefore able to govern in an accountable, effective manner. The NGO can also be a

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<sup>61</sup> Hansen G., *Taking Sides or Saving Lives: Existential Choices for the Humanitarian Enterprise in Iraq*, op. cit., p. 18

<sup>62</sup> Interview with Anne Gilles

<sup>63</sup> Interview with Omar Maktab

<sup>64</sup> Interview with Hashim Al-Assaf

campaigning tool or resource for a political party; NGOs can expose or subject the public to certain discourses, and thereby directly or (more often) indirectly influence the people to support a certain political agenda. As a result, 'All Iraqi parties, stakeholders now, they have their own NGOs.'<sup>65</sup> It seems that many Iraqi political actors still understand civil society in Gramscian terms. Antonio Gramsci, an Italian Marxist philosopher, considered that civil society was simply an arena for practicing power<sup>66</sup>. This is precisely how many politicians use NGOs in Iraq, even as their motivations are often intertwined with other considerations, such as religious affiliations and notions of communal solidarity.

A striking example of this appropriation of Iraqi NGOs is illustrated with the Islamic Dawa party's takeover of the Iraqi Red Crescent Society (IRCS) in 2003. The Dawa party is one of the main conservative Shiite political parties in Iraq. The draft constitution of the IRCS delegated the Iraqi government a supervisory role over the organization<sup>67</sup>. Under Ba'athist rule, this previously resulted in the Ba'ath party consolidating and exerting total control over the IRCS. After 2003, the emergence of new political groups and struggle to access power in the government resulted in a competition between many political parties to control the IRCS; in fact, domination of the IRCS became a political battlefield. Eventually, the Dawa party physically and organizationally took over the IRCS in 2004 by occupying its headquarters. Dawa officials justified this action by stating that it was necessary to rid the IRCS of members of the previous Ba'ath regime, in total accordance with the greater, national push for the so-called 'De-Ba'athification policy' encouraged by the CPA. Ibrahim al-Jaafari, member of the Dawa party and prime minister of Iraq from 2005 to 2006, initially arranged a new managing/administrative team for the IRCS post-2003 invasion. Also a member of the Dawa party and prime minister since 2006, Nouri al-Maliki installed the current transitional committee of the IRCS that has been running the organization for almost two years.

The politicization of the IRCS and its structures resulted in alienation and disconnection within many local branches, as the headquarters leadership came to assume a different political flavor and agenda than its numerous local offices<sup>68</sup>. This was the case in the Kurdish governorate and in the South; although the Shi'a are a majority in the south, members of the southern IRCS management team are not affiliated with the Dawa party specifically. These political divisions therefore threaten to further fragment and weaken the IRCS. But not a single political circle of influence is ready to give up on such a tool for gaining popularity and public support, even though a lot of Iraqi NGO workers are certainly tired of how much politics, sectarian or ethnic affiliations come into play in their work. IRCS

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<sup>65</sup> Interview with Omar Maktab

<sup>66</sup> Saeed Hayder, *Civil Society in Iraq: A Particular emphasis on the Islamic Discourse*, Research Papers for the Regional Conference on Research on Civil Society Organisations: Status and Prospects, January 2010, p. 2

<sup>67</sup> Interview with Omar Maktab

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

has evolved into 'a means for the Dawa party to create its image, and to win elections.'<sup>69</sup> This seems to be part of a broader strategy whereby 'Dawa takes over all organisations which perform among people, in order to use them as beacons'<sup>70</sup>. The establishment and the management of NGOs has therefore become a strategy to seek and consolidate power for some specific groups.

## 2. An Impossible Independence?

*'It is a reality that everything should have a color after 2003. Even before 2003, the color was like this, but people didn't talk about it publicly.'*<sup>71</sup> As for today, Iraqi society remains divided by numerous religious, ethnic and tribal cleavages, which are partly reflected in the way that Iraqi civil society is developing. Several factors have made these divisions even more structuralized and rigid within the last ten years. Before 2003, Saddam Hussein managed to strengthen population references to the religion, the tribe, the community. *'Saddam did really laminate the Iraqi society. [...] He said, 'After me, there will be no more Iraq,' and he put the mechanisms in place so that, indeed, after Saddam left, there was no Iraq. His absence stirred up tensions and divisions at the most local, community level'*<sup>72</sup>. Some might argue that, as a result, in 2003, the Iraqi population emerged from 35 years of dictatorship with a very weak notion of collective or civic spirit. This point of view has to be counterbalanced by taking into account the fact that the Ba'ath party also provided some public services, unequalled in the Arab world, such as free university education. It is therefore difficult to conclude that Saddam Hussein's regime never encouraged concepts such as civism or country-wide solidarity.

After 2003, with the collapse of the state, the society tended to rely more and more on community structures and a sense of community solidarity. Rising violence, which the authorities were unable to control, seems to have reinforced this tendency. As Ziad Abdel Samad explains, clan, tribal and religious affiliations strengthen when the state fails to provide security<sup>73</sup>. In order to seek protection, communities withdraw from their reliance on a central power and instead unite at a local level. *'There are different strata and groupings, which also provide protection in a situation that is still very tense. People tend to stay very close to their families.'*<sup>74</sup> In such a context, it is not surprising that some NGOs were used as

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<sup>69</sup> Interview with Omar Maktab

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Interview with Hashim Al-Assaf

<sup>72</sup> Interview with Anne Gilles

<sup>73</sup> Samad Ziad Abdel, *Civil Society in the Arab Region: Its Necessary Role and the Obstacles to Fulfillment*, The International Journal of Non-for-Profit Law, vol. 9, n°2, April 2007, p.8

<sup>74</sup> Interview with Anne Gilles

an instrumental tool by specific interest groups or that some NGOs faced difficulties with the numerous societal cleavages in Iraq.

Iraqi NGOs were established by various sets of actors after 2003: religious structures, political parties, armed groups, Iraqi expatriates, and Iraqis linked to the international community<sup>75</sup>. Most Iraqi NGOs were founded by two or three people, who sought a way to assist those within their district, village, and/or community. As a result, these organisations are closely linked to their local environments and all of the entities that compose it. Their understanding of the local environment and their inherent integration within it helps to guarantee them access to local communities, and especially the most vulnerable populations. This is among the greatest strength of Iraqi NGOs and their local staff, as compared to other actors in the humanitarian field.

These local ties also provide Iraqi humanitarian workers with some extent of protection. In a context of pervasive violence, the survival of Iraqi NGOs was largely dependent on the quality of their relations with the dominant clan or sect in a particular operating environment and/or beneficiary community. On the contrary, the 'wrong' affiliations can prove to be toxic, and even life-threatening<sup>76</sup>. Therefore, maintaining some degree of neutrality is also essential. Security certainly stems from a subtle mix of two options that allow NGOs to develop more nuanced, expert knowledge of the field in which they are operating. It seems that some of these community-based organisations are indeed an expression of traditional kinship among family and tribe. But some of them also manage to use this connection in order to secure a source of protection, and as a means to conduct projects among vulnerable populations that would otherwise be impossible to access.

Consequently, the concept of the 'independent NGO' in its Western understanding is poorly applicable to a vast majority of the Iraqi NGOs and inconsistent with the overall Iraqi context. The notion of independence can of course also be questioned in the case of Western NGOs: religious motivations, intrusive donors and partnerships with ethnically-oriented organisations are quite common among many Western NGOs. For instance, the Western INGO World Vision, which has a strong Christian affiliation, implemented projects that obviously targeted Iraqi Christian beneficiaries rather than Iraq at large, especially before the period of intense violence between 2005-2007<sup>77</sup>. As this example shows, in the Western world as in Iraq, a variety of structures adhere to the official definition of "NGO" making it difficult to make a general conclusion about the independence of the Iraqi and global NGO

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<sup>75</sup> Interview with Hashim Al-Assaf

<sup>76</sup> Hansen Greg, *Perceptions of Humanitarianism in Iraq*, NCCI Briefing Paper 6, January 2008, p. 1

<sup>77</sup> Interview with Anne Gilles



sectors. But some factors unique to Iraq's local and historical context are clearly hindering the ability of many Iraqi NGOs to pursue the principles of independence and impartiality. *'[Some NGOs] want to be without color but they cannot because of the funds, because of other things, because their new jobs give them something<sup>78</sup>.'*

Some Iraqi and non-Iraqi experts have assessed that Iraqi civil society, and by extension Arab civil societies, are too corrupted by pervasive influences. According to this line of thinking, Arab civil society cannot serve as an effective vector or arena for real change.

Maybe autonomy has to be appreciated differently in the Arab world. As an Iraqi political expert and consultant for major INGOs said, *'NGOs should be independent in their performance, and in their programme. They should emphasize the needs of their local communities, where they came from.'*<sup>79</sup> Accepting various affiliations in order to continue their work with vulnerable populations could be a means of obtaining long-term independence and operationality for many Iraqi NGOs, which most INGOs could never manage to achieve or maintain in Iraq.

The collapse of the state, departure of international relief organisations, increasing availability of international funds, arrival of religious and new political actors on the public scene, and high degree of unmet needs among the Iraqi people are among the key factors that have contributed to a boom in the Iraqi NGO sector. Moreover, the Iraqi NGO sector has taken on a character of immense diversity. It is within the often anarchic environment of Iraq that INGOs, withdrawn to neighboring countries, had to choose effective local partners to implement their projects on the ground.

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<sup>78</sup> Interview with Hashim Al-Assaf

<sup>79</sup> Interview with Omar Maktab

## **Chapter II. Diversity of Partnerships Established between INGOs and Iraqi NGOs due to Rising Sectarian Violence**

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Significant modifications in the operating environment, such as conflict or war, are one of the main factors that can influence major organizational changes in structures such as INGOs<sup>80</sup>. In the Iraqi case, attacks against humanitarian workers in 2003 and 2004, followed by persistent sectarian violence that developed between 2005 and 2007, forced INGOs to initiate a 180-degree turn in the ways in which they conducted their activities. The only solution that would potentially compensate for a partial or remote presence in Iraq was to rely more on local actors and local capacity. One option was to establish partnerships with emerging Iraqi LNGOs. The few INGOs that were willing to stay in Iraq during the waves of violence actually employed this kind of approach. For INGOs engaged in development-oriented and long-term operations, building and maintaining strong relations with the local CSOs was a desirable and common programming option<sup>81</sup>. But post-2003 Iraq was a major conflict zone confronted by complex emergency issues, such as internally displaced people (IDPs) and sectarian conflict casualties. In such a context, INGOs do not usually take the time to build relations with LNGOs. The specific configuration between INGOs and LNGOs in Iraq makes a quite unique case study. INGOs operating service delivery in Iraq often made choices in a quick manner, with little strategic planning for the long-term. These choices had various consequences, some of which were not really intended; some of these choices also strengthened the Iraqi NGO sector.

### **Section I. Shifts in INGOs' Programming Approaches: Reactive Choices and a Lack of Strategic Planning**

The insecure environment in much of Iraq caused INGOs to modify the ways in which they were conducting their humanitarian projects in Iraq. Initially, post 2003 invasion, there was an emergency context with huge needs that a certain number of relief organisations could not ignore – for different reasons – despite the rising violence and inter-ethnic conflict. As a result, choices were made without taking into consideration a long-term vision and without deeply reflecting on possible implications or upholding the ethics of humanitarian law. In essence, remote programming was only conceived as a temporary, short-term solution.

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<sup>80</sup> International NGO Training and Research Center (INTRAC), *What next for INGO structures?*, The newsletter of INTRAC, n°44, January 2010, p. 5

<sup>81</sup> Stoddard Abby, Harmer Adele, Haver Katherine, *Providing aid in insecure environments: trends in policy and operations*, Humanitarian Policy Group Report 23, September 2006, p. 38

## 1. Continuation of INGOs' Activities in Iraq through Remote Management Modalities

While the vast majority of INGOs were scaling down their operations in Iraq at the end of 2005, populations' needs were simultaneously growing due to mounting violence. Moreover, post-2005, Iraq's humanitarian space witnessed more donor mobilization as international attention was carefully fixated on Iraq. Therefore, while a lot of INGOs had permanently deserted the Iraqi field at that time, about 60 INGOs did decide to persevere and continue implementing their activities in Iraq. Donor pressure to continue operations was considerably high in some cases, and donors often failed to take the deteriorating security situation into careful consideration. The American aid agency, USAID, imposed a condition on to American NGOs who wished to retain their funding: American NGOs were required to maintain expatriate staff on the ground<sup>82</sup>, even if this meant that they would have to adopt highly visible, expensive and advanced security measures. In a general context in which INGOs were generally struggling to access funds worldwide, the availability of funding in Iraq was an incentive for many INGOs to remain in Iraq by any means necessary, in spite of the poor security conditions. *'The need to maintain presence for solidarity and/or visibility reasons – what World Vision calls 'keeping the light on' – also encourages a remote management approach, rather than the complete closure of the programme'*<sup>83</sup>. There are fields in which INGOs must have a presence in order to preserve the image that they are directly delivering services. Maintaining such an image is essential for many organisations to receive donations. Between 2004 and 2005, Iraq was one of these fields. At that time, the humanitarian situation in Iraq encouraged INGOs to think that working through remote approaches was better than not working at all. Facing a high level of vulnerability and unmet basic needs among beneficiaries, some INGOs decided to continue their projects in Iraq and mainly concentrated on a single objective: ensuring that aid continued to reach the population despite security and access constraints.

