

Stocktaking of existing indicators and information Inter-Agency Information and Analysis Unit, 13 March 2008

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Aims and purpose

The Inter-Agency Information and Analysis Unit was established in February 2008 to better coordinate and conduct analysis of the situation in Iraq. Surprisingly perhaps, the hazardous conditions have not stopped the information effort in Iraq. There is a wealth of information – the problem is rather that it is uncoordinated, impairing analysis of the big picture or trends over time.

This stock-taking exercise was undertaken to help make sense of the bewildering range of indicators and information and prepare the ground for a coherent and over-arching analysis on key humanitarian and development issues, and build evidence on needs, results and impact. It assesses the characteristics of 189 selected indicators available for Iraq, their quality and coverage as well as the gaps in our information needs.

Key findings

The need for current and reliable information in Iraq is great given that the UN, working largely by remote management, is removed from the reality on the ground. However, the overall conclusion from this stock-taking exercise is that the UN is not using information strategically in Iraq. As a result, the UN's use of information and analysis is fulfilling just a fraction of its potential. Information and analysis lacks strategic vision and purpose and does not always inform policy, programming, advocacy or coordination as it could and should.

This report raises several key problems with existing indicators and information. Firstly, the difficult and dangerous working environment means that in some instances, data reliability is questionable, contradictory figures exist, geographic coverage of indicators is compromised and methods and sampling change. Together, these factors undermine trend analysis and data comparability.

Secondly, existing information is focused on development needs. The humanitarian response, through the launch of the 2008 CAP in February, has gained momentum. Yet, there is an absence of information and indicators to adequately describe the humanitarian situation. Thus, while there is a wealth of information to describe the health, nutrition and education status of women and children, for instance, other issues such as the impact of violence on people's lives or the causes of their suffering have gone largely unaddressed.

Finally, the Iraqi Government (through COSIT and KRSO) collects the vast majority of information and indicators reviewed. This capacity is vital but it is also important to widen the sources of information to include NGOs and civil society as well.

Recommendations

The report highlights the four following key recommendations:

1. Develop a light and flexible tool to monitor a small number of meaningful and agreed upon indicators. To be collect through representative sample surveys on a quarterly basis by working with NGOs currently active in Iraq. The selected indicators should address the informational gaps and complement the data currently available and taking into consideration, as much as possible, the informational and analytical needs of the SOTs and the Humanitarian Working Group by coordinating data collection plans with them.
2. To the IAU: Ensure effective and coordinated information management and sharing;
3. As part of the effort to identify and collect information on humanitarian indicators and within the IAU:
 - OCHA should take the lead in identifying access and protection related indicators.
 - WHO should seek to implement the WHO/UNICEF/UNDP pilot project in cooperation with the emergency rooms and civil defense in order to provide regular civilian casualties information.
 - The IDP WG, IOM and UNHCR should provide updated and reliable information on Iraqi refugees; Collect information on IDP numbers that are not registered with MoDM and the reasons why; Collect reliable returnees figures with NGO partners; Partner with NGOs to verify/cross check IDP figures.
4. To the IAU: ensure that the vast amount of data currently available is analyzed for trends across surveys.
5. To UNICEF, UNDP, OCHA, COSIT, and KRSO: ensure that IRAQInfo continues to grow as the information base of all national surveys with all data from existing surveys entered by the end of 2008
6. To the IAU: Cooperate with the Gender Task Force to produce analytical reports on themes including:
 - a. Gender and access to services
 - b. Gender dimensions of violence
 - c. Gender and Poverty

1. Introduction

The purpose of this exercise is to take stock of existing indicators and information on the situation in Iraq. This report will provide a description of the types of indicators available in the UN IraqInfo database, their characteristics, quality, coverage and consistency. It identifies gaps in and inconsistencies between information and indicators collected. The accompanying matrix lists all the indicators addressed in this exercise and assesses them according to a checklist of objective metadata criteria.

The Inter-Agency Information and Analysis Unit (IAU) was established in February 2008. This stocktaking exercise is part of the Unit's plan for the initial two months. Also part of this plan was the creation of a UN IraqInfo database to serve as a repository for a broad range of indicators on Iraq updated monthly. This database is a tool for the Inter-Agency Unit and belongs to the UNCT as a whole. It is serviced by the Office of the DSRSG/HC/RC and OCHA. Together, the database and stocktaking exercise lay the ground for an analysis using existing information of the situation in Iraq to be conducted by the Inter-Agency Unit.

