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IRAQ REGIONAL PROGRAM I (IRP I)

FINAL REPORT

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Cover photo: Sinjar City's al-Shuhada'a park was rehabilitated by Shingal Engineering Association with IRP I funding. Reclaiming the park after damage during Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) occupation and post-liberation neglect provided an important social and recreational space for returnee families. (Credit: Chemonics/IRP I)

CONTENTS

ACRONYMS

AAM	Adil Abd al-Mahdi
COR	Council of Representatives
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
CR	OTI Country Representative
CSO	civil society organization
GCNED	General Company of Northern Electricity Distribution
GMU	grants management unit
GOI	Government of Iraq
ICRI	Iraq Community Resilience Initiative
IDIQ	indefinite delivery, indefinite quantity contract
IDP	internally displaced person
IHEC	Independent High Electoral Commission
IRP I	Iraq Regional Program I
IRP II	Iraq Regional Program II
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
KRG	Kurdistan Regional Government
KRI	Kurdistan Region of Iraq
MEL	monitoring, evaluation, and learning
OTI	Office of Transition Initiatives
PMF	Popular Mobilization Forces
PO	program objective
PKK	Kurdistan Workers Party
RA	Rolling Assessment
SMT	Senior Management Team
SO	sub-objective
SRS	Strategy Review Session
SWIFT IV	Support Which Implements Fast Transitions IV IDIQ
TAP	Transition Activities Pool
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development
YBS	Sinjar Resistance Units

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI)'s Iraq Regional Program I (IRP I) — branded locally as the Iraq Community Resilience Initiative (ICRI) or Ta'afi ("recovery" in Arabic) — was awarded on September 5, 2018 and formally launched in January 2019.[1] The 41-month task order under the Support Which Implements Fast Transitions IV (SWIFT IV) indefinite quantity, indefinite delivery (IDIQ) mechanism included a $127,198,961 base period, with $75,307,523 obligated over the life of project. Of this amount, $39.6 million represented activity funds under the Transition Activities Pool (TAP).

Launched two years following Iraq Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi's declaration of victory over the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), IRP I expanded OTI's then-ongoing Iraq Ramp-Up Option, activated under the Syria Regional Program II, to promote stability in Iraq. Whereas the ramp-up option focused predominantly on the recovery needs of ethnic and religious minority communities in Ninewa Plain and Sinjar that were decimated and displaced following ISIS's deliberate targeting of these communities, IRP I's mandate expanded to include support for the recovery of Mosul as well as ISIS-impacted communities in western Anbar. In its final year, IRP I established programming capacity to address emerging threats to stability outside the program's primary operating areas and to challenges unrelated to displacement. IRP I's final strategic framework included the following two program objectives (POs): 1) improving conditions that allow for durable returns in areas liberated from ISIS and 2) mitigating discrete challenges that threaten overall stability. PO 1 included three sub-objectives, corresponding with improved services prioritized by communities, expanded livelihoods, and improved social conditions.[2]

IRP I's stabilization approach included delivering immediate, tangible, and sustainable benefits provided in an inclusive and representative manner to local communities victimized or exploited by ISIS or others attempting to capitalize on divisions. IRP I played a critical role in multi-donor reconstruction efforts, with the program working directly with local communities to identify smaller-scale, quick-impact recovery projects to complement larger-scale reconstruction programs, such as the United Nations Development Programme's Funding Facility for Stabilization, which addressed government recovery priorities.

To complement on-the-ground recovery efforts, IRP I developed a social media strategy at project inception to broadly promote USAID's assistance and amplify recovery progress — a unique publicity level for an OTI program. IRP I leveraged a robust social media presence — which grew organically to more than 26,000 Facebook followers by

[1] Due to procurement delays during the award process, project startup was delayed until January 2019.
[2] The program defined social conditions as how people feel about living in their communities, their general feelings of safety, their ability to go about their daily lives, and their ability to interact positively with other community members.

the end of the January 2022 — to showcase the depth and breadth of USAID support nationally, helping raise Iraqis' awareness about the U.S. government's commitment to supporting Iraq as it faced multiple threats to stability, including the COVID-19 pandemic and a financial crisis.

