Distance Challenges Faced by NGOs in Iraq

Interviews and Workshop Report

August 2006

NGOs Coordination Committee in Iraq (NCCI)
www.ncciraq.org

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__Executive Summary__

Insecurity in Iraq has forced most foreign NGOs to adopt remote programming strategies and complicated the efforts of Iraqi NGOs who wish/ed to develop relationships with international actors. This imposed distance has raised a number of concerns with respect to the quality of the aid delivered, NGO's accountability for those deliverables, and donor's ability to appreciate and respond to the needs on the ground.

The worsening security situation in Iraq has forced most INGOs to continue operating in a remote mode since end of 2004. Some of the challenges in distance programming are still very difficult to overcome and it was deemed necessary to share experiences and lessons learnt by foreign and local NGOs in order to identify concrete measures that could be taken to overcome challenges related to distance programming.

In the implementation of remote programming approaches, NGOs encounter the same distance-related challenges since they started operating remotely almost 2 years ago. These include challenges in communication, assessment, monitoring & evaluation and personnel management. The effects of these challenges result in the donors' perception that remote programming is fraught with difficulties and render assistance difficult and expensive.

However, the main differences with the situation in 2004 are related to the organisational and programming options adopted by NGOs. This illustrates an adaptation of INGOs to the Iraqi operational environment consisting mainly in providing greater responsibility to Iraqis working for INGOs.
INGOs have developed a range of remote programming approaches that offer mixed results. As a result of the situation, a new distance programming option was developed - remote partnership - whereby INGOs enter into partnerships with LNGOs. This option can be implemented in parallel of other remote approaches.

There are several factors NGOs should consider before adopting one or a combination of the remote programming options. Participants concluded that it was not possible to compare the limits of each remote programming option since too many factors have to be taken into consideration and, most likely, a combination of factors would result in the failure of a remote programming option as opposed to a single factor. However, on the principle, participants favoured approaches that gave the most latitude to national personnel and LNGOs.

NGOs identified possible solutions (*see table summarizing them below*) to reinforce their capacity to overcome those challenges, which gives an indication that there is room for improvement.
Those solutions imply increased attention should be paid to:

- National staff empowerment and therefore on capacity building,

    - Coordination and capacity building resources at local level,

    - Coordination, exchange of information and trust among NGOs,

    - Addressing common issues of concern collectively,

    - Justifying and explaining the need for adequate funding as NGOs find it increasingly difficult to get sufficient funding for overhead costs.

As for some propositions that need to be developed and made clearer before to be implemented, the action plan need to be discussed with all the stakeholders. Indeed, the NGOs made the first propositions, but the implementation will need the investment of all actors.

Summary of proposed solutions

Challenge / solutions	NGO Collective action	Donors action
Communication		
- Video-conferencing	X	X
- Cultural and contextual understanding/awareness	X	
- Language skills		
- Increase handover periods between incoming and outgoing expatriate staff	X	X
- Changing office location from Amman to Erbil for NGOs operating in central Iraq		
- Create in Baghdad International Airport (BIAP) and in Basrah airport an NGO space where expatriates can meet with their Iraqi colleagues	X	X
- Liaison/reporting officer		X
- System of deputies for key personnel		X
- Board system		
- Iraq based staff: horizontal versus pyramidal structure		
Personnel Management		
- NCCI Human Resources (HR) database	X	
- Local network: more "localisation" of coordination activities	X	
- Bonus system		X
- Salary scale	X	X
- Increased interaction between NGO HQ and Iraqi personnel	X	
- Increased interaction between Iraq based personnel and donors	X	
- Improved expatriates' interpersonal skills		
- Training and development policy	X	X
- Small scale programmes "think small"		
- Internship abroad	X	X
- Local network: more "localisation" of coordination activities	X	
- Share training resources to reduce costs	X	X
- Expatriates and experienced Iraqis from various NGOs to provide collective trainings to NGOs' staff.	X	
- Localise training resources	X	X
Assessment		
- NGO Joint Needs Assessment	X	X
Monitoring and Evaluation		
- Promote organisational learning within NGOs and among NGOs	X	X
- Participatory M&E		X
- Separate M&E Unit		X
- Peer M&E	X	X
- External M&E	X	X

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1. <u>Introduction</u>

Insecurity in Iraq has forced most foreign NGOs to adopt remote programming strategies and complicated the efforts of Iraqi NGOs who wish/ed to develop relationships with international actors. This imposed distance has raised a number of concerns with respect to the quality of the aid delivered, NGO's accountability for those deliverables, and donor's ability to appreciate and respond to the needs on the ground.

Part of NCCI's mission is to enhance the NGOs' capacity to deliver humanitarian and development assistance to the population of Iraq. To this effect and in relation with the specific challenge of remote programming, NCCI organised in November 2004 workshops on remote management[1].

The worsening security situation in Iraq has forced most INGOs to continue operating in a remote mode since then[2]. Some of the challenges in distance programming are still very difficult to overcome and it was deemed necessary to share experiences and lessons learnt by foreign and local NGOs in order to identify concrete measures that could be taken to overcome challenges related to distance programming[3].

This report summarises results of:
- A rapid questionnaire[4] sent to LNGOs (Local NGOs) and INGOs (International NGOs),
- Discussions with NGO representatives during one to one meetings,
- A workshop[5] on distance programming challenges.