INGOs' operational adaptations regarding this new configuration sometimes varied, depending on each organization's specific capacities, function and code of ethics. One common choice was the withdrawal of expatriate staff from Iraq and the re-establishment of an INGO's regional headquarters in a neighboring country. Most of the INGOs' expatriate staff members were relocated to Amman, Jordan between 2003 and 2004. In order to maintain their operations in Iraq, INGOs increased their reliance on Iraqi staff and Iraqi structures. The distance of decision makers from the field and the channeling of

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<sup>82</sup> Carle A., Chkam H., op. cit., p. 23

<sup>83</sup> Stoddard A., Harmer A., Haver K., op. cit., p. 40

responsibilities to local actors are two of the main elements of various 'remote' approaches that were adopted by all INGOs in/for Iraq since the end of 2004. Names are diverse with off-site programming, long arm programming, remote control, remote management, remote support or oversight, and partnership<sup>84</sup>. This spectrum of remote programming indicates the various degrees to which authority may be delegated from the main INGO team in terms of managing and programming abroad to the operational actors in the field. The operational actors may include the INGO national staff, local NGOs, community leaders, government officials, and even commercial contractors<sup>85</sup>.

The time and resources that need to be invested to transfer skills to locals and to build their capacities may also differ from one approach to another, depending on the INGOs' actual objectives, structure and capacity. Few INGOs envisioned remote management as an opportunity to develop Iraqi civil society, especially in the initial phase of operations when they were conducting emergency operations and life-saving projects. *'If your first objective is to deliver services to [the] most vulnerable, you will not implement this objective by wasting your time to build the capacity of NGOs.'*<sup>86</sup> But some INGOs envisioned an eventual and full handover of operations and responsibilities to Iraqi structures. Therefore, they managed to include their Iraqi staff or partners in all aspects of the humanitarian project's cycle<sup>87</sup>. In most cases, however, remote managers assume the role of financial and strategic oversight *'in order to ensure a high level of due diligence and accountability to donors.'*<sup>88</sup> Each INGO reacted to the security conditions in Iraq differently. INGOs in Iraq established many types of relations with local actors, ranging from basic sub-contracting to a real partnership.

These varying 'remote management' strategies had one element in common: the rapidity of their adoption and implementation. Under donor and security pressures, INGOs were forced to react quickly rather than reflect carefully about their options<sup>89</sup>. The programming solutions they embraced were perceived as a compromise that was sub-optimal yet only temporary. Béatrice Mégevand Roggo, the Middle-East Operations Chief for the ICRC in 2008, describes the choice of the ICRC to work in partial remote control in Iraq as follows: *'It is never a choice, neither easy nor comfortable. We talk about it a lot in our organisation and with other humanitarian actors and we are very clear on the fact that it is really not desirable to extend it or to introduce it elsewhere.'*<sup>90</sup> As a solution, remote

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<sup>84</sup> Stoddard A., Harmer A., Haver K., op. cit., p. 38

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p. 39

<sup>86</sup> Interview with Hashim Al-Assaf

<sup>87</sup> Hansen Greg, *Operational modalities in Iraq*, NCCI Briefing Paper 2, January 2008, p. 5

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Stoddard A., Harmer A., Haver K., op. cit., p. 37

<sup>90</sup> Béatrice Mégevand Roggo in Dato Joseph, *Table ronde : Quelle action humanitaire possible au Moyen-Orient ?*, Humanitaire n°20, automne/hiver 2008, p. 25

approaches are essentially a last resort for short-term situations. As a result, they generated little policy formulation or strategic thinking. Often they were not well documented and were poorly evaluated. *'The prevailing feature of remote management has been the reactive and unexamined fashion in which it has been employed by international aid agencies.'*<sup>91</sup> It had different practical repercussions on the functioning of INGOs and on their relations with national staff or structures on the ground.

In Iraq, the adoption of remote approaches by INGOs had a negative impact on the quality of expatriate staff members and their capacity. Most of the expatriate staff members coordinated and supervised their respective organisation's operations from a neighboring country, such as Kuwait or Jordan. Anne Gilles, a manager of the MDM Iraqi Mission, describes an issue that MDM faced: *'The last two coordinators were people who had never been to Iraq. They were too far from the field to keep the motivation, and they were not in direct contact with the projects.'*<sup>92</sup> Because of the negative image Iraq has in terms of insecurity and the remote management nature of most positions, few internationals with considerable experience are interested in working on Iraqi projects. The especially high turnover among expatriates in these remote programming positions has *'limited the effectiveness of long-term remote strategies and jeopardized any progress that might have been made via the presence of expatriates that had previously dealt with high-risk environments, and that specialized in developing the skills of national staff.'*<sup>93</sup> Short-term strategies were therefore the norm, preventing INGOs to establish real partnerships with their Iraqi counterparts.

Vulnerability of the Iraqi population was one main justification for the implementation of remote strategies instead of simple operations closure in Iraq. But, in fact, INGOs often relocated their projects to fairly safe and stable areas, such as the Iraqi Kurdistan, and therefore not reaching locations where needs were the more acute. *'Most agencies tend to work where their resources and capabilities have the greatest chances of yielding results.'*<sup>94</sup> A shift in the nature of activities also occurred. There was a tendency to avoid initiating 'hard' health, water and sanitation infrastructure rehabilitation operations. Instead, many INGOs sought to implement more 'soft' democratization, human rights and civil society development projects<sup>95</sup>. With remote approaches, activities on the ground were more difficult to monitor and to evaluate for the managing teams. Therefore, they often did not take the risk to handover huge and technical projects to local actors. The need for accountability towards donors also led some INGOs to deal more with the authorities rather than with the local,

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<sup>91</sup> Stoddard A., Harmer A., Haver K., op. cit., p. 38

<sup>92</sup> Interview with Anne Gilles

<sup>93</sup> Carle A., Chkam H., op. cit., p. 23

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., p. 29

<sup>95</sup> Carle A., Chkam H., op. cit., p. 23

smaller structures: *'The Iraqi government is a well-established partner. It's the government of the land, and you can have reporting. [...] Donors would be more comfortable when they receive reporting, dealing with the Iraqi government. It's easier for them to accept, to see where their funds are going'*<sup>96</sup>.

The continuation of INGOs' activities in Iraq through remote management modalities led to a general drop in the quality of humanitarian action in Iraq. It affected INGOs' capacities to address priority needs, and to meet general standards in programming and overall effectiveness. Some organisations tried to find innovative solutions to counterbalance the negative aspects of remote management, but most simply adopted the remote programming approach and failed to adapt it.

## **2. Partnerships with Iraqi NGOs as a Specific Form of Remote Management**

Setting up of 'remote partnerships' was one organisational response of INGOs to the necessity of continuing activities in Iraq's insecure environment. In other words, two or more organisations would come together and contribute different resources to jointly address a common problem<sup>97</sup>. Within this specific context, one structure, the local NGO, is present and operational inside Iraq. The other organization, typically the INGO, is completely or partly based outside of Iraq. The INGO is in charge of resource mobilization, given its knowledge of donor agencies and its ability to present projects according to their standards. The INGO also covers advocacy activities; such advocacy efforts tend to target the Western public opinion and international institutions in terms of recognizing the importance of responding to the enduring and pressing humanitarian needs of the Iraqi population. The INGO also carries out the role of administrative backstopping, thereby ensuring that projects are implemented accountably and transparently. Project conceptualization is also generally an INGO task, even though some INGOs seek LNGOs' input from the beginning and consult them before submitting proposals or propositions to the donors. The LNGO is in charge of the operational aspects of the project, i.e. of putting in place activities on the ground like food distribution, vocational trainings, running a health center. The LNGO also provides contextual and local information to the INGO so that programs may be appropriately adapted to the often changing dynamics in the field.

The inherent difficulty of such a partnership is to *'ensure an equitable status between partners so that one does not become subservient to or isolated from the other'*<sup>98</sup>. This balance was managed quite differently from one INGO or Local NGO to another. INGOs

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<sup>96</sup> Interview with Omar Maktab

<sup>97</sup> Hansen Greg, *Operational modalities in Iraq*, op. cit., p. 5

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

tended to assume the role of coordination and supervision<sup>99</sup>, with partnerships looking more like sub-contracting arrangements. This specific form of remote management was considered as a risk for a lot of INGOs, especially between 2004 and 2005 as the Iraqi NGO sector was still nascent and its potential was unknown. INGOs feared that they might waste their resources to support some inefficient LNGOs. Furthermore, INGOs were cautious about indirectly becoming affiliated and associated with some political and militant groups through LNGOs; this could obviously jeopardize many INGOs' principle to maintain impartiality. In reflecting upon her efforts to develop partnerships between LNGOs and a neutral and impartial humanitarian organisation like the ICRC, Caroline Douilliez-Sabouba said: *'In most contexts the ICRC works in, local NGOs are not usual partners. In the case of Iraq, we cautiously weighed the added value of working with LNGOs and the risks it represents in terms of image and reputation, especially regarding the independence of the ICRC'*<sup>100</sup>. The risks that INGOs have incurred in working with local structures require INGOs to proceed cautiously. This explains the vital dimension of the selection process for choosing appropriate partnerships, as well as the complexity of monitoring such partnerships once they begin.

Identifying and screening potential partners among the thousands of existing local Iraqi NGOs is the first challenge for INGOs who decide to adopt this form of remote management. Confronted with by the confusing maze of the young and booming Iraqi NGO sector, INGOs first developed mapping activities to pictorially represent LNGOs' activities and locations throughout Iraq. This mapping of Iraqi LNGOs, which consists basically in determining 'who is doing what where,' is of course a partial mapping of NGO activity in Iraq, and is often adapted and simplified to meet an INGO's specific needs. It can be conducted by an INGO's Iraqi team or by other humanitarian actors, such as various UN agencies. Mapping is also one important function of the NCCI. By creating a network of LNGOs spread throughout the country, the NCCI has managed to compile an index of about 500 LNGOs. This data is shared with humanitarian actors depending on their needs and specifications. This mapping initiative was completed one year ago. It is by no means a complete mapping of NGO activity in Iraq, as some LNGOs are still reluctant to give information about themselves due to uncertain security conditions in Iraq. Apart from this NCCI initiative, there is a noticeable lack of information-sharing between INGOs in terms of mapping activities and locations. As a consequence, the process of identifying a potentially effective LNGO partner remains a real issue and a time-consuming activity for many INGOs.

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<sup>99</sup> Interview with Anne Gilles

<sup>100</sup> Interview with Caroline Douilliez-Sabouba

Given the general inexperience of the Iraqi NGO sector, INGOs are also afraid to commit themselves to partnering with the 'wrong' LNGOs. *'Even when you talk to NCCI, they are clear. They say that there are thousands of NGOs, but that many of them are neither efficient nor honest. It is true...it is a bit scary'*<sup>101</sup>. INGOs try to protect their neutrality in different ways. Some INGOs are working with different structures, each related to a specific sect or political party<sup>102</sup>. In this way, they ensure their impartiality. INGOs also selected some partners from among the Local NGOs that actually approached them. For MDM, *'especially in Iraq, the partnerships were built with associations which accepted to meet us, to work with us...for which we were not just donors.'*<sup>103</sup> INGOs did not really rely on any specific method to select structures they might want to work with. Trial and error, as well as caution, were the main strategies. In the selection process, several steps are necessary in order to build trust between organisations. For example, after the ICRC identified some of the best LNGOs candidates, they ask the LNGOs representatives about their registration, the type of activities they implement, their function, the procedures on which they rely, and their philosophy. The ICRC Iraqi staff visits its partner LNGOs in order to gain insight on their daily functioning and progress<sup>104</sup>. On this basis, the ICRC chooses which structures it wants to work with. Explanations about the project itself come afterwards, and LNGOs then agree to work on the project or refuse the offer: *'It is up to us [the ICRC] to sell our proposition'*<sup>105</sup>.

For a partnership between an IO and a LNGO to work effectively, IOs have to realistically adapt their standards and expectations to LNGOs' capacities. Meanwhile, LNGOs must aim to strengthen their capacities in order to meet IOs' standards. Caroline Douilliez-Sabouba describes her organisation's first instance of cooperation with Iraqi NGOs: *'There were NGOs at the beginning which brought us projects such as, 'Mrs. X is really poor. She will create her production of kebbeh at home and you have to give her \$2 000'. It was nice but not enough to say 'Yes.'*<sup>106</sup> While some Iraqi NGOs lack experience in reporting and accounting, IOs also have unrealistic expectations and must adapt to the challenging realities facing the Iraqi NGO sector. The majority of Iraqi NGOs are not at all familiar with the process of writing documents in English or setting up structured business plans in the case of micro-business financing<sup>107</sup>. They often do not think from such perspectives. As a result, IOs must either select LNGOs capable of accepting these procedures in the beginning, or it is the IO's responsibility to train the LNGO's staff to do such things. IOs generally prefer to deal

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<sup>101</sup> Interview with Caroline Douilliez-Sabouba

<sup>102</sup> Interview with Anne Gilles

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Interview with Caroline Douilliez-Sabouba

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.



with ‘ready-made’ NGOs<sup>108</sup>, i.e. ‘those that are culturally close to the international humanitarian community – i.e. young, urban, secular, educated, middle/upper-class.’<sup>109</sup> INGOs see partnerships with this type of structure as less risky and costly. But, in a lot of areas and domains, these ‘ready-made’ NGOs do not yet exist and oftentimes, the solution is for INGOs to lower their requirements. Some expensive trainings were organized, often abroad, in order to improve partner LNGOs’ capacities in report writing or accounting. INGOs also had to take into account the fact that they would not be able to properly monitor the daily work and operations of these LNGOs. Without staff in Iraq and rare opportunities to conduct field visits, it was almost impossible for INGOs to impose considerably high standards on their operational partners. Consequently, the absence of INGOs from Iraq has resulted in poor skill transferal to some LNGOs, even though it has fostered many partnerships.