From January 2019 to February 2022, IRP I implemented 290 activities valued at $39,555,921 with 136 grantees. Of these, two activities were partially implemented, but canceled — one due to leadership transitions within a government partner entity that stalled activity development and another due to COVID-19. IRP I partnered with 42 local, regional, and national government entities and 94 nongovernmental organizations, including youth and cultural groups, media organizations, activists, and artists. Of the program's 290 total activities, 19 were non-grant-under-contract Transition Activities Pool (non-GUC TAP) projects, with IRP I engaging vendors and contractors directly to deliver goods, services, and technical assistance to Iraqi beneficiaries. The allocation of TAP funding across POs can be found in Exhibit 1.

EXHIBIT 1. PROGRAMMING BY OBJECTIVE

	PO 1 – IMPROVE CONDITIONS FOR DURABLE RETURNS IN AREAS LIBERATED FROM ISIS	PO 2 – MITIGATE DISCRETE CHALLENGES THAT THREATEN OVERALL STABILITY
NUMBER OF ACTIVITIES	265	25
VALUE	$36,601,031	$2,954,890
NUMBER OF GRANTEES	125	11

In its final year, IRP I completed six internal cluster evaluations to assess the outcomes of recovery programming in Anbar, Mosul, the Ninewa Plain, and Sinjar as well as cluster findings from media and social recovery activities. Clusters represent activities intentionally grouped around a common intended result, and the evaluations examined the extent to which IRP I contributed to improving public perceptions of recovery in each of the four target geographies; the extent to which IRP's media activities complemented geographic recovery activities; and IRP I's contributions to social recovery in each of the four target geographies. OTI also commissioned an external final evaluation through EnCompass LLC, which focused on IRP I's contributions to social recovery and durable returns in Ninewa and Mosul, as well as the role of the program's social media strategy in influencing returns in these two locations. This evaluation helped to confirm some of IRP's key assumptions around recovery and pathways to durable returns. It also yielded valuable insights on incorrect assumptions and missed opportunities — for example, the importance of integrating gender considerations throughout the activity cycle — that will be applied to the follow-on program IRP II.

IRP I's internal geographic cluster evaluations reaffirmed that basic services and livelihoods were key recovery priorities for communities, as well as the importance of sequencing and layering interventions as recovery priorities evolve. For example, in the

Ninewa Plain, economic recovery and livelihoods are frequently cited as current priorities because many basic service and infrastructure rehabilitation needs have already been addressed. These findings were echoed in the external final evaluation, which found that access to basic services is a key factor in residents' decisions to return and that livelihood opportunities are key motivators for people to stay in their towns of origin in the long run in both the Ninewa Plain and Mosul.

IRP I's internal evaluations found that activities contributed to improved perceptions of recovery, feelings of hope, and willingness to remain after return. However, findings indicated that these feelings are contingent on continued recovery progress, whether current priorities are being addressed, and whether the security situation remains stable. The external final evaluation also found that IRP I substantially improved community members' access to basic services and livelihood opportunities and contributed to their sense of well-being and normalcy. These factors contributed to community members' decisions to stay in their communities. However, unemployment continues to be the greatest and most important challenge in both Ninewa Plain and Mosul, and despite IRP I's focus on livelihoods programming, there remains a great need for livelihood activities, especially in the Ninewa Plain.

IRP I's internal cluster evaluation on media programming provided valuable insight on the efficacy of a well-planned outreach strategy that incorporates emotionally resonant and engaging online content, tailored to local media consumption habits and preferences. IRP I used its social media presence, which grew its share of followers steadily over the course of the program, to amplify recovery activities and share personal stories of recovery with the intent of promoting positive narratives to encourage durable returns. The external final evaluation found that the program's social media strategy played an indirect role in promoting returns by providing a platform where residents disseminate recovery updates within their own networks, which in turn influences community members' decision to return. However, the evaluation also noted that other communication means and offline outreach strategies must also be used to reach a greater number (and more diverse groups) of residents and magnify outreach by social media.

Finally, findings from both internal and external evaluations confirmed that while IRP I's services and livelihoods programming contributed to recovery, social conditions are not determinants of durable returns, and the program's impact was limited at best. While IRP I's social infrastructure programming may have contributed to residents' well-being and sense of normalcy, final evaluation findings suggest that where social tensions do exist, these are often between community members and outsiders (e.g., from nearby villages or across the governorate) as opposed to within a neighborhood among community members. However, IRP I focused mostly on the latter. These relations, the evaluation suggests, have been favorable from the beginning and may have even been strengthened by the collective trauma faced during the war. A key recommendation for future programming is to focus on relations across communities, especially between rural and urban areas, to allay fears toward other groups and to decrease mistrust.