16 NGOs (including 7 LNGOs) answered the questionnaire, 15 NGOs (including 3 LNGOs) and NCCI personnel were met for individual meetings and 14 INGOs (including 2 LNGOs) participated to the workshop (for a total of 21 participants) held on 04th June 2006.

The rapid questionnaire and interviews were designed to help in the preparation of the workshop. The questionnaire was designed to review the 2004 remote management workshop SWOT analysis and challenges faced in distance programming while the interviews enabled the identification of possible solutions to overcome distance challenges. The results of the interviews were processed by the consultant and formed the basis for discussions among participants to the workshop.

The scope of this report is limited to the results of questionnaires, interviews and workshop and shall not be considered as an exhaustive study on distance challenges faced by NGOs in Iraq. Organisations outside NGOs such as donors, the UN and ICRC were not met nor invited to the workshop. Their positions on the matter are known and it was deemed preferable to limit discussions to within the NGO community and later address donors for instance with results of this exercise.

A particular shortcoming to this exercise was the impossibility, albeit with rare exceptions, for the consultant to meet with Iraqi personnel from INGOs.

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[1]   See Annex 1: NCCI – "Remote Management of Humanitarian Programmes in Iraq" - Workshops report – December 2004.
[2]   Note: a very limited number of INGOs still have maintained an expatriate presence in the country.
[3]   See Annex 2: NCCI – "Workshop ToR"
[4]   See Annex 3: "Remote Programming Questionnaire for NGOs"
[5]   See Annex 4: "Distance Programming Workshop Documentation"

2. <u>Identification of challenges in distance programming</u>

The table below gives the challenges identified by INGOs operating remotely in 2004 and 2006. Challenges are given by order of priority:

	Dec 2004 (NCCI Remote Management)	**Mid 2006**
1	Communication	Communication
2	Personnel management	Assessment, monitoring, evaluation, donors' perception
3	Assessment, monitoring, evaluation and donors complexities	Personnel management
4	Finance, administration and logistics	Finance, administration and logistics

The table shows that although a year and a half has passed, no new challenge was encountered and challenges are still ranked in the same order although Assessment/Monitoring & Evaluation/Donors perception has gone one rank higher. This can be explained by the fact that in 2004, when NGOs started operating remotely, programmes were still running but with time Assessment / Monitoring & Evaluation functions became greater issues.

The updated SWOT analysis did not reveal any particular change as compared to 2004. Most of the 2004 report findings and diagnostics are still valid and the present report should be taken as a follow up study focusing on concrete actions to overcome identified challenges.

However, the main differences with the situation in 2004 are related to the organisational and programming options adopted by NGOs. In 2004, most INGOs had adopted remote control or remote management options, but by 2006, no INGO was using remote control any more and the proportion of INGOs using remote support options has increased. This illustrates an adaptation of INGOs to the Iraqi operational environment consisting mainly in providing greater responsibility to Iraqis working for INGOs. During the same period INGOs have also developed a new distance programming option called by most INGOs Remote Partnership whereby an INGO enters into partnership with a LNGO or several.

Finance / administration / logistics issues were not discussed with NGOs during interviews nor during the workshop because of a lack of time and because they did not appear to be on the top priority list of concerns for NGOs operating remotely.

3. <u>Workshop Objectives</u>

During the one-day workshop, 4 working groups were formed to the following tackle issues:

- Communication,
- Assessment,
- Monitoring & evaluation and
- Personnel management.

The issue of donors' perception was not dealt with in a separate working group, as it is a cross cutting theme. The objectives of each working group were as follows:

3.1. Working Group Remote Partnership

This is a fairly new way of operating for NGOs in Iraq, therefore a common definition had to be agreed – and then issues of concern could then be raised and considered.

3.1.1. Objectives:

- Agree on a framework for remote partnership,
- Identify issues of concern in remote partnership programming,
- Identify solutions.

3.2. Working Group Distance Programming Options

3.2.1. Objectives:

- Define each remote programming option according to the roles and responsibilities of the stakeholders (INGO, LNGO, nationals and expatriates).
- Define factors to consider when implementing a remote programming options and the limits to its implementation.
- Define the triggers for change from one remote programming option to another.

3.3. Working group Personnel Management and Communication

3.3.1. Objectives:

- Identify possible solutions to improve communication
- Identify possible solutions to improve personnel management.

3.4. Working Group Monitoring, Evaluation and Assessment

3.4.1. Objectives:

- Study possible options for improving needs assessments.
- Study possible options for Monitoring and Evaluation to improve accountability and transparency.

4. <u>Distance Programming Options Comparison</u>

4.1. Remote partnership framework

4.1.1. Definition

Remote partnership defined according to remote management or remote support, implies more responsibility to local NGOs. Remote partnership is when at least 2 organisations come together and contribute different resources to jointly tackle a common problem/issue and where one of the organisations does not have key staff in the country of operation or when the NGO has key staff but are unable to access all areas where the organisation have programmes.

4.1.2. INGOs and LNGOs expectations in a Remote Partnership:

4.1.2.1. <u>INGOs:</u>

- Capacity building of LNGOs,
- Promoting the role of civil society,
- Security (decreases vulnerability of INGOs' staff),
- LNGOs have more understanding of the nature of Iraqi society,
- Tapping into local knowledge.