2. Methodology

The stock-taking was based on indicators contributed by agencies to the UN IraqInfo database, which was compiled in parallel to this exercise. Objective criteria were identified for assessing the indicators. These criteria were identified following referral to various sources including standards adopted by DevInfo¹ and the Cluster F stock-taking exercise conducted by UNHCR, IOM and OCHA in 2007.

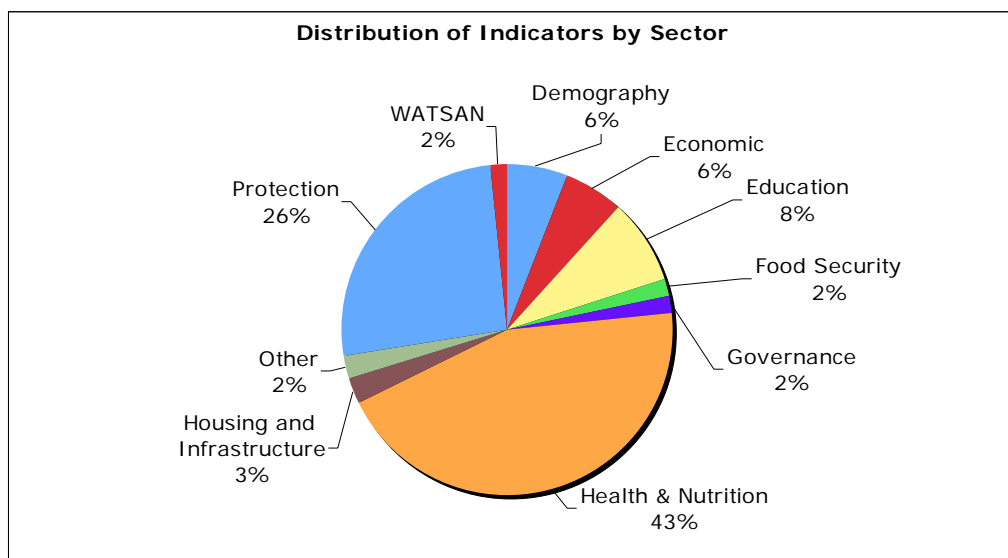
The reviewed indicators were examined against a checklist clarifying the (a) methodology utilized, (b) frequency of data collection, (c) data collection methodology, (d) utilized quality control procedures, (e) availability of the raw data, (f) post-estimation adjustments to the data, (g) timeliness of analysis after data collection, (h) the unit of measurement and target population, (i) level of disaggregation and accuracy.

The stocktaking exercise reviewed the written methodologies available from published surveys and also conducted interviews with key informants. The indicators included represent those provided by agencies to populate the UN IraqInfo database. It reviewed 189 indicators representing 9 sectors.

The majority of the indicators are developmental; few address the humanitarian situation. Of all indicators, nearly half (44%) come from UNICEF MICS. As a multiple indicator survey, it serves as a major source of indicators covering watsan, health, nutrition, shelter, demographic and education issues. It is also the only survey

¹ On indicators, DevInfo uses the Statistical data and metadata exchange (SDMX) ISO/TS 17369:2005 developed by BIS, ECB, EUROSTAT, IMF, OECD, UN and World Bank. With regard to sources, it uses the Data Documentation Initiative (DDI) ISO 11179 and Dublin Core (DC) ISO 15836:2003 Information and documentation.

updated using the same methodology and coverage. WHO (IFHS) and UNDP (ILCS) indicators constitute another one third of all indicators covered².



3. Overview

Overall, the stocktaking exercise produces both positive and negative conclusions about the current state of information generation and analysis in Iraq. Clearly, the volume of data is impressive given that Iraq is a hazardous environment in which to work. The fact that much of the indicators for which information is available require considerable skill in data collection and analysis is encouraging and points to the potential for interventions in Iraq to be well informed. However, as is typical in volatile working environments, data reliability in some instances is questionable, contradictory figures exist and geographic coverage of the indicators is often compromised for either security or political reasons.