SECTION ONE

COUNTRY CONTEXT

IRP I was awarded following Iraq's May 2018 parliamentary elections, which saw historically low voter turnout followed by political wrangling over inconclusive results and negotiations to determine the largest parliamentary bloc. In October 2018, Adil Abd al-Mahdi (AAM), an independent Shia candidate without a political base, was ultimately confirmed as prime minister — a post traditionally held by a Shia Arab in Iraq's power-sharing arrangement between its major ethno-sectarian components.[3] However, AAM was widely considered a weak, compromise candidate who would not oppose Iraq's major parties, including Iraq's rival Shia blocs, which have a vested interest in preserving the prevailing political system of sectarianism and Iranian patronage.

AAM immediately faced a daunting set of urgent national priorities, including the reconstruction and recovery of areas decimated by ISIS; repairing historical rifts between Iraq's components that precipitated the rise of ISIS and that were exacerbated by the conflict; and mediating tensions between the U.S. and Iran, both allies of Iraq. Despite an ambitious agenda — which included promises to limit the influence of paramilitary groups and consolidate them into the security forces and pledging to resolve Iraq's electricity problems by the summer of 2019 — AAM was unable to deliver on any promises. The government's failure to address unemployment, corruption, and improve basic services led to protests in Baghdad in September 2019. AAM's controversial demotion of Counter-Terrorism Service Chief Abdul Wahab al-Saadi, a revered military general beloved by Iraqis for his role in liberating the country from ISIS and for his patriotism, further fueled public discontent and sparked widespread protests in Baghdad and across the Shia South the following month.

TISHREEN MOVEMENT – A TURNING POINT FOR IRAQ

With unprecedented citizen participation and solidarity around common grievances that transcended ethno-sectarian identity, the protest movement was unlike previous seasonal service protests or those promoting narrow sectarian agendas. It also represented one of the biggest threats to Iraq's political status quo, with the protest slogan "We Want a Homeland" becoming emblematic of nationalist fervor to overhaul the political system and rid Iraq of elite corruption and Iranian influence. While AAM initially tried to appease protestors by calling for time to address long-standing public grievances, the government response turned brutal. Peaceful demonstrations were met with violent suppression by security forces, using live ammunition and tear gas grenades fired directly at protestors. Iranian-supported Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) factions were believed to have perpetrated the greatest violence, including sniper attacks targeting activists and protest leaders. At least 600 protestors were killed and thousands injured during the height of the protests, between October 2019 and the first

[3] Iraq's "three presidencies" convention dictates that the presidency be held by a Kurd, the prime minister post by a Shia Arab, and the parliament speakership by a Sunni Arab.

quarter of 2020, with protestors subsequently demanding the government investigate the killings and hold perpetrators accountable.

Rather than force the movement into submission, the government's tactics against its own citizens — documented widely on social media — only increased outrage and attracted more people in solidarity, forcing the government to cut internet access and event media coverage. In the following year, Iraqi activists and journalists associated with the movement were also targeted by unknown security elements, and subjected to assassinations, detentions, torture and enforced disappearances. Unable to calm the streets — and with protestors calling for a complete overhaul of the political system and Iraq's most revered Shia cleric Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani encouraging a change in leadership — AAM announced his resignation in November 2019.

In parallel, tensions between the U.S. and Iran reached a climax in December 2019 when a rocket attack believed to be perpetrated by Kata'ib Hezbollah killed a U.S. contractor and injured several other Iraqi and U.S. service members at a base housing U.S. personnel near Kirkuk. The attack drew retaliatory airstrikes by the U.S. on Kata'ib Hezbollah positions along the Iraq-Syria border, leading to anti-U.S. riots by PMF members and supporters, who entered Baghdad's Green Zone and attacked the U.S. embassy. On January 3rd, three days following the attack, the U.S. killed Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Quds Force Commander Qassim Suleimani and PMF Deputy Chief (and Kata'ib Hezbollah founder) Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis in a drone strike near Baghdad International Airport. Suleimani was widely considered the architect of Iran's military strategy in the region, with Muhandis as his deputy for Iraq operations and the de facto PMF leader. Together, both men played a significant role in the strategic command and training of pro-Iranian PMF militias as well as in orchestrating attacks on U.S. military forces in the region. Five days later, Iran responded with ballistic missile attacks against an Iraqi base hosting U.S. personnel and another base near Erbil. The escalation increased the threat of direct confrontation between Iraq's major allies, and Iraq's parliament, the Council of Representatives (COR), voted on January 5, 2020, to expel U.S. troops from the country, with elements of the protest movement also calling for the departure of U.S. forces. While open conflict did not transpire, Iran-backed groups maintained a steady campaign of attacks against U.S-led coalition facilities in Iraq, including drone strikes and rocket attacks that persisted throughout the program.