## **Section II. Strengthening of Local Iraqi NGOs: An Unsettled By-Product of INGOs’ Attempts to Adapt**

Even though INGOs did not directly engage in well-planned capacity-building projects with Iraqi NGOs, their partnerships did strengthen some LNGOs’ inherent capacities. Iraqi NGOs were in a sort of trial and error phase, working without many concrete guidelines to meet INGOs’ demands. The weak support of INGOs often meant that LNGOs had to develop their own programming and organisational strategies, which are not necessarily in line with international humanitarian principles or sustainable in the long-term.

### **1. Abilities to Cope with an Unstable and Insecure Environment**

INGOs’ decisions to rely more on local actors, and Iraqi NGOs in particular, for the operational aspects of their programs were partly based on the assumption that LNGOs’ Iraqi staff members were less threatened by poor security conditions than Western humanitarian workers. INGOs believed that ‘local staff are perceived more favourably and have greater ‘acceptance’ among the host and beneficiary communities, simply by virtue of their being ‘of the place’<sup>110</sup>.’ At the same time, LNGOs’ personnel had more ‘situational awareness’ than INGOs’ expatriate staff members<sup>111</sup>. Local, Iraqi humanitarian aid workers know the local environment in which they are operating better than most expatriate staff members, and also understand the nuances and nature of the ties between different actors. They are able to better analyze certain phenomena, especially in terms of culture, that an expatriate staff member might completely misunderstand or overlook. These INGOs’ perceptions were

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<sup>108</sup> Interview with Hashim Al-Assaf

<sup>109</sup> Carle A., Chkam H., op. cit., p. 30

<sup>110</sup> Stoddard A., Harmer A., Haver K., op. cit., p. 45

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., p. 44

based on relevant observations of the ground reality in Iraq. Yet many INGOs quickly transferred security risks to Iraqi structures without adequate planning and communication.

In determining precisely whether or not risks on the ground were lower for local organisations or for IOs, INGOs did not rely on a strong assessment or criteria. In analyzing the issue in more depth, it appears that LNGOs faced different—but not necessarily fewer—threats than INGOs. Few INGOs took into account the fact that LNGO members are supposed to stay in the field much longer than expatriates: *'They will face qualitatively different risks, including the potential loss of income for themselves and their families should a programme be terminated.'*<sup>112</sup> The 'acceptance' which is supposed to guarantee local actors' safety can be undermined if they decide to extend the territory of their operations, a typical suggestion of INGOs that support LNGOs in a partnership. Local humanitarian workers can also be over-confident about their acceptance and knowledge of communities; sometimes they are unable to identify potential threats and danger in time. Multiple attacks against Iraqi humanitarian workers reveal the distorted character of INGOs' assumptions about the risks that local actors face.

In addition to shifting security risks to local organisations, INGOs also did little to enhance LNGOs' capacity to cope with those risks. As justification, INGOs claimed that LNGOs know how to manage their security and are capable of making independent decisions<sup>113</sup>. As a result, few LNGOs benefitted from security trainings. The only notable initiative came from the NCCI, which managed to obtain the necessary funding to provide security training opportunities to the INGO community, including two LNGOs and Iraqi staff of INGOs who set up their own LNGO later<sup>114</sup>. There is little support available to local partners for security-related equipment, such as vehicles or radios. Security guidelines and codes of conduct are often specifically designed for expatriate staff, and thus fail to take into account those issues that affect Iraqis in a highly insecure environment. This can be considered as a serious abrogation of responsibility on the INGOs' part<sup>115</sup>, considering the fact that being in a partnership with international actors has increased the exposure of the Iraqi personnel in many LNGOs.

Association with international actors resulted in new security challenges for many Iraqi NGOs. With little support, they often managed to independently confront these obstacles and thus remain operational on the ground. They developed capacities and techniques in order to cope with an unstable and insecure environment. Many Iraqi NGOs adopted a combination of low-profile and clandestine security approaches in order to escape

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<sup>112</sup> Stoddard A., Harmer A., Haver K., op. cit., p. 44

<sup>113</sup> Carle A., Chkam H., op. cit., p. 18

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Stoddard A., Harmer A., Haver K., op. cit., p. 44

violence and oppression due to the nature of their work, or to their links with INGOs and/or other international structures. Most LNGOs would not disclose information about who they are working with and being financed by to their beneficiaries, to the local leaders, or even their families. Some Iraqi humanitarian aid workers would pretend to be from the Department of Health or another local, governmental body, in order to avoid raising suspicions and to keep attention away from their activities<sup>116</sup>. They would not carry any documents in English and would conceal their laptops and other sensitive equipment from external view. Many Iraqi NGOs would also regularly change their office's location: *'[They] tend to rent an office when new programmes start, and end the rental agreement with the end of the programme. They reopen another office in another location when new funding becomes available.'*<sup>117</sup>

The security strategies adopted by Iraqi NGOs were not always in line with humanitarian principles, particularly in terms of neutrality and impartiality. In order to ensure their safety and their access to vulnerable populations, some local humanitarian workers sought out protection from tribal or militia leaders, as well as local authorities. This could be justified as part of maintaining good relations with the local community, or as security strategy that emphasizes the importance of building 'acceptance' and trust on the ground<sup>118</sup>. But sometimes these relations involved payment and other illegal transactions in order to gain access to a particular community. In some instances, there was diversion of large quantities of aid as local humanitarian actors made illegitimate deals with other local actors. These breaches in neutrality could have resulted in attacks against some LNGO staff members, yet this subject is still under debate and it is often difficult to identify attack motives with certainty in this insecure context. In all cases, INGOs monitoring capacities were limited and they did not generally guide local actors on how to tackle security issues. Accordingly, LNGOs were forced to invent and develop their own strategies. In choosing to establish partnerships with some Iraqi NGOs, INGOs transferred part of their security issues to them, which forced Iraqi NGOs to improve their abilities to operate in the frequently violent and precarious conditions.

## **2. Operational Capacities to Deliver Services to Vulnerable Populations**

Apart from less direct exposure to violence, a major asset of Iraqi NGOs in the eyes of INGOs is their excellent and unparalleled access to potential beneficiaries of humanitarian action: *'Their strong point is that they are close to the field and they are culturally integrated into the Iraqi society and they know their community'*<sup>119</sup>. Even if an INGO managed to keep

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<sup>116</sup> Carle A., Chkam H., op. cit., p. 21

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., p. 19

<sup>118</sup> Stoddard A., Harmer A., Haver K., op. cit., p. 45

<sup>119</sup> Interview with Caroline Douilliez-Sabouba

national staff in Iraq, they are often based in governorate capitals and generally have a more limited capacity to identify and reach vulnerable populations in specific villages or rural areas. The LNGOs which were chosen to be INGOs' partners already had projects underway. Therefore, they were in contact with potential beneficiaries even before INGOs approached them. In their particular community, they knew who needed help. In return, people trusted these organisations, much more than the authorities at that time, because they were known and active on the ground. Anne Gilles explains: '*Before 2009, people refused to go to the offices of the health regional authorities. Even us [the MDM team], we were meeting them in [Iraqi] NGOs offices.*<sup>120</sup>' Consequently, INGOs, which were in need of implementing partners, assessed that LNGOs had valuable qualifications necessary to assume this role.

Most of the LNGOs that became partners with INGOs had quite efficient programs running before their association with international actors, as it was a selection criterion for them. They were already operational and operating. But INGOs' solicitations encouraged them to implement more projects. INGOs often provided missions or work for Iraqi NGOs. They came to local structures with ideas, a framework, and methods so that Iraqi NGOs could implement more and diverse activities on the ground. INGOs also offered financial means to Iraqi NGOs for program implementation. LNGOs answered the demands of international actors and, therefore, became more flexible in the type of activities that they were able to implement; this essentially widened their range of operations. In the process, they gained experience and professionalism. For example, they were the primary actors in emergency distribution<sup>121</sup>, a process which involves establishing beneficiary lists, monitoring distribution, and/or assessing if the most vulnerable populations were adequately served. '*It requires some professionalization, some competencies, some methods, some good processes*<sup>122</sup>.'

Working in partnership with INGOs improved the operational capacities of LNGOs to the extent that UN agencies and major donors decided to fund some of them directly<sup>123</sup>. Donors' also encouraged Iraqi NGOs to transition and diversify from pure service delivery into the fields of human rights, gender, child protection and monitoring political processes. Iraqi NGOs benefited from specific training sessions supported by INGOs, mostly on project implementation and management. After several years of work in cooperation with INGOs, LNGOs '*know more now about how to advocate for things, how to have better impact on things.*<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Interview with Anne Gilles

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Interview with Caroline Douilliez-Sabouba

<sup>123</sup> Carle A., Chkam H., op. cit., p. 30

<sup>124</sup> Interview with Hashim Al-Assaf

While their operational capacities strengthened, LNGOs had little incentive or space to truly define what they actually wanted to do. The projects that they were implementing were often designed without their advice, and most of the LNGOs could not afford to refuse implementing a project; after all, successful project implementation was a key source of funds and activities. As a result, a lot of Iraqi NGOs are non-specialized, conducting operations in fields where there is a demand coming from INGOs or donors. It also seems that LNGOs are not especially oriented towards reflecting on the values they are promoting, or the role(s) and impact(s) that they can have on Iraqi society. There is also little reflection on the ways in which beneficiaries may view and perceive them. *'They are not at all in the reflection which Western NGOs could have. No, they are here to help.'*<sup>125</sup> Few LNGOs are really worried about functioning internally in a democratic and transparent manner, even though such practices could push Iraqi civil society towards a path of democratization.

This phenomenon is partly due to the conception that INGOs had of their partnerships with LNGOs. INGOs in Iraq were confronted with a 'lack of capacity to build capacities.'<sup>126</sup> *'If you have a 'saving lives' project, if you have limited time, a pilot project, you cannot waste your time in building the capacities of NGOs.'*<sup>127</sup> Under these conditions, INGOs often just involved themselves in the bare minimum of capacity-building activities that were necessary for LNGOs to fulfill their duties in terms of financial and narrative reporting. Few training sessions were proposed by INGOs to provide LNGOs with information on the importance of internal, democratic governance, as well as drafting codes of conduct, abiding by humanitarian principles, and maintaining transparency in the organisation's functioning<sup>128</sup>. INGOs approached capacity-building for LNGOs in a very utilitarian way, or in the spirit of a sub-contracting relationship. This limited the development of LNGOs within a mainly operational/implementation role.

### **3. Aptitudes to Provide Information about the Iraqi Context**

After their departure from Iraq in late 2003-2004, international actors faced huge difficulties in collecting reliable data on Iraqi livelihoods, vulnerabilities, displacement and basic welfare needs. International agencies could no longer gather information themselves due to the security situation and their new approach of remote management. In general, the expatriate staff working on Iraqi humanitarian projects was also less experienced after 2004. Most of the expatriate staff members had never been to Iraq and could not accurately assess or fully understand the situation in the field. As a result, numerous actors in the Iraqi

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<sup>125</sup> Interview with Caroline Douilliez-Sabouba

<sup>126</sup> Stoddard A., Harmer A., Haver K., op. cit., p. 47

<sup>127</sup> Interview with Hashim Al-Assaf

<sup>128</sup> Mofarah Kasra, op. cit., p. 40

humanitarian scene considered that international organisations had an insufficient or erroneous understanding of the Iraqi context<sup>129</sup>, which misled them as they designed relief programs. An Iraqi advisor to the ICRC says: *'Some of the international programs are a bit strange to the Iraqis, like, especially, when it comes to women and children. They don't understand the social or the community code of conduct'*<sup>130</sup>.

Therefore, INGOs and UN agencies had to look for alternative sources of information. Data coming from the authorities was often incomplete, given the low capacity and level of functioning of the Iraqi state after 2003. Much of the information provided by the authorities was also likely to be distorted for political reasons, especially in the context of ethnic and sectarian conflict. Iraqi NGOs then appeared to have some inherent characteristics which could make them reliable information providers for INGOs. Their first asset was their direct presence in the field, which gave them unique knowledge about the local environment in its various cultural, social and political aspects. INGOs also initiated partnerships with LNGOs to access this information. Caroline Douilliez-Sabouba, a Project Manager at the ICRC, describes her relationships with local NGOs on this matter: *'The fact that I worked with women NGOs, it gave me a tremendous amount of information, knowledge of the context, of the issues, and a network of immediate contacts when I have questions'*<sup>131</sup>. LNGOs were ready-made information intermediaries for INGOs, because of their mere proximity to the Iraqi population and their daily functioning within the Iraqi context.