4.1.2.2. <u>LNGOs:</u>

- Access to funds,
- Networking: visibility with donors and other INGOs,
- Gaining capacity and experience (technical support, advice, training and development).

4.1.3. Problems and Issues

Problems and issues in Remote Partnership raised during the workshop can be grouped into 5 categories:

1. Selection of partners including issues of neutrality and impartiality,
2. Balance of power between the partners,
3. Accountability,
4. Security and
5. Communication

The concerns rose during the workshop centre around the following issues:

- Expectations between INGO and LNGO may not always match,
- Unequal balance of power (decision making power),
- Power dynamics vs. trust,
- Dependency of LNGOS on INGOs,
- Selection of partners,
- Which standards of accountability and transparency to apply – are international standards too high for the context of Iraq?
- Accountability, transparency and trust from both sides,
- Quality and impact of interventions (need to creative ways of monitoring),
- How to define a national NGO when many players are contractors, for profit organizations, political parties... etc.
- Inability of NGOs to produce detailed proposals and to meet required donor's reporting procedures,
- Neutrality and impartiality of LNGOs,
- Security: not a big issue for some LNGOs because they 'dissolve' in the society,
- Beneficiaries asking about the source of funds,
- Balance between security and visibility – noting that visibility is at two levels: 1) explaining to the community what humanitarianism is all about vs. 2) explaining what a certain project is about,
- Ability of LNGOs to represent themselves because of distance from INGOs,
- Language and communication difficulties,
- Miscommunication can result because of the lack of face-to-face interaction.

4.1.4. Solutions

Issue/Concern	Possible solutions	Challenge
Selection of partners	- Establishing a network to share information about LNGOs. - Provide LNGOs which INGOs know and trust with the contact information of INGOs with which they can partner with. - Selection of partners: using the NGO charter (NCCI approach). - Collecting information from the network of INGOs in the area (informal network). - Working with the LNGO on a small project to get to know it better. - Relying on formal staff as focal points to identify potential partners.	Sharing information about NGOs brings forward the issues of security and confidentiality.
Balance of power between partners	- Members of the working group did not identify solutions.	
Accountability	- INGOs to have project managers inside the country Challenge: security. *The question is the balance between security and the quality of interventions since there is a need for mentors on the ground. It is not enough to provide training; there is a need for practical experience on the ground.* - Proposal writing and reporting requirements: LNGOs to be provided with simplified templates, formats and guidelines in addition to training - LNGOs to monitor each other and review each other's work. *This suggestion created a lot of discussion about how realistically this could be done and will LNGOs accept this monitoring mechanism or not. The experiences of some of INGOs reveal that it is possible and in their case it was successful. It was agreed that its success depends on monitoring (in this case peer monitoring) being an integral part of the design of the project. It was also agreed that the relationship between the NGOs and the personalities of the people play a major role in this type of monitoring succeeding. Neutrality might be an issue in this type of monitoring.*	Security Trust Capacity Building
Security	- Members of the working group did not identify solutions.	
Communication	- Meeting partners on a regular and frequent basis Challenge: high cost - LNGOs to have offices to represent them in Amman Challenge: cost. *A number of NGOs may decide to share an office in Amman then competition between NGOs is a challenge.*	Cost

4.1.5. Assessing the performance of INGO support to LNGOs

In order to complete the partnership framework discussion, members of the working group were asked to discuss how to assess INGOs' support to LNGOs. Indeed, many trainings are given to LNGOs in Iraq by a wealth of actors (UN, Institutes specialised in democratisation… INGOs). However the NGOs interviewed consider the results as "generally poor ".

The following criteria were proposed for the evaluation of an INGO support to a LNGO (in the frame of Remote Partnership):

- Use the criteria that INGOs use in selecting LNGOs.
- How much INGOs has achieved in providing full technical support and know how, transferring experience and skills to LNGOs.
- Ability of the LNGOs to perform on their own.
- Quality of managing money and of reporting.
- Quality of expatriates.
- Expatriate knowledge of the local culture.
- Tools, methodology: how INGOs work with LNGOs.
- Evaluation at the end of trainings and workshops.
- How much the INGO have included Iraqis in training other Iraqis.
- The type of partnership is a strong indicator of performance: how much the LNGO was involved in the design of the project? What (financial) support did the INGO provide?
- Appropriateness of the training: How much money was spent in training vs. the capacity of LNGOs to apply what they learned during the training.
- Follow up to trainings to check on practical application.
- How well partners are training to approach donors on their own.
- What are the expectations on both sides – how regularly are these expectations reviewed.
- Feedback from local partners
- Length of time an INGO has been working with the same partner.

Members of the working group stressed that it was important that the process of partnership should be genuine and not a contractor relationship and also that from the beginning there should be an agreement on how the LNGO could assess the INGO.

4.2. Remote Programming Options Comparison

The differences between the various remote-programming options lie mainly in the role and responsibility of expatriates. The greater the role and responsibility of expatriates the more the NGO will tend to be in a remote control posture.

During the workshop, participants were asked to define, for 5 essential fields, the role and responsibility of the stakeholders (INGO, LNGO, nationals and expatriates) according to each programming option. This exercise was the occasion for a lively debate on how each one understood each remote programming option. The results are attached inn Annex 5 – "Comparison of distance programming options".