COVID-19 PANDEMIC INCREASES IRAQ'S FRAGILITY

2020 marked the arrival of the global coronavirus pandemic, with Iraq's first case recorded in Najaf at the end of February and the first deaths reported in early March. In response, both the Government of Iraq (GOI) and Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) reacted quickly to limit the contagion. Their extreme measures included months-long lockdowns and border closures (with neighboring countries and between the Kurdistan Region of Iraq [KRI] and federal Iraq), extended public holidays closing schools and government offices, recreational facilities closures, and prohibitions on social and religious gatherings. The restrictions caused acute food insecurity and income challenges for vulnerable communities, including returnees. Many Iraqis, underemployed and reliant on low-wage, informal jobs, were particularly affected by curfews and

closures. In addition, with reduced oil revenues resulting from the global collapse in oil prices in the Spring, the Iraqi government was unable to pay civil servants, whose salaries and pensions make up more than 45% of total government spending. To reduce salary costs in the immediate term, the GOI devalued the Iraqi dinar against the U.S. dollar. However, with imports (including food) mostly purchased in U.S. dollars, price increases further diminished Iraqis' spending power. The crisis prompted the government to pass a June 2020 emergency spending bill to borrow funds and subsequently release a white paper laying out urgent structural reforms to reduce the budget deficit in the long term.

Concurrently, the pandemic pushed Iraq's healthcare system to the brink of collapse. The situation was particularly dire in federal Iraq, with chronically under-resourced hospitals struggling to address increased patient intake. The public health crisis prompted a government plea for foreign assistance, with donors and implementers — including IRP I — increasing support to the health sector. In 2021, amid a surge in COVID-19 cases, Iraq suffered a devastating setback to its public health response when fires ripped through two healthcare facilities providing critical COVID-19 patient care. The fires killed 82 people in the Ibn Al Khatib and Ibn Al Zuhur hospital complex in Baghdad in April, and at least 92 people at the Al-Hussein COVID-19 hospital in Nasiriyah in July, with hundreds more injured. The fires are believed to have been ignited by exploding oxygen canisters which then tore through the facilities due to their lack of basic fire safety standards and detection/alarm systems. The disaster sparked national condemnation and further undermined confidence in the government's competence to address the crisis. The Baghdad hospital fire led to the resignation of Iraq's Minister of Health Hassan al-Tamimi, while the Nasiriyah hospital fire led Prime Minister Khadimi to order the suspension and detention of the provincial directors of health and civil defense and the al-Hussein hospital director.

PROSPECTS FOR RECOVERY IN SINJAR

The pandemic accelerated the return of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the Kurdistan Region to Sinjar. Between early July and August 2020, more than 2,500 displaced Yazidi families returned to Sinjar, the single-largest wave of returns since the district was recaptured from ISIS in 2015. Notably, IDPs returned despite persistent, widespread infrastructure destruction, insecurity, and lack of basic services in Sinjar. Concerns over COVID-19 transmission in camps, as well as general frustration with prolonged displacement and camp conditions, were reportedly the key return drivers.

Recognizing the need to accelerate recovery in Sinjar, the GOI and KRG announced an agreement delineating shared security, reconstruction, and governance arrangements for the district on October 9, 2020. The Sinjar Agreement seeks to reduce administrative uncertainty (Sinjar has had two mayors, each appointed by the central and regional governments) and enhance security by expelling non-state armed groups from the area

that contribute to instability.[4] Currently, numerous armed actors operate in the area, including Iraqi security forces and local Yezidi groups such as the Sinjar Resistance Units (YBS), a militia affiliated with the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) and included within the PMF umbrella. In their place, the agreement stipulates the creation of a local security force comprised of Sinjaris, including those currently displaced in camps. However, the YBS has resisted departure from the area and many Yezidis have opposed the agreement because local leaders were not consulted. At the time of writing, there has been little tangible progress toward implementing the agreement, although Iraqi security forces have increased efforts to forcibly remove the YBS since deploying to the district in December 2021 in response to YBS attempts to shut down Iraqi government presence in the district. Both groups have clashed since then, and the Iraqi army subsequently arrested several YBS fighters in January 2022.