INGOs therefore rely on Iraqi NGOs' inherent or 'natural' aptitudes to provide information on the local security situation, as well as the dynamic needs of the Iraqi people. INGOs also encouraged LNGOs to develop these kinds of capacities. On one hand, INGOs often requested data that the LNGOs would not have collected in the first place, for their own initiatives. They looked into issues which they were not previously familiar with and were stimulated by INGOs to get in touch with various local actors. On the other hand, some INGOs specifically trained their Iraqi partners in order for them to become skilled and reliable information providers. Most of the time, the fact that LNGOs were on the field was not sufficient by itself. A lot of Iraqi NGOs had to learn how to collect, select and transmit information. INGOs helped them in this regard just by working with them, exchanging advice, and giving them recommendations on a case-by-case basis. They also organized some workshops in order to build the capacities of LNGOs in this regard.

The Focal Points Network, established by the NCCI in 2009, somehow institutionalized the function and concept of Iraqi NGOs as reliable and useful information

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<sup>129</sup> Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), *Research to Improve the Effectiveness of INGO Activities and Future Humanitarian Coordination in Iraq*, NRC, August 2009, Oslo, p. 30

<sup>130</sup> Interview with Omar Maktab

<sup>131</sup> Interview with Caroline Douilliez-Sabouba

providers. *'Working for Iraq, it means you have to know everything about Iraq,'* says Hashim Al-Assaf, the NCCI Iraqi Coordinator<sup>132</sup>. In order to offer a grassroots perspective and precise data on the constantly changing security and humanitarian situation to its members, the NCCI selected and trained LNGOs all over Iraq. On a bi-weekly basis, these structures had to collect and transmit all relevant information to the NCCI teams in Jordan and Iraq. The NCCI teams would then process and edit the data in order to publish it online as Focal Points Reports, which are accessible for NCCI members only. The system is currently improving with the inclusion of a digital map, which is now updated real-time, directly by the focal point NGOs. This LNGOs network has also been used for specific assessments on topics including health and protection. In cooperating with the NCCI, Iraqi NGOs improved their aptitude to gather information and increased their awareness of new means to spread it.

By searching for new solutions in order to pursue their activities in the Iraqi context, INGOs established relations with structures in the booming Iraqi NGO sector. This cooperation was primarily motivated by self-interest for the INGOs, and also on the LNGOs' part. The results were mixed. INGOs managed to maintain access to information about the humanitarian field in Iraq and projects in Iraq through Iraqi NGOs, but sometimes INGOs' efficiency and magnitude of impact was reduced. LNGOs obtained funds and work, i.e. programs to implement. They asserted themselves as structures that are able to act in a difficult environment, remain operational in the field, and serve as efficient data collectors. But as the consolidation of these developing capacities has not been fully supported by many international actors, these acquired skills may not be sufficient for long-term survival of LNGOs' operations. The nature of these first partnerships between INGOs and LNGOs has had a big influence on their present—and their future--relations. Even if the consequences are not all positive, INGOs and LNGOs at least gained some extent of knowledge about each other and developed an ability to work together. This gives INGOs and LNGOs more incentive to continue their cooperation in different ways when security conditions improve and the emergency phase is completed.

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<sup>132</sup> Interview with Hashim Al-Assaf

**Part II. IRAQ'S TRANSITION TOWARDS  
DEVELOPMENT: NEW ROLES TO PLAY FOR  
INGOs AND IRAQI NGOS**



Violence in Iraq reached its peak between the years 2006 and 2007. The website “Iraq Body Count” reports respectively 27, 797 and 24, 599 documented deaths from violence for these two years. Since May 2008, this rate never exceeded 1, 000 deaths per month<sup>133</sup>. Even though the period of intense sectarian and ethnic conflict seems to have passed, the Iraqi population must still face insecurity daily. The governorates of Baghdad, Ninewa and Diyala are particularly prone to regular mass explosions and indiscriminate attacks<sup>134</sup>. The parliamentary elections of March 2010 have increased tensions at this level and the current political impasse makes it difficult to make a prognosis for security in Iraq for the years to come. At the humanitarian level, the situation remains very difficult to assess, as it varies considerably throughout the different regions of Iraq: the KRG in the North seems to be entering the phase of economic take-off, while rural areas of the country, especially in the South, remain entangled in deep poverty.

Huge needs persist in terms of protection or basic services delivery, but humanitarian crisis and emergency operations are less and less relevant today. ‘*We are near to start the recovery period*,<sup>135</sup>’ assesses Hashim Al-Assaf. Even though changes are certainly occurring in Iraq, numerous international actors point to this dynamic -- probably very too quickly -- to justify decreasing or ending their support to the country. The American military withdrawal, as well as the phase-out of traditional aid donors, are two striking examples of this trend. Confronted with this phenomenon, appeals have been raised from military leaders, policy decision-makers, and humanitarian workers, asking the international community to not turn its back on Iraq. Iraq still needs the support of the international community in order to completely reach a development phase, away from humanitarian crisis and persistent insecurity. Many fear that without this aid, Iraq could return to violence and chaos, making the international coalition intervention of 2003 an irreparable, unjustified failure.

In this transitional period, new roles are taking shape for Iraqi NGOs and INGOs active in Iraq. Some factors are pushing these two groups of actors to think about their long-term goals and how their mission should be adapted should Iraq reach a viable state of recovery and development. Medium-term, the main challenge facing NGOs is finding a way to cope with the recent, drastic reduction of financial resources for humanitarian aid delivery and development in Iraq, in order to guarantee the sustainability and continuance of basic service delivery and other projects. In the long-term, Iraqi NGOs and INGOs have to decide if they are willing to remain in Iraq and face the longer term process of reconstructing Iraq, and how such a task should be approached.

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<sup>133</sup> Iraq Body Count, *Documented civilian death from violence, Monthly table*, <http://www.iraqbodycount.org/database/> (accessed September 10, 2010)

<sup>134</sup> Mercy Corps, NGO Coordination Committee for Iraq and others, *Fallen off the agenda? More and better aid needed for Iraq recovery*, July 2010, p. 5

<sup>135</sup> Interview with Hashim Al-Assaf

## Chapter I. Current Donors' Withdrawal from Iraq: A Common Challenge Facing Iraqi NGOs and INGOs

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Until now, Iraqi NGOs and INGOs were mostly financed bilaterally by states, and particularly the US, as well as regional and international organisations. Changes in the priorities of these donors are leading to drastic drops in project funding for humanitarian aid and development in Iraq. According to a policy brief published by a coalition of NGOs in July 2010, the European Commission and many EU member states, including the United Kingdom as one of the largest contributors, radically reduced their aid budgets for Iraq in 2010-2011. The trend of US assistance to Iraq is also dropping in parallel<sup>136</sup>.

The argument put forward by traditional donors is that 'Iraq is a rich country.'<sup>137</sup> Indeed, Iraq's tapped oil reserves places it third after Saudi Arabia and Iran in comprising the world's largest oil reserves<sup>138</sup>. Iraqi government revenues are based on this resource, with 86% coming from crude oil exports in 2008. According to Omar Maktab, an Iraqi political analyst, the Iraqi state budget exceeds those of neighboring countries, such as Jordan. But the Iraqi state still lacks the effective capacity—and perhaps the necessary will—to make these profits benefit the Iraqi population first and foremost with the provision of basic services: '*The Iraqi state currently is unable and will be unable to serve the population for a long time to come*'<sup>139</sup>. Some donors, such as the European Commission, are responding to this criticism by concentrating their funding efforts on building the Iraqi authorities' capacity. Other donors are accusing INGOs to being too far away from the field, even as more international organisations actually reopen their offices in Iraq every year.

Donors' change in strategies for Iraq have affected both Iraqi NGOs and INGOs. If a vast proportion of these organisations leave the country or close their offices, the necessary recovery of basic services and security in Iraq will remain in peril. Some organisations are currently adopting new approaches in order to continue their activities, while the Iraqi people's multiplicity of unmet basic needs remain.

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<sup>136</sup> Mercy Corps, NGO Coordination Committee for Iraq and others, op. cit., p. 2

<sup>137</sup> Interviews with Hashim Al-Assaf and Omar Maktab

<sup>138</sup> Cordesman Anthony H., *Economic Challenges in Post-Conflict Iraq*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, March 17, 2010, p. 10

<sup>139</sup> Interview with Omar Maktab

## Section I. The Necessity of Reflecting on the Presence of INGOs in Iraq

Donors are currently proposing the argument that INGOs are not really present in the field in Iraq, and therefore deserve a reduction or discontinuation of funding of their projects. While this perception is unrealistic and neglects to acknowledge that most NGOs are actually developing a closer, more involved presence in the field, it also holds some truth. The remote approaches of project delivery that were adopted by INGOs in past years does make less sense as security conditions continue to improve in many parts of Iraq. Therefore, each INGO operating service delivery in Iraq via remote programming must now face the following questions: Should they return to Iraq? If so, how can they do it? Returning to Iraq also presents a renewed opportunity to establish different, more equitable partnerships with Iraqi NGOs.

### 1. Modalities and Difficulties in Returning to the Field

Donors encourage INGOs to return to Iraq in both direct and indirect ways. Many donors now refuse to fund any projects from INGOs that are still implementing projects via remote management, and which do not have a constant presence of expatriate staff in Iraq. UN agencies, for example, are now stating that they prefer to finance projects through local actors directly, rather than through partnerships with INGOs. While many UN agencies are reopening some of their offices in Baghdad, they are not necessarily closer to the field than many INGOs that operate within and outside of Iraq. These UN offices are largely contained within the Green Zone, an insulated area of Baghdad.

In order to counter these justifications for refusing finances, INGOs have to plan their return to Iraq. As aid budgets decrease, this is forcing INGOs to think about more efficient ways to continue their activities in Iraq. Remote approaches proved their general lack of efficiency in the past, increasing transportation costs, difficulties in staff recruitment, and a multiplication of intermediaries. In the long-term, a return to Iraq could actually save money, allowing INGOs to carry on similar projects as now in Iraq with an even lower budget.

Apart from donors' pressure, INGOs' ethics and principles encourage them to return and resettle in Iraq. According to a manager of a European NGO, '*Returning to Iraq is absolutely necessary. With an intention of efficiency, it is possible to do more things, better by being in Iraq*<sup>140</sup>.' Remote approaches have limited INGOs' monitoring and evaluation capacities. It is also responsible for the emergence of opaqueness and a lack of transparency in terms of the ways that some INGOs conduct their activities. Finally, the

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<sup>140</sup> Interview with Anne Gilles

impact on the beneficiaries is less than optimal with a remote approach. The necessity of proximity grows with the progressive shift in INGOs projects, from short-term, emergency relief to long-term development. In practical terms, this could mean that there is less food and non-food items distribution, and in its place there would be more vocational training and capacity-building. These types of activities are more prone to practices of misconduct in remote management, and certainly require close supervision from INGOs.

Even though more INGOs are beginning a return to Iraq, and in turn increasing their field visits and office resettlements, some elements are still hindering a massive movement of INGOs back to Iraq. Security in Iraq is still an issue, as large-scale security incidents have increased, both in the run-up to the parliamentary elections and in the enduring post-election period<sup>141</sup>. There is always a possibility, with the current political blocking, that violence levels similar to 2005-2006 could return in Iraq. *'We are in a similar transition period as in 2006, when Samarra bombing<sup>142</sup> happened. Today, there is a fear of seeing the same things reoccur<sup>143</sup>.'* Departure from Iraq in 2004 was also experienced as a real traumatic event, creating the lasting image of Iraq as one of the most dangerous countries for humanitarian workers and relief operation implementation. It is therefore understandable that a proportion of INGOs' expatriate staff members are still reluctant to return and resettle in Iraq.

Partly linked to the unstable security situation, the costs of an INGOs' resettlement in Iraq is also daunting. INGOs cannot avoid relinquishing on protection, surveillance and high-communication materials, as well as strict security codes for operation implementation. The option of weapons use and armed deterrence is rejected by most INGOs<sup>144</sup>, and alternatives such as low-profile armored vehicles or compounds are also costly. During a meeting organized by NCCI, which explored the feasibility of a collective return of INGOs to Iraq, the executive coordinator of a European NGO assessed that such vehicles would cost about \$95,000 per vehicle, and that it would require multi-millions in funding to have a compound in Baghdad today. The security costs could reach even higher, depending on the security standards of a particular INGO. Strict security precautions would have also have to be adopted, which would require additional trainings and resources. For example, humanitarian workers would have to regularly change routes to their compounds, and schedules would

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<sup>141</sup> Mercy Corps, NGO Coordination Committee for Iraq and others, op. cit., p. 1

<sup>142</sup> On February 22, 2006, the bombing of the Al-Askari Mosque in Samarra marked an escalation in sectarian tensions between Iraq's Sunni and Shi'ite Arabs

<sup>143</sup> Interview with Anne Gilles

<sup>144</sup> NCCI, *Minutes of the meeting of the 'Returning to Iraq: Options, Challenges and Opportunities' working group*, August 22, 2010

have to be consistently—yet unpredictably—modified in order to reduce the threat of possible attack<sup>145</sup>.