While it was fairly easy to define Remote Control, Remote Management and Remote Support option according to the role and responsibility of INGO expatriate staff, the same exercise did not succeed when it came to Remote Partnership. INGOs appeared to have differences of appreciation of what the partnership involved which brings us back to the previous discussion on the remote partnership framework and the issue of power balance between the partners and the expectations of each party. It must also be noted that the experience of the LNGO will have a great influence on its relationship with an INGO and thus on the role and responsibility of the INGO expatriate personnel.

In the particular case of the Remote Support option, it was interesting to note that the results of this exercise show that the participants viewed the expatriate role as more directive in the conduct of programmes rather than in the overall management of the mission.

4.2.1. Factors and limits to consider when implementing a remote programming option

The factors to consider when deciding to implement a remote programming option are as follows:

- Staff experience (Iraqi and expatriate),
- Expatriates' experience in the country,
- Expatriate access to the country,
- NGO organisational culture (developmental or emergency),
- Capacity of HQ to provide support to the mission.
- Financial resources available,
- Level of communication accessible,
- Local context where programmes take place (security, political…)
- Level of access to beneficiaries (depends on the geographical location of programmes),
- Type of project to implement (level of technicality and length of time available to accomplish the project),
- Availability of reliable partners.

It was not possible to define the limits to each remote programming option. Those limits can be any combination of the above factors.

4.2.2. Triggers for change from one remote programming option to another.

The triggers for change from one remote programming option to another are:

- A major change in the security environment,
- A major change in the NGO personnel composition,
- A change in funding availability.

5. Personnel Management and Communication

5.1. Communication

5.1.1. Flow

5.1.1.1. Email, chat, voice chat and telephone

Email, web chat, voice chat and telephone are the usual means of distance communication that are already being used by NGOs. Clear protocols of communication must be drawn to make the best use of each mean of communication. For instance, email should be used for programme purposes and official communications while chat should only be used for emergency purposes. Telephone remains the best mean of communication but the costs can be prohibitive for some NGOs.

Due to high turn over rates, the impossibility to visit offices in Iraq and high costs for travelling by plane, expatriates have often never seen most of their Iraqi colleagues. Email, chat and phone calls do not make up for face-to-face meetings. Video-conferencing could help overcome this problem. Moreover, in cities like Baghdad where several NGOs have offices and coordination meetings expose personnel to insecurity, video-conferencing could prove to be a valuable tool.

Other potential solutions are discussed in the next section under *5.1.2.4* and *5.1.2.5*.

5.1.2. Quality

5.1.2.1. Cultural and contextual understanding/awareness

It was agreed there is a clear need to develop expatriates' cultural and contextual understanding/awareness of communication with Iraqis. Iraqis could develop a guideline regularly updated which would be quite useful for expatriates starting their mission.

5.1.2.2. Language skills

Recruiting Arab speaking expatriates (of Arab origin or from any other country) improves the communication but can also lead to irritations on the side of Iraqis who may not always welcome Arab expatriates because of a feeling of an Iraqi superiority towards other Arab countries.

5.1.2.3. Increase handover periods between incoming and outgoing expatriate staff

High expatriate turnovers have a negative impact on communication with Iraqi colleagues. Often organisation systems and structures are changed with the arrival of new expatriates and Iraqi colleagues have to adapt to the new expatriates instead of the opposite. When expatriates are changed, they apply different systems according to their personality and their individual organisational culture.
Handover periods should be of 2 weeks minimum and adequately budgeted for.

5.1.2.4. Changing office location from Amman to Erbil for NGOs operating in central Iraq

Flights from Baghdad to Erbil are cheaper than Baghdad to Amman. Some participants argued that without office in Erbil, organising meetings there could be as expensive as doing the same in Amman. In the other hand, it was noted that the presence of donors and the UN in Amman makes it more convenient to be based in Amman.

5.1.2.5. Airports NGO spaces

NCCI is currently studying the possibility to create in Baghdad International Airport (BIAP) and in Basrah airport an NGO space where expatriates can meet with their Iraqi colleagues. It would allow more regular meetings between expatriates and their Iraqi colleagues and diminish the costs of meeting in Amman.

5.1.3. Structure

5.1.3.1. Liaison/reporting officer

A liaison officer based in Iraq would improve communication between the remote office and the field-based personnel. It would also relieve some of the pressure of the field-based staff.

5.1.3.2. System of deputies for key personnel

Providing deputies or assistants to key personnel would ensure that key staffs spend sufficient time at office exchanging with the remote office. It would also reduce the over reliance on key staff and therefore reduce the pressure on their shoulders. Also, in case a key person quits, the assistant would be designated as replacement reducing therefore problems in recruitment.
NGOs thought it was a good option but were concerned with its cost.

5.1.3.3. Board system

Transferring decision making to the field would decrease the required flow of information back and forth. Remote support and remote partnership offer this possibility.

Also, the creation of a board composed of key personnel based in Iraq would ensure that important matters are discussed in a collegial manner and that solutions proposed are well thought which in turn would reduce the flow of information with the remote office for decision making.

5.1.3.4. Iraq based staff: Horizontal versus pyramidal organisational structure

Participants favoured a pyramidal versus a flat structure as they deem it more efficient. However, reaching a pyramidal structure requires a lot of resources in terms of capacity building and can prove to be a long process before the NGO reaches a pyramidal structure. Also, participants believed that only NGOs with a long experience in the country could reach this stage.