Informational needs for Iraq are great, especially for the UN agencies engaged in remote management of their activities from Jordan. The relocation of the UN to Amman in 2003 generated a sense of distance from the Iraqi reality. Enhanced data collection processes, quick turnaround of analysis and reports, strong coordination amongst the information generating community and effective dissemination of analytical reports and data are necessary to overcome this sense.

In contrast, the reality observed through this exercise is that of poorly coordinated data collection activities, long intervals between data collection and report publication and virtually no common information / report sharing and dissemination platforms.

Informational needs in Iraq are further magnified by the fact that both humanitarian and developmental activities are taking place simultaneously. The type of information

² This does not necessarily include all the indicators collected by the different agencies. Rather, it is restricted to the indicators put forth by the agencies as most useful for understanding the situation in Iraq and for inclusion in the IraqInfo database.

required to guide sustainable development programmes differs from that required for quick humanitarian action.

This stocktaking exercise shows that very little humanitarian information exists for Iraq. The most glaring shortcoming of both the national and international humanitarian actors in Iraq has been the inability to reliably gauge the impact of violence on Iraqi lives. Estimates for civilian deaths and injuries and numbers of refugees are highly contentious, unreliable and easily influenced by political considerations. There is no systematic methodology for collected information on refugees or returnees and no independent verification of either the IDP or returnee figures, which are being used by UN agencies to determine programming in Iraq. The only information periodically collected for humanitarian purposes through representative sample surveys is the Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis collected by COSIT with the support of WFP.

The capacity of the Iraqi Government Central Office for Statistics and Information Technology (COSIT) to conduct large-scale surveys covering a great part of the country has encouraged agencies (UN and otherwise) to conduct data collection/data analysis exercises in partnership with the government. Since 2003, the capacity of COSIT to draw representative samples for the entire population has gradually improved with increased cooperation between COSIT in Baghdad and the Kurdistan Regional Statistical Office (KRSO). Previous to this cooperation, surveys conducted by COSIT covered 15 governorates only as the remaining three governorates fall in the Kurdistan region.

While the increased cooperation between COSIT and KRSO is a welcome advancement, the variation in the total sample between surveys impairs the ability to compare results and observe the evolution of the situation on the ground. This obstacle translates into a lack of baseline information for much of the data collected through sample surveys, which represents a sizable proportion of the total information available.

In addition, many indicators collected by different agencies at different moments in time suffer from lack of comparability due to varying methods of data collection and concept definitions. This, along with the problem of varying sample coverage described above leave the Iraqi information scene dominated by one-off pieces of information with limited comparability across geographic regions or over time.

Furthermore, the stocktaking exercise reveals that nearly half of the available information, although collected by different agencies, revolves around women and children's health and nutrition status and education. Essential information on the economy, micro-level trends, poverty, humanitarian access, population perceptions and the impact of aid are, up to this point, either non-existing or incomprehensive.

4. Characteristics of available indicators

Context specific versus global indicators

Of all the indicators in the database, 87% are globally-used and are not developed specifically to portray the reality in Iraq. Just 13% are context specific. The use of

internationally-agreed standards for indicator definitions and data collection methods is positive because it suggests conformity to established and high quality methods that add objectivity to information and credibility to programmes developed in response.

While some global indicators do capture the specific situation in Iraq, the available indicators do not reflect the specificity of the humanitarian situation. The downside of this focus is that the nature and impact of conflict and sanctions may not be adequately captured. This focus is likely to be the result of a predominance of a development discourse in Iraq up until this time.

Availability of baseline information and repeat measurement

One limitation of existing information is the general absence of a baseline for a significant proportion of the reviewed indicators. While it is positive that 58% of indicators have previously-collected baselines and repeat measurements, the majority of these relate to health indicators and economy. Indicators without any repeat measurement (42%) refer to protection among others.

In addition, just one third (35%) of these baselines were collected prior to the 2003 war (i.e. MICS II, 2000 and MOH surveillance from the nineties). This prevents the analysis of trends over time that are important to understand whether the situation has deteriorated or improved.

The 1996 MICS for example, would have served as an important baseline for many of the child health, nutrition and education indicators. However, looting in Baghdad in 2003 wiped all available primary records of the survey and its findings. As a result, the 2000 MICS2 survey serves as a baseline for many of these indicators, which were measured again in the 2006 MICS3.