In order to cope with these issues and make a return to Iraq possible, INGOs are attempting to shape adaptation strategies, both individually and collectively. Anne Gilles, a manager of the Iraqi Mission of MDM, explains what is discussed among her INGO's team: '*It is not easy to convince teams to return to Iraq. Therefore, the first step would be to have one permanent expatriate [in Iraq] and still maintain an office in Amman. The second step would be to close the Iraqi Mission office in Amman, while maybe keeping a regional office there [...] in order to always make it possible for people to come back to Jordan*<sup>146</sup>.' In any case, a progressive approach tends to be adopted that could take into account any evolution or change in the security conditions of multiple Iraqi locations. The majority of INGOs are ready to resettle in Erbil, the capital of the stable KRG, even though some question the usefulness of such a choice, considering the lower needs of the Kurdistan region. But a resettlement in Baghdad can also prove to be inefficient and dangerous, given the difficulties of circulating and operating in the insecure governorate.

The NCCI is positioned as a relevant and capable exchange platform through which INGOs might discover solutions together. In the past months, the NCCI has hosted a number of meetings for a working group titled 'Returning to Iraq: Options, Challenges and Opportunities.' This working group is currently discussing the possibility of purchasing an INGOs' joint facility in Baghdad. It could be used as a permanent headquarters for some NGOs, or for temporary visits for some staff members. This joint facility would require the participation and commitment of a minimum of three to four INGOs. It would also present a means to share the costs for INGOs, including the costs of rent, vehicles, and hiring security personnel like guards. The risks of such an approach should also be carefully considered. A concentration of international humanitarian workers in the same central location could draw more the attention from potentially hostile groups<sup>147</sup>. INGOs are also considering the option of a collective return in order to reduce the potential isolation of their expatriate staff in a city such as Baghdad. Moving is quite difficult and risky in Baghdad. INGOs' expatriate staff members who currently work in Baghdad are often confined to their offices, and may have little to minimal communication with Iraq outside of their INGO's staff. This also explains the reluctance of humanitarian workers to return to Iraq. Offering a joint facility where INGOs' personnel can exchange between more diverse actors might encourage more INGOs to

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<sup>145</sup> NCCI, *Minutes of the meeting of the 'Returning to Iraq: Options, Challenges and Opportunities' working group*, August 22, 2010

<sup>146</sup> Interview with Anne Gilles

<sup>147</sup> NCCI, *Minutes of the meeting of the 'Returning to Iraq: Options, Challenges and Opportunities' working group*, August 22, 2010

return to Iraq. It would also be a means to enhance coordination and information sharing between organisations, which has proved crucial in the often volatile and dynamic Iraqi context.

## 2. INGOs Increased Proximity with Iraqi NGOs

The first partnerships between INGOs and LNGOs, driven by remote management approaches, were often characterized as subcontracting and/or a financing/financed relationship. INGOs generally lacked the ability to closely monitor LNGOs' activities, or to participate in considerable capacity-building. Therefore, for a certain number of Iraqi NGOs, INGOs are perceived similar to donor agencies, along with UN bodies or governmental aid agencies, like USAID. When asked about the different Western NGOs with which they had cooperated, members from an Iraqi NGO working in Baghdad on peace building and conflict resolution cited the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the Canadian bilateral agency. To the question, 'What were the positive aspects of the cooperation of your organisation with a Western NGO?' another Iraqi NGO staff member replied that there was a chance to diversify funds<sup>148</sup>. These answers are characteristic of a confusion between humanitarian actors that is reigning in Iraq, but also reflects the type of relationships that could have been set up between INGOs and Iraqi NGOs. Anne Gilles reports that MDM faced difficulties in trying to identify those Iraqi NGOs that were not only interested by the funds that the INGO could give them access to. '*We tried to set up a partnership with Al-Amal, but they were only expecting us to be donors, so we dropped the idea*<sup>149</sup>'. More often, INGOs need to distinguish themselves from other types of organisations. And an INGO's position with LNGOs requires the INGO to explain its purpose and goals in clear terms. For example, some Iraqi NGOs have been baffled about the European NGOs' refusal to accept funding from American institutions, as many Iraqis interchangeably associate the two entities.

It can be argued that a funding relationship is at least a direct and honest way for INGOs to support local actors<sup>150</sup>. But with the reduction of their financial resources, a lot of INGOs will no longer have as the adequate fund channels to partner with Iraqi NGOs. Furthermore, few Iraqi NGOs are now receiving more funds for projects in Iraq than their Western counterparts. Consequently, partnerships based only on financial aspects are not likely sustainable. INGOs will have to choose either to abandon their support to LNGOs, or to broaden their relations with LNGOs beyond the criteria or condition of financial support. This might present an opportunity to establish more equal cooperation, based on exchanging information, ideas and methods rather than simply money transactions. One could even

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<sup>148</sup> Survey among seven Iraqi NGOs, conducted in June and July, 2010

<sup>149</sup> Interview with Anne Gilles

<sup>150</sup> INTRAC, op. cit., p. 1

imagine INGOs orientating Iraqi structures towards potential funding organisations which are different from those that financed Iraqi reconstruction and are currently withdrawing. *'Numerous donors in the [Middle East] region are centered on development and civil societies' strengthening. It is up to us [the INGOs] to be the link between these donors and local associations by giving them the competencies to be able to bring projects.*<sup>151</sup> Sitting together and discussing issues, even if they concern financial aspects, seems to be the basis of a sound collaboration between LNGOs and INGOs. In order to do realize this, INGOs should also be more present in Iraq.

While most INGOs' choice to adopt remote program management strategies left space for LNGOs to develop as operational and implementing organisations, this absence itself did not help to build the capacities of many Iraqi NGOs. According to the Iraqi Coordinator of NCCI, *'[...] being outside Iraq affected negatively the building of the capacities of NGOs. [...] In general, there is no direct relation between being in remote management and the NGOs improving their capacities*<sup>152</sup>. Remote approaches involved little monitoring and evaluation of the projects implemented by local partners. Trainings, if they took place, often lacked any follow-up. Exchanges on practices were rarely enough to make partnerships a positive learning process of development for LNGOs.

A lot of Iraqi NGOs' staff members are criticizing remote management and do not consider it as the optimum partnership modality. The time for decision-making is often considered too long, as a consequence of the absence of INGOs headquarters in Iraq. Grave misunderstandings, particularly about the Iraqi security and humanitarian context, have emerged. This is partially due to many INGOs' considerable distance from the field. Yet far from thinking that a return of INGOs in Iraq could be threaten their operations, Iraqi NGOs often express a desire to see INGOs return to establish a direct and permanent presence in Iraq. Many Iraqi NGOs perceive this as the first step in the establishment of real and horizontal partnerships.

More INGOs are currently involving themselves in capacity-building activities, as the reconstruction of dilapidated infrastructure and provision of equipment, costly and technically-oriented projects, appear to be less necessary. But capacity-building could also be one consequence of a better monitoring of projects' implementation, as overseen by IOs to LNGOs while they work collaboratively on a daily basis. Some IOs managed to keep a close monitoring of the projects they were handing over to LNGOs. Caroline Douilliez-Sabouba describes the process at the ICRC, where LNGOs are partners to select and support micro-projects for female-headed households: *'For micro-projects, the ICRC follows*

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<sup>151</sup> Interview with Anne Gilles

<sup>152</sup> Interview with Hashim Al-Assaf

*the process from the beginning to the end. So LNGOs are doing the work but we are wholeheartedly behind. We don't just give the money. We are monitoring the project and assessing it. We go to see the women, often directly*<sup>153</sup>. For the moment, the results of this approach seem to be quite positive: *'I hope that working with us [the ICRC], makes them learn things too*<sup>154</sup>. A lot of Iraqi NGOs are recognizing the IOs' potential contributions to strengthen and build their capacity due to IOs' considerably longer and varied experiences<sup>155</sup>. But most LNGOs are also convinced that they could benefit more from a direct INGO presence in Iraq<sup>156</sup>.

## **Section II. New Urgency for Iraqi NGOs Function Autonomously**

Donor withdrawal and disengagement from Iraq is directly threatening the survival of numerous Iraqi NGOs. A lot of LNGOs benefitted from the relative ease of accessing adequate funding for humanitarian and reconstruction projects in the first years of their existence, post US-led invasion in 2003. In that period, most LNGOs not attempt to diversify their funding sources. Consequently, hundreds of LNGOs are disappearing. Only those LNGOs who have managed to network with the few remaining donors—who have not yet cut their funding for projects in Iraq—will be able to continue their activities. Confronted by this phenomenon, some Iraqi NGOs are turning towards INGOs for help, creating new areas of cooperation between these two sets of actors.

### **1. Extinction Trends and Rising Competition in the Iraqi NGO Sector**

Obtaining sufficient funding is one of the first concerns for Iraqi NGOs. In a survey that the NCCI Iraqi team conducted with 375 LNGOs in 2010, a vast majority of the organisations ranked inadequate project funding as their first preoccupation<sup>157</sup>. The drastic decline of international donors' interests in and budgets for Iraq is causing mounting concern in the Iraqi NGO sector, as most LNGOs are dependent on international aid for their functioning to varying extents. Donors are now more conservative and cautious in terms of financing projects in Iraq. Donors have more willingness and capacity to monitor LNGOs and to require their accountability. Therefore, structures that formally received American or UN funding and failed to effectively implement or document successful projects are quickly disappearing from the Iraqi humanitarian field.

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<sup>153</sup> Interview with Caroline Douilliez-Sabouba

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Survey among seven Iraqi NGOs, conducted in June/July 2010

<sup>156</sup> Interview with Hashim Al-Assaf

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.



Other LNGOs that wish to continue their work are currently striving to convince previous donors to Iraq that they are still worth financing, or to find alternate and more diverse sources of funding. *'Now, [Iraqi NGOs] begin to ask themselves some questions because they feel that the UN and American agencies are approaching them less'*<sup>158</sup>. But in some cases, LNGOs' partnerships with private foreign companies, American structures or INGOs were not transparent; this may have discredited certain LNGOs in the eyes of both Iraqis and donors<sup>159</sup>. Some Iraqi communities associate LNGOs with the occupying forces, resulting in mistrust and misunderstanding. As a result, some Iraqi NGOs could be deprived of a minor yet potentially sustainable source of funding from their own local communities. As the Iraqi state's revenues will probably rise, due to the progressive development of the petroleum sector, the Iraqi government is now another potential source of funds for LNGOs. Iraqi authorities are already subsidizing some organisations. Moreover, with the new NGO law, some NGOs will be granted "public utility status," thereby exempting them from paying certain taxes<sup>160</sup>.

Which types of Iraqi NGOs will manage to maintain access funding from major donors and obtain new sources of funding? According to Hashim Al-Assaf, *'The ones with a clear view, a humanitarian mission to do, and a clear vision will continue. The NGOs supported by political parties will continue too'*<sup>161</sup>. Some Iraqi political parties are using resources of the Iraqi state, and can influence international stakeholders. As a result, NGOs affiliated with a dominant or influential political party are not as threatened by the current funding crisis as non-affiliated LNGOs, who wish to remain independent of governmental structures and parties. Apart from these structures, donors are prioritizing funding for well-structured Iraqi NGOs' projects, or those NGOs that are functioning autonomously and fostering strong connections with the international community. Caroline Douilliez-Sabouba illustrates this in speaking about one of the ICRC's partners: *'[The founder of this Iraqi NGO] is a woman who was educated in the US, from a great Iraqi family. It is different from the basic and local NGOs, which don't necessarily have knowledge about the Western world [...] She has many partners such as the International Organization for Migration, the US Institute for Peace. She is not needy in terms of finances, because she is really efficient.'*<sup>162</sup> More selective access to funds will probably eliminate a proportion of NGOs that were basically ineffective, empty shells, yet this phenomenon of decreased donor support to LNGOs also poses considerable risks.

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<sup>158</sup> Interview with Anne Gilles

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> NCCI, *Interview about the New Iraqi NGO Law with Legal Advisor Kareem Elbayar*, NCCI Op-Ed, June 13, 2010, p. 4

<sup>161</sup> Interview with Hashim Al-Assaf

<sup>162</sup> Interview with Caroline Douilliez-Sabouba

Donors are likely to concentrate on a small number of Iraqi NGOs that clearly demonstrate an ability to meet international standards and hold an extensive network of connections. There is a multiplying effect, as an Iraqi NGO that has been supported by one donor agency is more likely to draw the attention of other funding aid structures. There are two main risks inherent with these phenomena. Some Iraqi NGOs may be stormed by international organisations that are searching for partners. In turn, those Iraqi NGOs would be encouraged to conduct more projects, and might accept more than they can actually efficiently implement, with the risk of leading to a loss of quality. By having too much to do, these LNGOs will progressively move away from the field and be less able to understand populations' situation. The second risk of the donors' concentration on one type or a small group of LNGOs is a possible loss of diversity in the Iraqi NGO sector as a whole. A staff member of Rafidain Peace Organization, an Iraqi NGO active in Baghdad, describes this phenomenon: *'[Western NGOs] work with a limited number of Iraqi NGOs; often, the Iraqi NGOs that have offices abroad are distant from the real needs of the local communities.'*<sup>163</sup> Many grass-roots, small and medium-sized organisations will no longer receive adequate support and funding; many of these organisations will likely close down, or experience a period of frozen operations. Furthermore, this system will *'antagonise those who are left outside'*<sup>164</sup> and create deep divisions and resentment between the structures that have access to important funding and those who do not.