5.1.3.5. Conclusion

Generally, participants mentioned that the best possible structure was the adoption of board system coupled with liaison officers.

5.1.4. External communication and donors representation: Role of Iraq based staff.

Delegating external communication and donors representation responsibilities to Iraqi Nationals is deemed an important element in building relations of trust between expatriates and nationals and can act as a catalyst for building the sense of responsibilities of Iraqi personnel.

5.1.4.1. External communication[6]: delegation and limitations of Iraq based staff.

Communication with the media is not possible because of security constraints and the need to maintain a low profile security strategy.

Generally, participants viewed low profile strategies as a serious impediment to developing the communication skills and responsibilities of Iraqis.

Expatriates tend not to delegate enough external representation responsibilities to the nationals because of a lack of trust but also because of a lack of adequate skills. More training can solve the later problem.

5.1.4.2. Representation and negotiation with donors: Delegation and limitations of Iraq based staff.

Participants agreed that, while it is important that Iraqis meet with donors, but the cost implied with meeting donors could be prohibitive.

5.2. Personnel Management

5.2.1. Expatriate staff turnover

Participants did not identify means to reduce expatriate staff turnover.

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[6] Media, foreign and Iraqi authorities, local communities…

5.2.2. Recruitment of nationals

5.2.2.1. NCCI Human Resources (HR) database

Ideas for improving the quality of NGO personnel included maintain an NCCI HR database and use standardised formats including references such as professors from university, friends who have an NGO experience… It was proposed that a special web page called "NGO in Iraq Job Vacancies" might be useful in increasing chances of skilled and experienced Iraqis to find appropriate employment. This page already exists on NCCI website and might be improved according to the NGOs' investment in such information.
Participants expressed the need for such database and agreed they should do more efforts in providing the required information so that NCCI can maintain this database.

5.2.2.2. Local network: more "localisation" of coordination activities

Many NGO activities undertaken in Iraq (tender, recruitment…) have to be done through informal networks. There is a need to find ways to extend those networks and make them more efficient by for instance connecting them.
This would require more coordination on the ground (exchange between Iraqis from different NGOs experiencing similar difficulties and successes…) and in particular through sectoral coordination meetings.
Trust among NGOs' workers can only happen if interaction through coordination, trainings… is increased.

5.2.3. Motivation / Initiative / Sense of Ownership

5.2.3.1. Bonus system

A system of bonus on salary according to initiative, accomplishment, reporting, etc. was proposed.

5.2.3.2. Salary scale

It is important to adjust salaries to reflect increasing cost of life, competition with the private sector and security requirements. Indeed, in the most dangerous parts of Iraq, personnel have to make special arrangements for their families that often involve important costs such as re-location.
One of the tools used for adjusting salary scales is the NCCI compilation of NGOs salary scales- however it was noted only a small number of NGOs return the filled salary scales to NCCI.
Raising salary scales would require improved donor comprehension of the benchmarks and rationales.

5.2.3.3. Increased interaction between NGO, HQ and Iraqi personnel

More dialogue between HQ and the field increases the sense of responsibility and ownership of Iraq based staff. Also, involving Iraqis in the recruitment of expatriates through asking Iraqis to review applications can have a positive impact.

5.2.3.4. Increased interaction between Iraq based personnel and donors

Iraqis should interact more often with expatriates from other INGOs, UN, International Organisations (IOs) and donors to develop their interpersonal skills, presentation skills…
Under the umbrella of NCCI, NGOs could organise on a regular basis thematic workshops/presentations… for donors, UN… given by Iraqis from various NGOs.

5.2.3.5. Improved expatriates' interpersonal skills

Moral support is very important. Communication is all the more important when security deteriorates. If communication is not sustained Iraqis feel that the expatriates are not there. It is important to keep a personal relationship and to increase communication outside professional settings.

5.2.3.6. Training and development policy

Training and development policy acts as an incentive to continue working for an NGO and improves motivation.
Trust among expatriates and nationals are also based on expatriates' capacity to provide the needed support.

5.2.4. Staff development, Mentoring and Capacity building

5.2.4.1. Trial and error

This is done from observing how well/poorly approaches and initiatives taken work.

- Small-scale programmes "think small":
Small-scale programmes enable field-based staff to have more efficient on the job training as compared to often complicated and expensive large INGO programmes.

5.2.4.2. Observation of others

Learn from the experiences of others.

- Internship abroad:
Send Iraqi staff on other missions in order to develop their technical and interpersonal skills and develop a sense of perspective in their work.

- Local network (more "localisation" of coordination activities):
Localisation of coordination activities would enable personnel from different NGOs to meet, exchanges experiences and learn from peers.

5.2.4.3. Education and training

Trainings are essential but often courses are too short and lack follow up or evaluation of the newly acquired skills. Due to the impossibility of foreign trainers to go to non-Kurdish areas, trainings are given abroad and are therefore expensive. Moreover, it can be difficult to judge whether the trainees are more motivated by the prospects of acquiring new skills to better their capacity or by the prospects of spending good time abroad in a nice hotel.

- Share training resources to reduce costs:
Trainings are provided by internationals at high costs and NGOs could seek to regroup training opportunities to reduce costs.