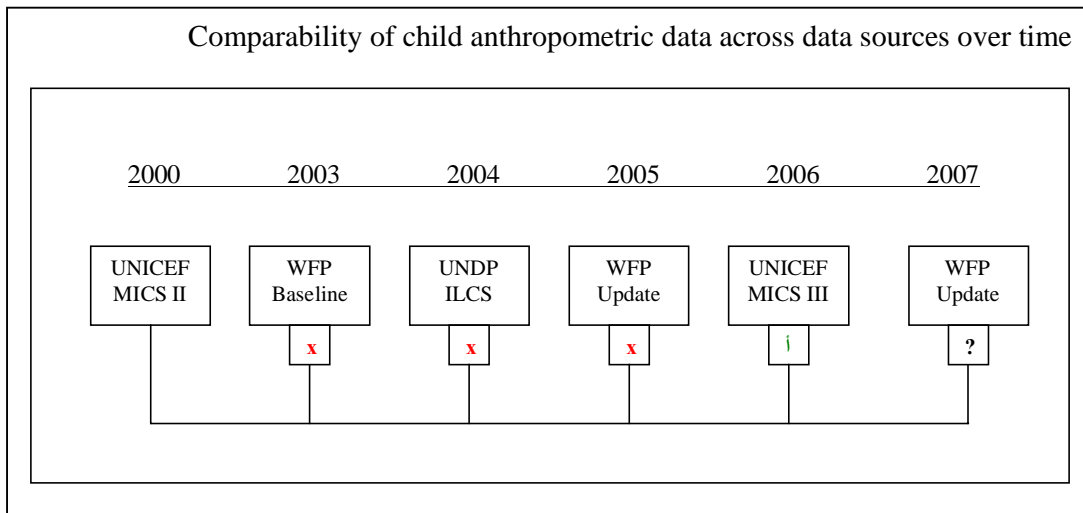
Another reason for the lack of baseline information is the reluctance to use information from the 1990s. During interviews with stakeholders, it was frequently stated that older information is unreliable because it was politically rigged or interfered with. The stock-taking team could not confirm whether or not this was the case and failed to understand if the raw data from surveys conducted during the 1990s would also be rendered unusable.

Coverage

A second reason for lack of baseline information is the problem of coverage. The large surveys conducted by WHO (IFHS), UNICEF (MICS) and UNDP (ILCS) contain information pertaining to the whole of Iraq - down to the governorate level. However, other surveys and assessments, particularly those conducted in previous years, have been conducted in the south and central regions of Iraq, excluding the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). It would be possible to circumvent this problem by establishing a trend with the lowest common denominator (i.e. 15 governorates excluding the KRG) but in the case of Iraq this is considered politically inappropriate.

The problem of coverage is best illustrated with nutrition indicators. There are three different agencies who have conducted surveys using child anthropometric

measurements – WFP (2003, 2005), UNICEF (2000, 2006) and UNDP (2004). However, because of the different timings and levels of coverage of Iraq, their findings are not comparable. WFP data is not comparable over years or with the other two surveys at the national level because of differences in areas covered as well as differences in methodology used.³ UNICEF and UNDP are comparable, save for indicators on child anthropometry where UNICEF reports on children aged 0-59 months while UNDP report on children aged 6-59 months.⁴