Fierce competition and a lack of solidarity among the various components of the Iraqi NGO sector are the result of fund scarcity, as well as the concentration of funds within the hands of a few LNGOs. A humanitarian aid worker describes the world of the Iraqi NGOs as quite competitive: *'The contacts they have, they never give them to each other. When they are in meetings and are saying that they are doing this type of project, they rarely say who is financing it. They don't give each other any kind of hints, maybe because the others will think, 'Oh, these ones are paying, I will try to steal them from them.' It is a kind of a jungle.'* When asked about their suggestions as to how INGOs could better support Iraqi NGOs, team members of a well-established and experienced Kurdish NGO answered that, *'[INGOs should] build partnerships with the NGOs that have good humanitarian resources and can deal with critical issues that need good experience; [INGOs should] not [build partnerships] with the NGOs that have low capacities.'*<sup>165</sup> Could this be a way to disqualify potential rivals? Impossible solidarity is undermining the influence, power and development of common values within the Iraqi NGO sector. The NCCI and some INGOs are willing to facilitate

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<sup>163</sup> Survey conducted among seven Iraqi NGOs in June-July 2010

<sup>164</sup> Carle A., Chkam H., op. cit., p. 30

<sup>165</sup> Survey conducted among seven Iraqi NGOs in June-July 2010

communication between these structures in order to encourage working together, even though solidarity and cooperation is not always the prerogative of INGOs. Several specialists in NGOs and civil society are seeing the 'building of alliances for mutual support'<sup>166</sup> and the 'development of networks for advocacy, joint analysis and fundraising'<sup>167</sup> as key elements for organisations which want to help NGOs to confront any challenges that limit their effectiveness. Iraqi NGOs are seeking INGOs to assist in developing this function.

## **2. Growing Iraqi NGOs' Demands that INGOs Share their Experience and Methods**

Witnessing the progressive withdrawal of American contractors and agencies, as well as UN bodies, Iraqi NGOs are currently seeking different means to guarantee their survival. Until recently, American structures and UN agencies were the major donors for local actors' projects. INGOs appear as kind of a model, given their experience, autonomous functioning, and well-established methods and principles. For a staff member of the Iraqi Youth League, which was created in 2003, '*These [international] NGOs possess the vast experience required to run an NGO.*'<sup>168</sup> Therefore, some LNGOs are currently getting in touch with INGOs in order to ask for their assistance. As the manager of an American NGO observes: '*It is [...] one thing that many LNGOs approach us for – capacity building and training. They have no one else to turn to*'<sup>169</sup>. Anne Gilles, from MDM, has witnessed the same trend and reports the common demands of Iraqi NGOs that approach MDM: '*How could we continue to work in our country, and according to which modalities? We don't know how to write proposals. We don't know how to evaluate needs. We are ready to help you, but help us too*'<sup>170</sup>. Even though some Iraqi NGOs are well-structured and are already functioning autonomously, the majority of them need assistance and training on crucial aspects of NGO work and functioning, ranging from establishing their mission and vision to strategic planning and financial management.<sup>171</sup>

One of the first demands of Iraqi NGOs is related to the actual process designing and proposing humanitarian or development projects. Because most Iraqi NGOs were limited to the role of project implementer in the past seven years, Iraqi NGOs had rarely been involved in all of the steps of generating a project cycle. Iraqi NGOs have regularly criticized INGOs, as well as other international humanitarian actors, for asking LNGOs to implement 'off the

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<sup>166</sup> Brown D., Kalegaonkar A., op. cit., p. 231

<sup>167</sup> Christoplos Ian, op. cit., p. 52

<sup>168</sup> Survey among seven Iraqi NGOs conducted in June-July 2010

<sup>169</sup> E-mail communication with Mercy Corps team

<sup>170</sup> Interview with Anne Gilles

<sup>171</sup> E-mail communications with Mercy Corps team

shelves programmes<sup>172</sup> without consulting local actors for their advice or input. Iraqi NGOs were also rarely involved in conducting needs assessments, and therefore did not develop sufficient skills related to this critical field. Iraqi NGOs are now requesting that INGOs invite Iraqi NGOs to participate in designing Iraqi programmes. According to one Kurdish NGO, People Aid Organisation (PAO), *'[INGOs should] send a work team to the area when the need and/or the problem is identified to discuss the project with the local NGOs, and to study the future plan and the ways in which the project will be implemented.'*<sup>173</sup> Experiences of cooperation at this level have been described quite positively by many Iraqi NGOs. Massala Organization for Human Development, an Iraqi NGO active in Erbil since 2004, reports a fruitful collaboration with the Spanish NGO Nova: *'They don't oblige Iraqi NGOs to meet their conditions. They consult Iraqi NGOs on their projects.'*<sup>174</sup>

Some INGOs are willing and attempting to establish this kind of relationship with LNGOs, based on exchange and collective reflection. MDM, which has a tradition of partnering with local initiatives worldwide, has always sought out promising partner organisations with which the MDM staff members can consult, work on needs assessments and programme evaluations, and establish close relations around mutual projects. The mid-term objective is for LNGOs to be able to set-up projects themselves from the beginning stage, from identifying the problems and unmet needs facing a particular vulnerable population to implementing the project and running its daily affairs. If INGOs can teach the methods necessary to design humanitarian and development projects, they can also be a source of ideas and inspiration for Iraqi NGOs in the many forms that a project can potentially take. Caroline Douilliez-Sabouba partnered with several LNGOs to implement a project that aimed to help women register for welfare allowances, and supporting them with by covering transportation costs: *'They are really happy to do that because some say, 'That's a great idea. We did not think about it.' That's what is awesome; if we stop, they might continue by themselves.'*<sup>175</sup>

The other set of LNGOs' demands concerns all of the aspects of an NGO's daily functioning. LNGOs want to improve their financial and administrative management skills, as well as learn how to write proposals and conduct fundraising activities. According to Massala Organization for Humanitarian Development, in order to better support LNGOs, INGOs should *'assist partner Iraqi NGOs to correct their system, such as administration, programs, public relations, media, etc., and put them on the right track.'*<sup>176</sup> This type of cooperation has been more common, beginning with the establishment of partnerships between INGOs and

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<sup>172</sup> Interview with Omar Maktab

<sup>173</sup> Survey among seven Iraqi NGOs conducted in June-July 2010

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> Interview with Caroline Douilliez-Sabouba

<sup>176</sup> Survey among seven Iraqi NGOs conducted in June-July 2010

LNGOs. For instance, the Iraqi Al-Amal Association cooperated with the Dutch Hivos Knowledge Programme in order to improve Al-Amal's administrative and financial management practices. Ian Cristopolos, a specialist of humanitarian action's modalities, explains one possible motivation for this phenomenon: '*Ubiquitous training of local partners in financial management and proposal-writing may be motivated at first by a rather selfish desire on the part of the Northern agencies to make their Southern/Eastern partners more 'presentable' to potential donors.*'<sup>177</sup> But this must not mask the fact that INGOs' trainings on such issues have helped to develop many Iraqi NGOs' skills and capacity. Credible financial management and the ability to prepare a logical framework are both preconditions that allow LNGOs to autonomously conduct their own fundraising activities. Apart from trainings, INGOs can contribute to building LNGOs' self-sufficiency by sharing their connections and providing LNGOs with access to their more well-established networks. Caroline Douilliez-Sabouba describes how she and her ICRC team are trying to include their Iraqi NGOs' partners in nearly every aspect of their daily work, including participation in coordination meetings with other INGOs on sectorial issues.

Some INGOs have developed ad hoc capacity-building activities by choosing to conduct projects in close cooperation with their Iraqi partners and by associating these partners with every stage of the process. For instance, the American NGO Mercy Corps is currently conducting an "NGO Empowerment Program" in Kirkuk and Ninewa, financed by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The project comprises two elements. The first element consists of LNGOs' formal trainings on project management, minimum standards and accountability, organisational management, networking, advocacy, and project evaluation. The second element follows a learning-by-doing approach, in which selected NGOs receive microgrants in order to implement projects to assist IDPs and returnees<sup>178</sup>.

What factors have encouraged some INGOs to respond to the Iraqi NGO sector's demand for more assistance in capacity-building? In the case of the Mercy Corps "NGO Empowerment Program," there is a budget for such capacity-building, and the donors also expressed interest in this activity. But Caroline Douilliez-Sabouba explains that in the case of the ICRC, this choice is motivated first by self-interest; it is a way for the ICRC to fulfill its mission but also a question of ethics. '*We also think that it is useful, and that in the long term, this [capacity-building] will allow some ideas to survive.*'<sup>179</sup> Some INGOs are indeed thinking

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<sup>177</sup> Cristopolos Ian, op. cit., Cristopolos Ian, op. cit., p. 47

<sup>178</sup> E-mail communication with Mercy Corps team

<sup>179</sup> Interview with Caroline Douilliez-Sabouba

about the long-term impacts of their presence in Iraq and about their eventual, final departure. Some Iraqi NGOs are also joining INGOs to reflect about these issues, as well as the future role and influence of Iraqi civil society, and the best way to develop its potential.

## **Chapter II. International and Iraqi NGOs' Involvement in Shaping the Long-Term Future of the Iraqi Civil Society**

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Beyond financial survival, a long-term challenge for Iraqi NGOs is defining themselves, their positions, and their influences on society. Reduced to the role of simple operators by international actors involved in the reconstruction of Iraq, many Iraqi NGOs now have more capacity to function and conduct projects with increased autonomy. But they still have to determine for what sectors they want to work, in which activities they are willing to specialize in order to gain expertise, and their final goals. The Iraqi NGO sector must also find its place between the state and the population, and decide how it wants to work with these two entities.

During the current transition period, the willingness and the commitment of INGOs to support Iraqi civil society is becoming more apparent. It is no longer only a matter of self-interest to partner with LNGOs as the conditions are progressively allowing many INGOs to work on the ground-level in Iraq. For some INGOs, partnerships with local actors are part of their ethics as solidarity organisations, as well as a result of their reflections on their actions' long-term impacts. Connected to this idea of leaving sustainable results behind, some international actors are actively collaborating with Iraqi NGOs to guarantee their survival, independence and development.

### **Section I. Defining the Relation between Iraqi Civil Society and the State**

Civil society and state are linked per se. The Iraqi civil society and the Iraqi NGO sector particularly developed after 2003, partly to fill and occupy the vacuum left by their failing state. Today, the Iraqi state is progressively recovering its capacity and Iraqi NGOs must position themselves regarding strengthening governmental authorities. Some Iraqi NGOs have been approached with proposals to partner with public institutions, despite some risks that this may pose. The international community has been working in cooperation with Iraqi NGOs to provide them with a legal framework of their rights and responsibilities in the new Iraqi NGO law.

## 1. The New NGO Law: A Guarantee of Independence Won with the International Community's Support

On January 25, 2010, the Iraqi Council of Representatives (CoR) adopted the new Law on Non-Governmental Organisations. It came into force on April 7, 2010 even though it is not enforced yet. This new law was the outcome of years of discussions and negotiations between the Iraqi governmental authorities, Iraqi civil society, and representatives of international organisations<sup>180</sup>. These efforts led to the adoption of one of the most progressive laws on this matter in the Middle Eastern region. This new law puts down the legal basis of an independent civil society with sufficient space and freedom to strengthen its role in the recovery and development of Iraq. Ensuring that government intervention on NGOs and CSOs activities and functioning can only take place under a certain legal framework is essential for the long-term future of the Iraqi civil society. According to Ziad Abdel Samad, the Executive Director of the Arab NGO Network for Development in 2008, an inadequate legal framework is one of the obstructive barriers limiting CSOs abilities to increase their impacts and improve society<sup>181</sup>. Therefore, the liberal character of the new NGO law and its overall compliance with international best practices should further encourage the development of the Iraqi NGO sector.

The central government, which is currently paralyzed in political deadlock, is in a crucial period in which it must regain its authority and sovereignty. For this reason, it may attempt to limit the role of NGOs in Iraqi society. *'The creation of a new Iraqi state, the strengthening of the government, and the centralization could also mean that associations will be a bit put aside because they also represent a kind of expression which is necessary to control.'*<sup>182</sup> The Iraqi state will have more resources coming from the petroleum sector; this will allow the state transition into the status of a stockholder state, similar to a majority of Arab countries. This kind of state does not generally need the support of the society, for it does not get its revenues from taxes, but rather from oil exports<sup>183</sup>. As a result, the Iraqi civil society needs protection against a potentially more powerful state. This necessity explains the ideological and practical struggles which preceded the adoption of this law and the challenges that remain for its implementation.