- Expatriates and experienced Iraqis from various NGOs to provide collective trainings to NGOs staff:
NGO expatriates and experienced Iraqis could come into agreement to define global NGO and LNGO staff training needs and provide free of charge trainings. Experienced Iraqis could be given financial incentives to participate to this scheme. Trainees will be selected among NGOs which participate to this collective scheme and would also include LNGOs.

- Localise training resources:
Identify competent training centres or individuals in Iraq. Some initiatives already exist in Baghdad for instance. The capacity of those training centres should be developed through training of trainers (ToT). This solution would have not only the advantage of reducing costs but it would maximise sustainability and filter trainees as only those that are really motivated would participate. A partnership between local training centres and a well renowned international training centre could be envisaged to ensure that trainers receive the best training possible. A curriculum for each type of training would be developed and diplomas given providing that the trainees have demonstrated that they integrated and put in place

what they were taught. The curriculum would be based on formal training/courses, distance learning and on the job training. Expatriates would act as mentors and evaluators in partnership with the training centre.

5.2.5. Conclusion

Participants concluded that more should be done to delegate more responsibilities to nationals and therefore step up capacity building efforts. However, the valuable solutions envisaged would have a cost element that donors ready to absorb yet. It was therefore deemed essential to increase collective NGO action to lobby donors- highlighting the cost effectiveness of this approach and thus encourage their support. Participants also agreed that costs could be reduced through a mutualisation of the training resources and NGOs should do more efforts in this direction.

In general, it was acknowledge that more should be done to improve coordination and exchange of information among NGOs.

6. <u>Assessment</u>

The quality of needs assessments is not always up to the required level. This is because of reduced mobility, time constraints, absence of existing data and also sometimes insufficient capacity building of Iraqi staff in the field. A possible solution consisting in an NGO joint needs assessment was explored during the workshop.

Objectives:

- Improve or build NGOs' staff needs assessments skills through formal training, on the job training and planning of needs assessment exercises,
- Provide more extended geographical baseline data for NGOs' programmes that would facilitate analysis and comparison. NGOs face great difficulties when it comes to analysing data they have collected in a specific area. Indeed, the collection of similar data in the rest of the country is in most cases not done and therefore it becomes difficult to draw conclusions on the meaning of such data.
- Promotion of systematisation and standardisation of needs assessments,
- Improve NGOs network and team work,
- If well planned and thought out, NGOs could positively engage various stakeholders including governments, local authorities, donors…
- Build trust among NGOs,
- Illustrate NGOs' ability to conduct needs assessments to donors,
- Sensitize and mobilise donors on humanitarian needs,

Additional note: It was considered Donors would support such an exercise.

Participants welcomed the idea but raised a number of concerns:

- Joint Needs Assessments must be sectoral specific.
- Coordination with local authorities is necessary but difficult because of lack of a continuum in the Iraqi administration, corruption and problems in identification of relevant authorities.
- Need for a centralised analysis system of the data collected (which does not exist at the moment).
- Access to, and verification of, data may prove difficult.

Participants insisted on the need for capacity building, standardisation of NGO needs assessments and for Joint Needs Assessments to remain an NGO exercise to avoid methodology and security problems.

7. <u>Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E)</u>

When providing support to staff on the field or LNGOs, some aspects of project management are prioritised – with reasons given such as heavy workloads, reduced staffing, restrictions on field work to keep low exposure to risks, etc. This is often the case for monitoring and evaluation functions.

Moreover:

- Staff may perceive Monitoring and Evaluation as something that interferes with the work which overload them and uses up a lot of resources,

- Staff may perceive Monitoring and Evaluation as a lack of trust by management,

- Staff can be reluctant to commit time and resources into evaluation, seeing it as too academic and may be sceptical about its practical benefits.

7.1. Stress the importance of Monitoring and Evaluation as a tool to improve the quality of aid

It was agreed that Monitoring and Evaluation is a critical tool to improve the quality of aid and, notwithstanding the difficulties of managing at a distance, efforts should be allocated to improving the quality of Monitoring and Evaluation outcomes.

Strategies should include:

- Reflecting the importance of Monitoring and Evaluation with adequate staffing and financial resources (donors responsibility),

- Encouraging those involved to see Monitoring and Evaluation as a learning exercise and an opportunity for all staff and beneficiaries to express their views,

- Explaining the tangible benefits of Monitoring and Evaluation for improving programmes, developing better practice and better relations with donors,

- Reassuring that the main purpose of building their capacity to conduct Monitoring and Evaluation is to build their capacity, not to test or evaluate them.

7.2. Promote organisational learning within NGOs and among NGOs

Given the particular context of Iraq where corruption is pervasive and donors and expatriates are in most cases not able to visit project sites and meet with beneficiaries and other stakeholders, evaluations tend to focus more on the outputs rather than the impact and process. Rarely will the effectiveness of humanitarian and developmental projects in Iraq be similar to those in safer settings and improvements will be highly dependent on NGOs continuous adaptation to the Iraq context. The performance of any project often depends on the organisation implementing it. When conducting an evaluation, it makes sense to look at the organisational capacity of the implementing NGO.

The purpose of evaluation should not only demonstrate accountability to donors and beneficiaries but also:

- To provide feedback for program improvement,

- To promote organisational learning within NGOs and among NGOs.