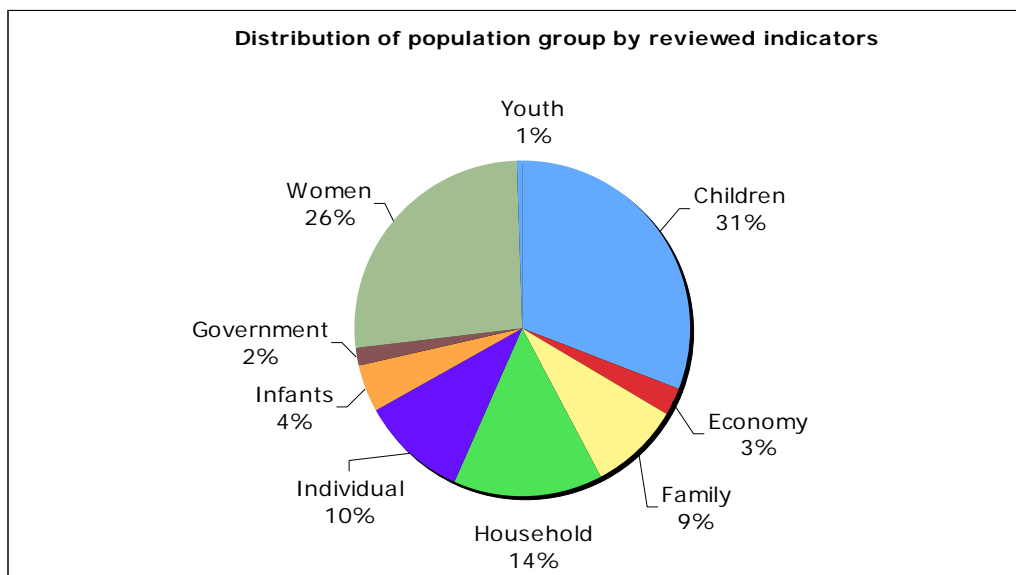


As outlined in the figure above, the comparability of child anthropometric indicators collected by different agencies over time is limited. Drawing conclusions on the changes over time would require a return to the raw data to compare information for the lowest common denominators among the five data sets, i.e. on the 16 governorates included in the WFP surveys and on children aged 6-59 months. Moreover, to achieve comparability of the “lowest common denominator” datasets, the sample weights of subsequent datasets must be revised according to the population distribution reflected in the sample of the “base” survey.

Women and children are the two population types most widely covered representing over half the indicators; another 12% refer to displaced populations (refugees, returnees and IDPs). The majority of indicators provide a breakdown by type of locality (urban / rural) and gender and age.

³ With regard to WFP's food security surveys, indicators collected in 2003 and 2005 covered 16 governorates, while in 2007, 18 governorates. The 2003 data included anthropometric measurements for children between 1 and 5 years of age while the 2005 data included measurements for children between 6 and 59 months of age.

⁴ Similarly, with the labour force surveys conducted by COSIT (2005, 2006), Anbar, Dahuk and Erbil were not covered and KRSO does not have additional information to provide a complete picture for Iraq.



Existence of multiple sources

The Iraqi Government, in partnership with the UN, is by far the most commonly-used information provider. The Government is used as an information source in 81% of all indicators assessed. The capacity of the Iraqi Government to collect data is considered by many organizations to be superior to other organizations such as research institutes and universities. International organizations depend on COSIT for information due to their lack of presence in the field. For instance, all the large UN surveys have been conducted through COSIT, namely, the Iraq Family Health Survey (2007, WHO), Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis (2003, 2005, 2007, WFP), Household Income and Expenditure Survey (2007, World Bank), Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (2000, 2006, UNICEF) and the Iraq Living Conditions Survey (2004, UNDP). The data for all economic indicators used by IMF are provided by COSIT.

To a lesser extent, NGOs are used by UN agencies as Implementing Partners for data collection. In just one instance, is information collected and owned by an NGO (Iraq Body Count which collects information on civilian casualties). In rare instances, public institutions, such as clinics, are sources for information. This is the case with regard to WHO health surveillance information.

There are implications of heavy reliance solely on a government information source and ways should be found to ensure GOI information is triangulated with other sources. A case in point is the Ministry of Displacement and Migration (MoDM) IDP figures collected for 14 governorates. MoDM is the sole source for IDP numbers in these 14 governorates and counts registered IDPs only (in contrast to IOM, which counts registered and non-registered refugees in Anbar governorate). However, not all IDPs are registered by MoDM and there is an unknown number of IDPs that is unregistered. Registration is a lengthy and bureaucratic procedure and in addition, physical access constraints and different regulations in place in different governorates set further limits to the numbers registering.

The numbers of Iraqi refugees is a further example of the limitations of reliance on one government source. UNHCR reports that there are approximately 2.47 million refugees in neighbouring countries. However, the UNHCR offices in neighbouring countries rely entirely on the host governments for these numbers and further, are unable to provide any information on the methodologies used to arrive at this figure.⁵

Routine reporting versus surveys

A small number of the indicators contain information collected through routine reporting. WHO's immunization surveillance, UNAMI's security incidents monitoring and Iraq Body Count casualty figures are rare examples of monitoring mechanisms in place. In addition, there is a lack of information coming from the different geographical regions of Iraq that provides updates on the specific trends and needs in those different areas. The main problem with the data emanating from routine reporting is the potential for under reporting.