In addition to the Sinjar Agreement, the COR passed the Yezidi Survivors Law in March 2021. The historic legislation was heralded as a significant milestone in Iraq's post-ISIS reconciliation and reconstruction. The law is considered a necessary and important step to recovery by creating a framework for justice and reparations for the survivors of ISIS atrocities, particularly female survivors of sexual violence, and extends to Christians, Shabaks, and other minority components. The law includes financial and other assistance, including a salary, land or housing, education support, and access to health and psychosocial services. In July, the Iraqi government took steps to implement the law by creating the General Directorate for Survivors Affairs and appointing Sarab Alyas to lead the new directorate, which is temporarily based in Mosul with plans to expand operations to Sinjar.

GOI CLOSES REMAINING IDP CAMPS IN FEDERAL IRAQ

Elsewhere, the Iraqi government made additional progress on its plan to close the country's remaining IDP camps. The plan, announced in 2020, was widely criticized by humanitarian actors noting that the closures amounted to forced returns without basic guarantees of safety, shelter, or essential services. The closures were seen as particularly problematic amid the COVID-19 pandemic, prompting concerns around a lack of planning and the potential for secondary displacement. In November 2021, the Ministry of Migration and Displacement announced only two IDP camps remained to be closed, including Ameriyat Al-Fallujah camp in Anbar and Al Jeddah camp south of Mosul. Previously, the GOI repatriated 381 Iraqis from al-Hol detention camp in Syria — which houses families of suspected ISIS fighters, many of whom are believed to have been radicalized in the camp — to Al Jeddah camp as part of an interim plan to return individuals to Iraq. The repatriation and return of individuals with suspected ISIS links have been highly controversial, with a majority of Iraqis, including local officials, rejecting the return of these individuals to their communities of origin, posing complex reintegration challenges and implications for social cohesion and community stability.

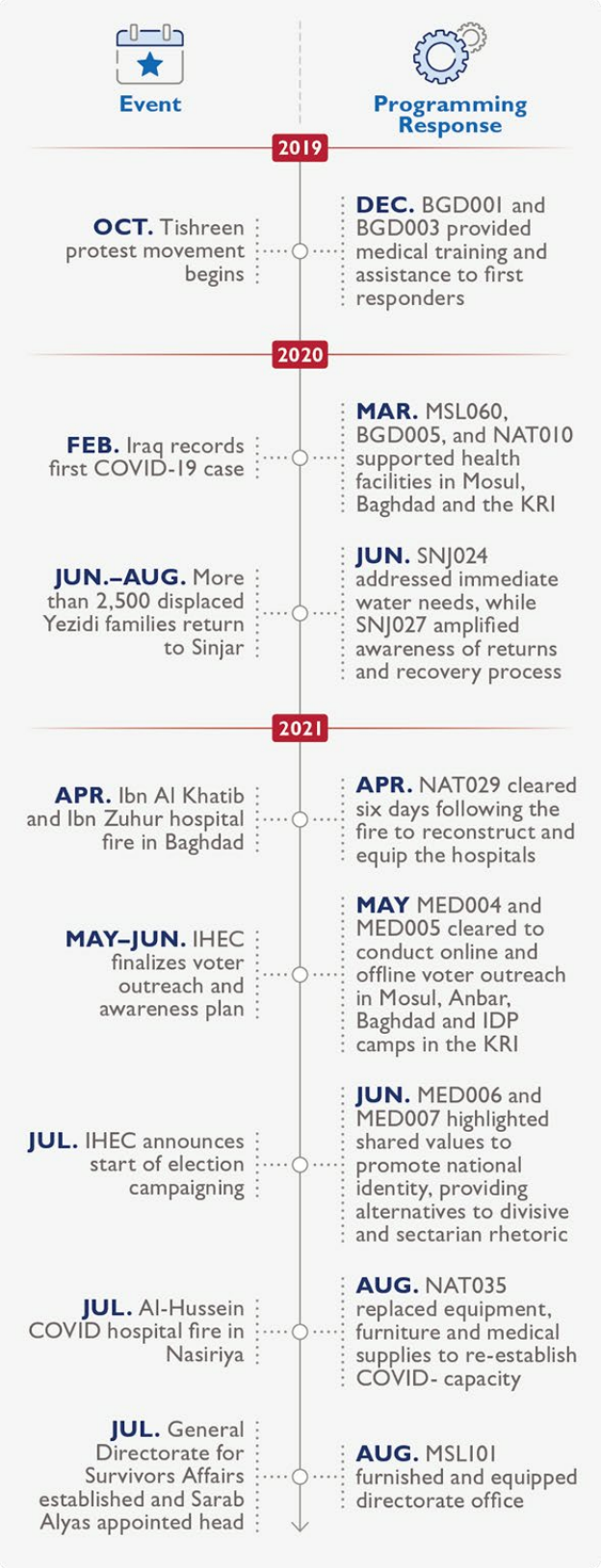
[4] Turkey considers the PKK, a Kurdish separatist group, a threat to its national security and frequently launches cross-border operations in northern Iraq targeting the PKK and its affiliates. In April 2021, Turkish airstrikes targeted YBS units in several locations across Sinjar, including a school used by YBS militants as a clinic near Sinjar city, and a checkpoint west of Khana Sor complex.