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<sup>180</sup> International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL), Iraq, ICNL website, <http://www.icnl.org/knowledge/ngolawmonitor/iraq.htm> (page consulted on August 28, 2010)

<sup>181</sup> Samad Z., op. cit., p. 7

<sup>182</sup> Interview with Anne Gilles

<sup>183</sup> Interview with Omar Maktab

During the last seven years, NGOs in Iraq were regulated by different legal texts, all of them endorsing strong governmental control over civil society<sup>184</sup>. For more insight into the general spirit of these regulations, one can just quote the preamble of the “CPA Order No. 45: Non-Governmental Organisations,” which was issued in 2003 and is applicable in the central and southern regions of Iraq. The CPA is ‘*determined to ensure the security of the Iraqi people and prevent the misuse of non-governmental organisations for fraudulent or illegal purposes.*’<sup>185</sup> As a consequence, registration was mandatory. NGOs that were not registered were prohibited from operating in Iraq. Restrictive conditions had to be met before a new NGO could be formally established and granted recognition by the CPA. Upon registration, NGOs were forced to disclose a vast quantity of potentially sensitive data to the authorities. In the case of an order passed by the American forces, this type of vision of the NGOs is in-line with the post-September 11 atmosphere, during which NGO work in the Arab world was suspect to have links with “terrorism.”<sup>186</sup> But the measures adopted under the Kurdish National Assembly Law Number 15 and the Sulaimaniya Governorate Decision Number 297, both applicable in the KRG, were quite similar. Hoshyar Malo, a lawyer and the Director of the NGO Human Rights Watch in Kurdistan, explains that, especially in the Middle East, neither the people nor the governments believe that the right of association and assembly are fundamental. Malo elaborated, ‘*Even where the government allows individuals to establish associations, this is seen more like a gift or a bonus from the government to the people.*’<sup>187</sup> This understanding of human rights in the Middle East helped give birth to the restrictive legislations which were in force in Iraq until recently.

In June 2004, the CPA was disbanded and Iraqi sovereignty was officially restored. From this time, Iraqi government officials and international and domestic NGOs representatives constantly struggled, negotiated and constructed new drafts for an innovative NGO law. Two main concepts were in direct opposition. The first one, supported by Iraqi authorities’ representatives, was calling for more government control, especially on foreign NGOs, leading potentially to more isolation of Iraq from the rest of the world. The second one, promoted by civil society leaders and the international community, requested more freedom of association in Iraq. This vision was more consistent with international standards and best practices, and particularly the principles stated in the “International Covenant on

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<sup>184</sup> Malo Hoshyar Salam, The Future of Civil Society in Iraq: A Comparison of Draft Civil Society Laws Submitted to the Iraqi Council of Representatives, The International Journal of Non-for-Profit Law, vol. 10, n°4, August 2008, p. 8

<sup>185</sup> CPA Order No. 45 cited in Jamal Al-Jawahiri, op. cit.

<sup>186</sup> Jamal Al-Jawahiri, op. cit.

<sup>187</sup> Malo Hoshyar Salam, op. cit., p. 7



Civil and Political Rights” and in the “Arab Charter of Human Rights,” which were both ratified by Iraq<sup>188</sup>.

In March 2008, the UN Office for Project Services (UNOPS) organized an NGO law roundtable. It brought together representatives of the government, parliament and NGOs and led to the creation of a new NGO law draft. While the parties involved in this roundtable agreed upon the resulting NGO law draft, it was not submitted to the CoR. Instead, in March 2009, a different proposition that was more consistent with the Iraqi government’s initially restrictive position was approved by the Council of Ministers (CoM) and subsequently sent to the CoR. This action provoked outcry among Iraqi civil society representatives, INGOs and UN agencies. The government’s NGO law draft was the subject of renewed discussions at a second roundtable arranged by UNOPS and the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL), an INGO promoting an enabling legal environment for civil society. Representatives of the government, parliament, NGOs, international experts, international observers and donors sat together and agreed upon a list of recommendations in order to improve the NGO law draft that would then be submitted to the CoR<sup>189</sup>.

In January 2010, the CoR finally adopted an NGO law that took the results of the second roundtable into account. Registration is no longer mandatory, allowing informal civil society groups to exist and legally function. Foreign funding and affiliations are less controlled and restricted by the government<sup>190</sup>. The Iraqi NGO law is considered as a major success for the Iraqi NGO sector, INGOs, and UN agencies, although some concerns remain in terms of INGOs<sup>191</sup> and the substantial discretion given to the Council of Ministers in the allocation of the “public utility status.” This law does not apply to the KRG, where much work must be done in order to propose and adopt such a law for NGOs. The main obstacle now rests in the issue of implementing regulations, which guide the state to enforce each law in an effective, constitutional way. Under UNOPS and ICNL patronage, different stakeholders met one more time in July 2010 to discuss these issues. The objective of civil society representatives and INGOs is to have the CoM adopt precise implementing regulations, which will more likely limit the authorities’ ability to ignore, distort or violate the law.

The elaboration process of the Iraqi NGO law is an interesting example of the ways in which the international community, and INGOs in particular, can contribute to the long-term future of Iraqi civil society and the Iraqi NGO sector. The NGO law guarantees the survival of

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<sup>188</sup> ICNL, *op. cit.*

<sup>189</sup> NGO Coordination Committee for Iraq (NCCI), *Interview on the New Iraqi NGO Law and Implementation Developments with UNOPS Representative Mr. Adam Styp-Rekowski*, NCCI Op-Ed, July 20, 2010, p. 1

<sup>190</sup> NCCI, *Interview about the New Iraqi NGO Law with Legal Advisor Kareem Elbayar*, NCCI Op-Ed, June 13, 2010, p. 2

<sup>191</sup> Article 11 of the Iraqi NGO law says that domestic NGOs can't have more than 25% foreign members. NCCI, *Interview about the New Iraqi NGO Law with Legal Advisor Kareem Elbayar*, *op. cit.*, p. 2

independent Iraqi NGOs, even in sectors where Iraqi institutions have more capacity. UNOPS and INCNL, two international structures, have been the catalysts and organizers for various meetings, some of which have led civil society leaders and political decision makers to make compromises and advance. The NCCI and the American NGO Mercy Corps also attended these roundtables and played the role of mediator. The main goal of these roundtables was to lead each party to consider the other parties' point of view, and also to put many issues in broader perspective. Adam Styp-Rekowski, the Portfolio Manager for Civil Society for UNOPS, explains that it is in the interest of the governmental authorities to have the processes of registration and monitoring of NGOs streamlined in the implementation regulations: *'This will make the government's work much easier in the end.'*<sup>192</sup> Iraqi state representatives, as well as Iraqi CSOs, often need the expertise, the experience and the ideas brought by international actors. Fyras Mawazini, the NCCI Executive Coordinator, was present during the July 2010 meeting and has described how there was a halting impasse during the first days of the roundtable. On the last day, international organisations proposed a list of practical recommendations which were received quite positively by the Iraqi authorities; this served to unlock the debate. According to Adam Styp-Rekowski, *'Writing the final implementation regulations is not our job.'*<sup>193</sup> The role of international actors is limited to bringing Iraqi actors together and making some suggestions. But during the process, trust and mutual understanding were progressively built between the Iraqi government and civil society. This ability to communicate and work with authorities may actually strengthen the Iraqi NGO sector, even though too much association with the Iraqi state could eventually harm many Iraqi NGOs.

## **2. Iraqi NGOs as Partners of the State: Designing and Implementing Public Policies**

Far from considering all Iraqi NGOs as potential covers for terrorist activities, many Iraqi authorities are now engaging more intensively with LNGOs to create public policies. Some LNGOs are becoming conveyor belts or information transmission between local communities and public institutions. In the KRG, Anne Gilles from MDM recently remarked that some Iraqi NGOs were doing surveys for the public institutions on the Iraqi population's general perceptions of the impacts of various public policies. For instance, the well-established Kurdish NGO, People Aid Organisation (PAO), is currently helping the Iraqi authorities' set-up public services. PAO reflects suggestions and feelings from different actors of the society to KRG regional authorities. In June 2010, PAO organized a symposium

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<sup>192</sup> Adam Styp-Rekowski in NCCI, *Interview on the New Iraqi NGO Law and Implementation Developments with UNOPS Representative*, op. cit., p. 2

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

on the Kurdish health reform for members of the health commission at the KRG parliament, as well as representatives of various ministries. The Iraqi NGO presented the results of its survey about doctors' perceptions of medicine in the public and private sectors, and about the work of health centers, to these policy and decision makers. In this way, the NGO was encouraging the Kurdish authorities to act on the health issue; yet in offering the results of its staff members' work and expertise, they also hope that these politicians will consider and incorporate their data to make useful assessments and policies<sup>194</sup>.

Some Iraqi NGOs are more frequently operating on behalf of the Iraqi authorities. The mobilization of LNGOs was particularly visible during the last electoral vote. Iraqi NGOs conducted numerous campaigns about the importance of registering and voting. In the South, the MDM team met several small-scale LNGOs that had claimed to conduct a campaign for awareness about breast cancer screenings. Surprised by the quantity of NGOs interested in this issue, Anne Gilles inquired for more details and learned that it was a program of the Ministry of Health that some regional authorities had asked the NGOs to implement<sup>195</sup>. Hashim Al-Assaf, the NCCI Iraqi Coordinator, analyses the broader phenomenon as follows: *'In some places in Iraq, the local government wanted to control the services that NGOs deliver to say 'we are delivering services' and to keep the government's money for other things. I'm not saying it's corruption. I'm saying that it's the government's willingness to have others helping them in service delivery'*<sup>196</sup>. It is not yet clear if Iraqi NGOs' involvement in some public policies is voluntary, or if the authorities are putting pressure on them to engage. Yet the Iraqi state is offering money and projects for many of these structures, which is even more difficult to refuse considering the waning donor contributions to Iraq and lack of alternative funding sources.

The association between CSOs and authorities in designing and implementing public policy is a current trend common in a majority of Arab countries. The governmental plans for civil society have increased these last ten years in the Arab world. States are funding the non-profit sector more in order to ensure that institutions can provide essential basic services to populations. NGOs and other forms of organisations are also considered by decision makers as an interesting tool to accelerate a country's development. In the past, some Arab states chose to reduce their involvement in the provision of basic services, liberalizing and privatizing their economies. However, in the current context of economic crisis, this strategy did not prove successful and the populations' burdens increased. In order to confront these issues and maintain social order, many Arab governments have included NGOs as partners

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<sup>194</sup> Interview with Anne Gilles

<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

<sup>196</sup> Interview with Hashim Al-Assaf

in their development projects and basic service delivery initiatives. In the field of public services provision, recent studies show that CSOs are generally participating in public policies in various ways and in cooperation with public administrations. The debate remains open in terms of the legitimacy and ethics of states' use of LNGOs to justify and compensate its own disengagement from society's well-being.

In any case, these partnerships between Arab NGOs, and more specifically Iraqi NGOs, and public authorities seem to confirm the theory of Philippe Droz-Vincent, the author of Middle East: Authoritarian Powers, Blocked Societies. According to him, Arab civil societies do not generally conceive the idea of a counter-state, but do favor state restructuring through cooperation between CSOs and public institutions<sup>197</sup>. The relations are of cooperation more than of exclusion. The future of Iraqi civil society and of the Iraqi NGO sector is therefore unlikely to become anti-authority. This is consistent with the Islamic discourse, as Hayder Saeed explains: '*The function of civil society towards the state is [...] 'guiding and advising the leadership,' so 'the duty of citizens is the obedience of governor and the right advice him.*'<sup>198</sup> Communication, exchange and collaboration between Iraqi NGOs and the state have also been encouraged by INGOs and international actors aiming to strengthen Iraqi civil society. But manipulation and dependence on authorities might not be far away. That is the reason why the new NGO law is so essential. NGOs must also be cautious to not risk losing the trust of their communities in the process of collaborating with the state, especially in the Iraqi context with mounting dissatisfaction and disapproval regarding Iraqi political elites.

## **Section II. Defining Iraqi NGOs' Missions for their Communities**

According to a survey conducted by the NCCI in 2010, a lack of community understanding about the role of NGOs is among the first obstacles that Iraqi NGOs have to face. Some communities may be confused by projects led by Iraqi NGOs over the last seven years, especially as some projects responded more to donors' priorities than to the beneficiary community's actual needs. LNGOs' partnerships with foreign actors, as well as Iraqi authorities, could further jeopardize any trust built between beneficiary populations and Iraqi NGOs. As a consequence, Iraqi NGOs should clarify their role among their communities. Will they limit their activities to pure service delivery, or will they link their projects more closely with advocacy and awareness campaigns? Could Iraqi NGOs have an essential role in the democratization of Iraq?

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<sup>197</sup> Droz-Vincent Philippe, op. cit. , p.59

<sup>198</sup> Saeed Hayder, op. cit., p. 11

## 1. Advocacy or Service Delivery?

Even though they developed in order to fill the gap of basic service provision, which was left by the failed Iraqi state post-2003 invasion, Iraqi NGOs still do not have the capacity to take the state's place in service delivery—nor are many NGOs inclined to do so. *'It is not up to them to solve the whole issue of poverty,'* argues Caroline Douilliez-Sabouba<sup>199</sup>. Yet a lot of Iraqi NGOs were established as a short-term response mechanism, attempting to find solutions to ensure the immediate and basic survival of the most vulnerable populations. State was not anymore a potential solutions' provider. Members of LNGOs often learned to just rely on themselves. As a result, the type of aid provided did not always ensure a sustainable or marked improvement in local populations' living conditions. The long-term impact of projects was not always taken into account, either because LNGOs were not experienced in planning this way, or because they did not have the resources to set up long-term programmes. Some LNGOs are also uninterested in choosing the programmes that they implement, as long as they receive sufficient donor funding for these activities.