Means of verification / accuracy / quality control

Many of the large surveys adopting internationally-accepted standards have built-in quality control. For example, 82% of the indicators are based on a representative sample, the vast majority of which have benefited from COSIT standardized quality control.

However, 16% of indicators using non-survey information are based on estimates and as such, are liable to change and less reliable (e.g. CPI and other macro-economic indicators, refugee and returnee numbers). One example is the number of refugees. In the absence of border monitoring on Iraq's borders, refugee figures are extremely difficult to verify and are open to manipulation for political reasons.

The different figures for civilian casualties in Iraq since 2003 – Iraq Body Count, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and WHO's Iraq Family Health Survey - highlight the difficulties in ascertaining casualty numbers in Iraq using both survey and non-survey methods. Available numbers differ by as much as a factor of 10 and, according to IFHS, suggestions indicate that as many as 50% of violent deaths may have gone unreported.⁶

Tracking refugee and IDP movements is notoriously difficult. The two different surveys⁷ currently used to gain a picture of returnees to Iraq highlight the issue of quality control. Both IOM and UNHCR have conducted assessments of returnees, however one is geographically focused (Baghdad only) and thus not representative

⁵ This is according to the September 2007 UNHCR refugee report and includes figures from Syria (1.2 – 1.4 million), Jordan (500,000 – 750,000), Egypt (up to 70,000), Lebanon (20-40,000), Turkey (10,000) and the Gulf States (200,000).

⁶ In the absence of comprehensive death registration and hospital reporting, household surveys are the best way of determining numbers. However, there are limitations: some areas are too dangerous to visit and more people leave their homes in times of conflict and many people have left Iraq altogether, which affects not only the reporting of deaths but also the accuracy of sampling and computation of national rates of death.

⁷ IOM's "Returnee Monitoring and Needs Assessments" and UNHCR's "Rapid Assessment of Return Iraqis from Displacement Locations in Iraq and from Neighboring Countries".

nationwide and the other, while nationwide, is acknowledged by the agency as not being representative due to the limitations in methodology.

Another problem related to data accuracy and verification is evident in the compilation of IDP numbers. In this case, three different methods are used by the three organizations collecting information in the different governorates to compile one figure.

A further accuracy related issue is the updating of records – a problem faced in the IDP numbers. The IDP total figure of approximately 2.5 million IDPs throughout Iraq is based on two IDP databases. The first database covers the period pre-2006 from and includes 1.2 million IDPs.⁸ The second database includes IDPs who were displaced after the February 2006 bombing of the Al Askari mosque: the event which is widely acknowledged to have triggered the rise in sectarian violence in Iraq. The pre-2006 IDP database provides approximately 50% of the overall IDP figure being used today and yet has not been updated since 31st December, 2005. As such, the overall IDP figure may be distorted as it does not account for returnees or for births and deaths.⁹

Geographical Index

Information is available at the governorate level for 80% of indicators while only 13% of indicators have information available at the district level (e.g. IOM needs assessment monitoring and WFP Food Security Analysis). Geographical reference codes are out-of-date and district level geo-political boundaries are not yet agreed upon. Consequently, there is inconsistency in reporting at the sub-national level - different organizations and agencies can report by governorate, district or health district. This restricts the analysis of datasets together.

Future changes to the districts could undermine already weak comparability of information over time. It is yet unclear whether changes to the districts will cross governorate boundaries. This could potentially affect comparability of indicators currently representative at the governorate level. In the event that changes are within the governorate boundaries, statistically, it would still be necessary to reweight all previously-collected information to reflect the new distribution.

Gaps

The assessment reveals a number of gaps in information and indicators. The available information describes the state of a specific sector or population type in Iraq.

⁸ The total number of IDPs in the first database is based on data gathered on IDPs in public buildings and collective centres in the three northern governorates (UNHCR/UNOPS) as well as monitoring and needs assessments of IDPs in the 15 central and southern governorates (IOM).