The dissemination of evaluation results among donors, NGOs and other stakeholders is usually treated as a secondary matter. In particular, results of evaluations should be shared among NGOs to improve remote programming options. Donors have a role in promoting this culture of evaluation sharing as it improves global practices. It should be clear that "doing evaluation to show capacity to do it" is not a valuable outcome. There should be a formal relationship between more financial resources for "overhead costs" and NGOs indicating to donors what use was made of the sharing of evaluations/experiences and what difference it made.

7.3. *Monitoring and Evaluation options to improve accountability and transparency*

Below are options for Monitoring and Evaluation methods discussed during the workshop.

7.3.1. Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation

Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation is a process through which stakeholders at various levels engage in monitoring or evaluating a particular project, program or policy, share control over the content, the process and the results of the Monitoring and Evaluation activity and engage in taking or identifying corrective actions. Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation focuses on the active engagement of primary stakeholders.

Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation is geared towards not only measuring the effectiveness of a project, but also towards building ownership and empowering beneficiaries; improving accountability and transparency; and enabling corrective actions to be taken to improve performance and outcomes.

Participatory M&E	Conventional M&E
Participant focus and ownership of evaluation	Donor focus
Broad ranges of stakeholders (locals, project staff, managers…) participate.	Senior managers or outside experts. Stakeholders often don't participate.
Focus is on learning	Focus is on accountability
Flexible design. Primary stakeholders design and adapt the methodology, collect and analyse data, share findings and link them to action.	Predetermined design. Primary stakeholders provide information only.
- Rapid appraisal methods. Indicators are defined internally and include more qualitative judgements. Methods: - Key informant interviews, - Focus group interviews, - Community group interviews, - Direct observations, - Mini surveys, - Case studies: *Case studies record anecdotes that illustrate a program's shortcomings or accomplishments. They tell about incidents or concrete events, often from one person's experience.*	Formal methods. Include mainly quantitative indicators.
Outsiders are facilitators.	Outsiders are evaluators

Advantages to participatory evaluations are that they:

- Examine relevant issues by involving key players in evaluation design,
- Promote participants' learning about the program and its performance and enhance their understanding of other stakeholders' points of view,
- Improve participants' evaluation skills,
- Mobilize stakeholders, enhance teamwork, and build shared commitment to act on evaluation recommendations,
- Increase likelihood that evaluation information will be used to improve performance,

But there are also disadvantages. For example, participatory evaluations may:

- Be viewed as less objective because it involves the participation of program staff, customers, and other stakeholders with possible vested interests,
- Be less useful in addressing highly technical aspects,
- Require considerable time and resources to identify, involve and build the capacity of a wide array of stakeholders. In particular, it may be difficult to seek the involvement of Iraqi local authorities,
- Take participating staff away from ongoing activities,
- Be dominated and misused by some stakeholders to further their own interests,
- Increase exposure to risks and therefore increase insecurity,

Additional note:
The network of local authorities can be used to improve NGOs' Monitoring and Evaluation activities, access to beneficiaries and response to emergencies. However, local authorities are often difficult to reach and lack access to emails. Donors involved in reconstruction activities and support to the Iraqi government should put more resources in "wiring" local and central authorities through building their communication means (internet, phone…).

7.3.2. Separate Monitoring and Evaluation Unit

In Separate Monitoring and Evaluation Unit, the personnel responsible for Monitoring and Evaluation are not those implementing programmes. It can be either:

- A department within the NGO structure composed of staff trained in Monitoring and Evaluation,

- An Iraqi based in Amman, Erbil, Kuwait… with expatriates, trained in Monitoring and Evaluation and able to visit project sites. Could also be the general project coordinator or his/her deputy.

Personnel responsible for Monitoring and Evaluation would not only be responsible for Monitoring and Evaluation but could also be in charge of the coordination among departments and reporting (liaison officer). They would help foster communication across departments and between field-based staff and remote staff.

Problem/issues to consider with Separate Monitoring and Evaluation Units:

- Can be perceived as something that interferes with the work,

- Can be perceived as a lack of trust by management,

- Monitoring and Evaluation can encounter resistance and even hostility,

7.3.3. Peer Monitoring and Evaluation

Involve other NGOs in Monitoring and Evaluation such as LNGOs and INGOs:

- Through a practical exercise of capacity building of LNGOs in the field of Monitoring and Evaluation and lead by an external organisation (a group of NGOs involved in support to LNGOs),

    - Group of NGOs doing rotary Monitoring and Evaluation on each other's projects on a rotation basis.

Such experience has been already implemented successfully by a group of INGOs operating in southern Iraq and participants to the workshop mentioned that this Monitoring and Evaluation option would be the cheapest.

Problem/Issues to consider:

- NGOs can encounter resistance and even hostility. Lack of trust among NGOs because Peer Monitoring and Evaluation can be seen as threatening,

    - NGOs involved in Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation should work in similar sectors,

    - Too few NGOs on the ground can prevent Peer Monitoring and Evaluation,

    - Security concerns,

Possible solutions:

- Develop relations of trusts between NGOs' staff through for instance workshops, trainings…

    - Increase the localisation of coordination to build relations of trust among NGO aid workers.

7.3.4. External Monitoring and Evaluation

On top of internal Monitoring and Evaluation, the donor or the NGO itself contracts an external Monitoring and Evaluation provider to undertake Monitoring and Evaluation activities. In the field of rehabilitation for instance, 2-3 private contractors could be sent on projects to conduct Monitoring and Evaluation. External Monitoring and Evaluation providers are already operational in Iraq.