Caroline Douilliez-Sabouba describes one ICRC partner: *'For him, NGOs must be helped to help because he distributes dozens of eggs and other food items to the destitute women who are standing in line at his NGO everyday. He is well organized, he tries to find [something to give to these women everyday], he is going to harass the city's shopkeepers. He is a man who does real and sincere charity.'* But, she also points out, this local actor does not really help these women—his beneficiaries—to find a lucrative activity or a stable source of revenue. Caroline Douilliez-Sabouba likens these kinds of practices to other LNGOs that propose sewing workshops or computer trainings. It seems to her that many LNGOs involved in women's vocational trainings put in place either sewing or computer trainings without always thinking about the economic prospects of such skills: *'This is rarely what will give women a job, given all the competition from imported products from China for example. There is not much need of dressmakers.'*<sup>200</sup>

Long-term results suppose a renewed commitment of the Iraqi state to the provision of basic services and to the improvement of the social and economic situation for the Iraqi people. Iraq's development cannot be pursued by Iraqi NGOs alone, even with considerable international community support—which most LNGOs are receiving less of today. Iraqi NGOs should not become a justification for the state to definitively abandon its responsibilities, especially in the case that the state has the financial resources to fulfill its duties of providing for the general welfare of its people. This is the reason why some

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<sup>199</sup> Interview with Caroline Douilliez-Sabouba

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

representatives from Iraqi civil society and other entities are calling for NGOs to lobby and advocate more vis-à-vis the state. They should develop a means to pressure the public authorities to fulfill their obligations. As Hashim Al-Assaf puts it, *'We have to ask NGOs to advocate for better investment, better use of Iraqi money, better government performance, monitoring accountability, ensuring transparency, and fighting corruption. If you continue delivering services for 100 years while corruption continues, you'll gain nothing. If you stop delivering services for 5 years and focus on issues related to public policies, accountability, monitoring the government performance, you will have real change and you can use your money in a better way.'*<sup>201</sup> In some ways, as civil society functions, it actually exposes failures of the government in terms of responding to its citizens' needs<sup>202</sup>.

Such a shift in Iraqi NGOs' orientation would certainly not be everyone's cup of tea. Some analysts are seeing this change as unrealistic and potentially dangerous. Hashim Al-Assaf admits that, *'[The governmental authorities] would not be happy when they would see well-educated people, people with good experience, community initiatives, society activists trying to impact and advise the government.'*<sup>203</sup> Too much pressure, or pressure that is not applied effectively and wisely, could lead some authorities to simply refuse cooperation with LNGOs. Some Iraqi NGOs involved in advocacy programs appear unable to act along these gray lines: they are either deeply pessimistic and want no interaction with the authorities, or they are demanding full access to public institutions, such as prisons, in order to report and monitor human rights abuses. In response, some public administrations' staff members are already discrediting certain LNGOs, criticizing their levels of competency and experience. The 'advocacy strategy' also presents the risk of creating deep antagonisms within the Iraqi NGO sector, mainly between NGOs centered on service provision and NGOs concentrating on advocacy: *'Service delivery CSOs might find coordination with government agencies a necessary part of doing business, while an advocacy NGO might believe that cooperation with the state would undermine the organization's goals'*<sup>204</sup>. Advocacy campaigns and actions related to them must therefore be carefully designed in order to optimize efficiency and minimize the potential of generating hostility and/or apathy.

Furthermore, LNGOs often face difficulties in clearly communicating with their beneficiary communities about the necessity of advocacy action. One of the major challenges for civil societies in fragile states, such as Iraq, is to raise communities'

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<sup>201</sup> Interview with Hashim Al-Assaf

<sup>202</sup> Karajah Sa'ed, *Civil Society in the Arab World: the Missing Concept*, The International Journal of Non-for-Profit Law, vol. 9, n°2, April 2007, p. 30

<sup>203</sup> Interview with Hashim Al-Assaf

<sup>204</sup> Samad Z., op. cit., p. 6

awareness of linkages between poor governance and a lack of basic services<sup>205</sup>. There is a lot of communication work for LNGOs to perform with these issues. But this work is essential in order for LNGOs to remain close to their beneficiaries and understand their needs. A participatory method that allows more individuals and groups to become directly involved in LNGOs' programs is more often supported by the population.

## 2. LNGOs' Potential Impact on Iraq's Democratization

Since 2003, Iraq's democratization is one main mission of Iraqi civil society and the Iraqi NGO sector, as introduced in the American administration's political agenda and a number of political analysts and decision makers in IOs. CSOs are supposed to have a vital role in limiting the state's control over society and in the prevention of any despotic or authoritarian deviation. Expectations were sometimes quite high, including the development of free media, securing women's liberation, and establishing democratic institutions<sup>206</sup>. Given the current political deadlock, the level of corruption of the political elites, and the little progress in freedom and human rights in Iraq, some observers quickly jump to the conclusion that the Iraqi civil society was not effective in realizing Iraq's democratic potential. Some may respond that CSOs were not supported in an appropriate or constructive way, that hopes towards the Iraqi civil society were often totally disconnected from the Iraqi reality, and that establishing a democratic system takes more than seven years.

During the initial post-invasion years, Iraqi NGOs were generously supported to put in place activities like human rights awareness campaigns, election monitoring trainings, and seminars about the new Iraqi Constitution. In this way, LNGOs were supposed to spread democratic values among the Iraqi population. The idea of 'teaching democracy' is problematic in itself, but some structures achieved successful results through these kinds of activities. However, the majority of these programs were inspired by speeches delivered in another part of the world, and devoid of a direct link to Iraq's unique and complex realities. A humanitarian worker observes the phenomenon concerning women's NGOs: *'The number of women's NGOs which are doing awareness, democratization, you don't know exactly what they are doing. They put someone in front of a group of 15 women, and it is sold to donors as an awareness campaign for I don't know what. Is it not sometimes a waste of money?'* The means chosen to implement democracy in Iraq might have given the impression that something was done in this field, but these programs were probably not the more efficient way to support the democratization of the Iraqi society.

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<sup>205</sup> Dowst Michelle, op. cit., p. 6

<sup>206</sup> Interview with Omar Maktab

Yet initiatives are emerging which prove that Iraqi NGOs could be crucial actors in Iraq's process of democratization. For instance, in August 2010, the Iraqi Women Network and three other CSOs filed a lawsuit claiming that the political coalitions elected in March 2010 were '*deliberately and repeatedly breaching the Iraqi Constitution [...] and delaying the formation of the Iraqi government.*'<sup>207</sup> The case was raised against the Provisional Chairman of the Parliament, responsible for setting limits to the establishment of a new government. For some observers and politicians, this judicial step symbolizes considerable defiance towards the Iraqi political class as a whole. In this way, Iraqi NGOs commit themselves to reflect the populations' perceptions and expectations. Iraqi people are currently unsatisfied and deeply disappointed with their elected leaders more than six months after they casted their votes. They cannot wait for the political deadlock to end. They also feel unengaged and neglected as the political process continues outside of the parliament, and instead within many private "coalition meetings." By filing a lawsuit with the Iraqi Federal Supreme Court, some Iraqi NGOs attempted to give people their voices back, restore popular participation in governmental process, and pressure the political situation to positively evolve rather than continue in a suffocating deadlock. These representatives of Iraqi civil society are also counting on the independence of the Iraqi Federal Supreme Court, and hope that it will enforce democratic principles based on the Iraqi constitution.<sup>208</sup> This initiative certainly impacted the Iraqi population, proving that not all Iraqi NGOs are disconnected from the communities; indeed, some Iraqi NGOs have demonstrated how effective they are at listening to and organizing with their communities in the "Civic Initiative to Protect the Constitution" campaign. This lawsuit also proves that a certain number of Iraqi NGOs are sensitive to democratic principles and ready to struggle for them.

Apart from this kind of highly visible actions, democratization of the country coming from Iraqi NGOs could also involve the adoption of democratic internal governance structures within Iraqi NGOs. Their functioning should be based on participation, elections, transparency and accountability towards their beneficiaries<sup>209</sup>. Good internal governance has been quite forgotten in many democratization campaigns and NGOs empowerment programs. Yet this could serve as the first step in a broader strategy to make LNGOs real actors and models of democratization in their country. According to Omar Maktab, basic services delivery is also crucial because it is a way to rally people: '*By delivering services to the people, CSOs can get them involved, encourage their participation, and bring up*

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<sup>207</sup> NGO Coordination Committee for Iraq (NCCI), *Lawsuit Campaign Led by Iraqi Civil Society Organizations Challenges the Iraqi Government's Constitutionality*, NCCI Op-Ed, August 24, 2010, p. 1

<sup>208</sup> NCCI, *Lawsuit Campaign Led by Iraqi Civil Society Organizations Challenges the Iraqi Government's Constitutionality*, op. cit., p.2

<sup>209</sup> Christoplos Ian, op. cit., p. 68



*democratic values within the societies.*<sup>210</sup> The democratization of LNGOs could progressively lead to the population's belief and adherence to democratic principles. Such evolution could eventually reach political elites and the state apparatus. The process will obviously take time and patience, two elements that some international actors which came to 'save' Iraq certainly lacked. Building the future of the Iraqi civil society will require more long-term approaches than those adopted in the past.

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<sup>210</sup> Interview with Omar Maktab

## Conclusion

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INGOs' contributions to the evolution of the Iraqi NGO sector have been quite varied and irregular, given the diversity which characterizes local NGOs and INGOs operating in/for Iraq. In any case, the current period is certainly a transition period, even though it is difficult to set limits to its duration. In 2003, INGOs arrived in Iraq with the idea that they should avert a humanitarian crisis. The humanitarian crisis actually materialized in 2005 in many areas of Iraq, well after INGOs had already left Iraq or resettled their headquarters elsewhere in the Middle East due to the poor security situation. As a consequence, until recently, INGOs have been reacting in the mode of emergency response towards rapidly changing realities without adequate long-term planning. Therefore, from the perspective of many INGOs, the emergence of the Iraqi NGO sector was primarily and initially a phenomenon that they observed without taking part in. But as INGOs exited Iraq, they began to increasingly rely on LNGOs to continue their projects in the Iraqi field. In this period, capacity building became more interesting to many LNGOs and INGOs. With the decreasing of the violence, INGOs do not anymore need Iraqi partners in many regions of Iraq that have stabilized in terms of security. With the exception of some pockets of humanitarian crisis, as well as certain vulnerable populations that remain unprotected, the emergency phase has mainly passed. INGOs that are still willing to operate in Iraq are more prone to reflect on projects designed to have a long-term impact and encourage sustainable development in Iraq.

Partnership with local actors is currently a subject of numerous debates among INGOs, in the field as well as in leadership structures. The main challenge facing INGOs is the need to be closer to the field in order to be able to better identify and meet unmet needs, and to also conduct programs that will have a long-term impact and leave something tangibly beneficial behind. Development-oriented NGOs have been thinking for a long time about these questions and are used to cooperating with local partners on a long-term basis. But many INGOs that are currently involved in Iraq are more used to time-limited, emergency-response actions. Some of these INGOs, such as MDM, have been reflecting extensively for about 10 years on the ways in which they can establish real partnerships with local organisations in respective countries, and on the best means to effectively support civil society actors. Their operational strategy in Iraq is therefore not surprising, nor is it only based on Iraq's particular circumstances. But for the majority of INGOs active in Iraq, partnerships with LNGOs are something quite new, either encouraged or forced by the difficult Iraqi security situation. As a result, in some cases, INGOs' support for Iraqi NGOs has been motivated by self-interest, as a rather utilitarian goal for the INGOs that does not necessarily take into account the ways in which a partnership might impact Iraqi society's

future. For some others, it has been a means to kill two birds with one stone. For example, partnerships have served as a way to remain in the Iraqi field and strengthen local organisations that will remain in Iraq to continue building the country's long-term future, especially after many INGOs depart in the coming months and years.

Iraqi NGOs are now in a phase of defining their roles and missions in developing a better future for Iraq. New trends are emerging, such as an increase in the number of partnerships between Iraqi NGOs and Iraqi authorities at the local, regional and national level. There is also more involvement of some structures in representing and diffusing people's opinions, perceptions and dissatisfactions. Most Iraqi NGOs are unlikely to develop an anti-authority stance, but though some of them could better articulate their service delivery activities with advocacy programs, as well as advising the government in terms of improving service provisions and public policy. At this stage of evolution in the Iraqi NGO sector the INGOs which have been involved in Iraq since 2003—or prior to the US-led invasion--will gradually step aside.

As for today, INGOs can still play an important role in strengthening Iraqi civil society. Their awareness and mobilization capacities within the international community are acutely needed so that Iraq does not continue to disappear from donors' agendas and public conscious. INGOs can also set-up an enabling environment for Iraqi NGOs to develop, as they achieved with the new Iraqi NGO law. Capacity-building programs geared towards LNGOs, especially in the field of internal governance, could also be strengthened if more INGOs returned to Iraq. Furthermore, developing closer relations between INGOs and their Iraqi partners, from designing a project to its final implementation then its monitoring and evaluation, could be one key to strengthen the Iraqi NGO sector and establish more equitable partnerships between INGOs and Iraqi NGOs.

But INGOs' contributions to the development of the Iraqi NGO sector may not actually progress. Defining their long-term orientations and their place in the Iraqi society is probably a path along which the various components of the Iraqi NGO sector have to go alone. At this stage, INGOs could support LNGOs by explaining to them their own evolution as INGOs and the choices they had to make. INGOs will eventually leave Iraq, and may be replaced by other structures with a greater orientation towards development. The Iraqi NGO sector would then have to chart the course of its own history and future, developing its own codes and practices, as well as support methods and strategies.

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