⁹ Another potential problem with the 2003 – 2005 dataset is the fact that it could include IDPs from before 2003. No checking took place to determine if displaced families were displaced prior to 2003, as was the case for example, with Marsh Arabs. It is also possible that this figure excludes a number of IDPs, especially in the north, since the figure for the three northern governorates is based on data gathered of IDPs in public buildings and collective centres only and thus excludes any IDPs living in other places (rented accommodation, with friends, family etc).

However, there is a lack of information allowing analysis of causes of current problems (e.g. war, sectarian violence, sanctions).

The prevalence of poverty in Iraq – an essential indicator for both development and humanitarian intervention planning – is unknown. Previous analyses such as the Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis and the Unsatisfied Basic Needs report address poverty though are limited by the absence of both comprehensive expenditures data and a defined national poverty line. Positively, comprehensive household income and expenditure data collected in 2007 by COSIT with the support of the World Bank will address this information gap and provide a solid baseline against which future trends can be measured.

In addition to poverty, the indicators for the following fields are absent:

- Big picture economic analysis
- Micro-level trends
- Access and movement monitoring
- Impact of aid interventions
- Population perceptions

5. Recommendations

1. *Expand the range of sources for data collection and analysis.* International NGOs have been active in Iraq throughout the war; with experience on the ground and a presence in most governorates, and in many cases a sustained presence over a period of many years allowing an understanding of the evolving situation with a historical perspective. Given the UN's distance from the reality on the ground in Iraq, this capacity could be harnessed to great effect.

Specifically, NGOs with an established IDP assistance programme, such as Mercy Corps, could be used to verify existing IDP data. NGOs could also be used to collect currently missing data on behalf of the international humanitarian community. Expertise within relevant local institutions, such as universities, could also be used to broaden the scope and range of sources.

To the IAU:

1.1 Develop a light and flexible tool to monitor a small number of meaningful and agreed upon indicators. To be collect through representative sample surveys on a quarterly basis by working with NGOs currently active in Iraq. The selected indicators should address the informational gaps and complement the data currently available and taking into consideration, as much as possible, the informational and analytical needs of the SOTs and the Humanitarian Working Group by coordinating data collection plans with them.

1.2 Cooperate with the Gender Task Force to produce analytical reports on themes including:

- Gender and access to services
- Gender dimensions of violence

- Gender and Poverty

2. ***Focus on more effective and coordinated information management and sharing.*** With the establishment of the Inter-Agency IAU, the OCHA office and the newly created Sector Outcome Teams (SOTs), the institutional backbone is in place for a more effective and coordinated effort in information management.

To the IAU:

- 2.1 Ensure existing information and analysis is made available to the SOTs and other relevant stakeholders through the IAU website (www.UNIraq/IAU) and other means of dissemination.
- 2.2 With the Information Management Working Group, ensure that for the purposes of analysis a unified geographical index is agreed to and used by all agencies and organizations.
- 2.3 Ensure that existing information systems (such as UNIraqInfo and IOM's IDP monitoring system) are used and built upon.

To UNICEF, UNDP, OCHA, COSIT, and KRSO:

- 2.4 Ensure that IRAQInfo continues to grow as the information base of all national surveys.

3. ***Increase efforts to identify and collect information on humanitarian indicators.*** The appropriate agencies should systematically address basic missing indicators and information:

To OCHA:

- 3.1 Coordinate a process led by the IAU and in coordination with the Humanitarian Working Group to identify access related indicators.

To WHO:

- 3.2 Seek to implement the WHO/UNICEF/UNDP pilot project in cooperation with the emergency rooms and civil defense in order to provide regular civilian casualties information.

To the IDP WG, IOM, UNHCR:

- 3.3 Provide updated and reliable information on Iraqi refugees.
- 3.4 Further capacity building of MoDM in IDP registration and data collection.
- 3.5 Collect information on numbers that are not registered with MoDM and the reasons why.
- 3.6 UNHCR/IOM: start collecting reliable returnees figures with NGO partners.
- 3.7 IOM – partner with NGOs to verify/cross check IDP figures.

4. ***Identify key indicators in consultation with the SOTs and the Humanitarian Working Group and establish the means for collecting and monitoring them***

regularly. There is a need to have more regular updates on the evolving situation in different governorates of Iraq.

To the IAU:

Refer recommendation No. 1.1