Problems/issues with External Monitoring and Evaluation:

- NGOs interviewed agreed that donors should do more efforts to develop their Monitoring and Evaluation capacity through outsourcing this function,

- A number of donors have already put in place such systems but there is room for improvement. In particular external evaluators should have more competent staff especially for technical projects,

- Integrity of External Monitoring and Evaluation providers,

- External Monitoring and Evaluation providers can encounter resistance and even hostility,

- Cost for External Monitoring and Evaluation is important,

- Security.

Possible solutions:

- Donors to develop the sector of External Monitoring and Evaluation,

- Donors to build capacity of External Monitoring and Evaluation providers and ensure that those sent to the field have the required skills,

- Donors to agree with NGO and External Monitoring and Evaluation provider planning and design of Monitoring and Evaluation at the early stage of the project.

- Donors to exchange experiences with External Monitoring and Evaluation providers to ensure integrity of External Monitoring and Evaluation providers and seek also NGOs experiences with External Monitoring and Evaluation providers.

7.4. Conclusion

All participants agreed that methodologies for Monitoring and Evaluation of programmes should be part of the project proposal and agreed with the concerned donor who in turn should make more efforts to bear increased costs for Monitoring and Evaluation in Iraq.

While Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation, Separate Monitoring and Evaluation and Peer Monitoring and Evaluation can improve internal NGO Monitoring and Evaluation functions, participants viewed External Monitoring and Evaluation as an essential function as is the case in other contexts where donors undertake their own Monitoring and Evaluation.

Participants stressed the role of donors in undertaking and being more creative to find solutions for their own Monitoring and Evaluation.

8. <u>Conclusion</u>

INGOs have developed a range of remote programming approaches that offer mixed results. As a result of the situation, a new distance programming option was developed - remote partnership - whereby INGOs enter into partnerships with LNGOs. This option can be implemented in parallel of other remote approaches. When participants tried to define a framework for remote partnership, it appeared that there were mixed appreciations of what partnership is about and in particular how decision making should be shared. In its implementation, remote partnership can tend towards remote management or remote support approach. These options vary in the degree of responsibility given to national personnel.

There are several factors NGOs should consider before adopting one or a combination of the remote programming options. Participants concluded that it was not possible to compare the limits of each remote programming option since too many factors have to be taken into consideration and, most likely, a combination of factors would result in the failure of a remote programming option as opposed to a single factor. However, on the principle, participants favoured approaches that gave the most latitude to national personnel and LNGOs.

In the implementation of remote programming approaches, NGOs encounter the same distance-related challenges since they started operating remotely almost 2 years ago. These include challenges in communication, assessment, monitoring & evaluation and personnel management. The effects of these challenges result in the donors' perception that remote programming is fraught with difficulties and render assistance difficult and expensive.

NGOs identified possible solutions to reinforce their capacity to overcome those challenges, which gives an indication that there is room for improvement.

The table below summarises these proposed solutions:

Challenge & solutions	NGO Collective action	Donors action
Communication		
- Video-conferencing	X	X
- Cultural and contextual understanding/awareness	X	
- Language skills		
- Increase handover periods between incoming and outgoing expatriate staff	X	X
- Changing office location from Amman to Erbil for NGOs operating in central Iraq		
- Create in Baghdad International Airport (BIAP) and in Basrah airport an NGO space where expatriates can meet with their Iraqi colleagues	X	X
- Liaison/reporting officer		X
- System of deputies for key personnel		X
- Board system		
- Iraq based staff: horizontal versus pyramidal structure		
Personnel Management		
- NCCI Human Resources (HR) database	X	
- Local network: more "localisation" of coordination activities	X	
- Bonus system		X
- Salary scale	X	X
- Increased interaction between NGO HQ and Iraqi personnel	X	
- Increased interaction between Iraq based personnel and donors	X	
- Improved expatriates' interpersonal skills		
- Training and development policy	X	X
- Small scale programmes "think small"		
- Internship abroad	X	X
- Local network: more "localisation" of coordination activities	X	
- Share training resources to reduce costs	X	X
- Expatriates and experienced Iraqis from various NGOs to provide collective trainings to NGOs' staff.	X	
- Localise training resources	X	X
Assessment		
- NGO Joint Needs Assessment	X	X
Monitoring and Evaluation		
- Promote organisational learning within NGOs and among NGOs	X	X
- Participatory M&E		X
- Separate M&E Unit		X
- Peer M&E	X	X
- External M&E	X	X

Those solutions imply increased attention should be paid to:

- National staff empowerment and therefore on capacity building,

    - Coordination and capacity building resources at local level,

    - Coordination, exchange of information and trust among NGOs,

    - Addressing common issues of concern collectively,

    - Justifying and explaining the need for adequate funding. NGOs find it increasingly difficult to get sufficient funding for overhead costs however, there are a number of areas and in particular in the field of capacity building where NGOs could do more efforts to share resources and therefore decrease costs.

The workshop was supposed to end with the drawing of an action plan but, unfortunately, due to time constraints this exercise was adjourned.

As for some propositions that need to be developed and made clearer before to be implemented, the action plan need to be discussed with all the stakeholders. Indeed, the NGOs made the first propositions, but the implementation will need the investment of all actors.