2021 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS RESULT IN LOSSES FOR IRAN-ALIGNED GROUPS AND GAINS FOR MUQTADA AL-SADR

IRP I's final year of programming saw accelerated preparations for parliamentary elections, first slated for June 2021 and later postponed to October 10, 2021. Early elections were a key protest demand and among incoming Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi's earliest priorities. Kadhimi, the former chief of Iraq's National Intelligence Service, was sworn in on May 6, 2020, almost six months following AAM's resignation and following unsuccessful bids by two previous prime ministers-elect to form a government. Kadhimi's ambitious agenda had several priorities aligned with protestor demands, including early elections and electoral reform, militia disarmament, and accountability for those responsible for protestor deaths.

In November 2020, following amendments to a draft election law approved the previous year, Kadhimi ratified the new electoral law, which replaced the previous party list system with a single non-transferable vote for candidates, designed to put voter choice above party preference, and created 83 multi-member constituencies to replace 18 governorate-level constituencies. Collectively, these reforms aimed to improve the competitiveness of independent candidates and smaller parties, disadvantaged under the previous system, and to improve representation transparency. Iraq's Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) also took steps

Exhibit 1. Timeline of Key Events



to improve voter confidence and encourage turnout, including the roll-out of a standardized, long-term biometric voter card to mitigate fraud and strengthen election integrity. Despite enhanced security measures and election reforms, however, the slow pace of voter registration, delays in the roll-out of ID cards (including difficulties faced by many IDPs trying to register outside their home districts), and insufficient voter education about changes to the law and process increased the potential for low turnout.

On October 10th, more than 9.6 million Iraqis cast their votes in the parliamentary elections, representing a 43% turnout, slightly below the 44.5% turnout in the previous elections, continuing a trend of declining participation. Populist Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr emerged a clear front-runner winning 73 of the 329 available seats, while the Fatah Alliance, the pro-Iran political wing of the PMF, was dealt a crushing defeat. Fatah, which performed well in the 2018 elections following the successful military campaign against ISIS, saw its seat numbers drop from 48 to 17. Notably, the elections also saw strong performance from reform-minded, "alternative" candidates — including those from Imtidad, a party that emerged from the Tishreen movement, and independents — who collectively won 70 seats. Fatah immediately rejected the preliminary results, alleging widespread fraud and with supporters staging sit-in demonstrations outside the Green Zone for several months. Tensions culminated in a November 7th assassination attempt against Prime Minister Kadhimi. The drone attack on Kadhimi's residence has been interpreted as a signal from pro-Iran groups that they are willing to take extreme measures and will not be excluded from future government negotiations. However, despite appeals to the results, Iraq's Federal Supreme Court ratified the elections results on December 27th, paving the way for the newly elected parliament to hold its first session, which by law must occur within two weeks of ratification.

PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE

With a strengthened mandate, Sadr is in a strong position to influence government formation. While this process has traditionally involved "backroom" negotiations to divide various government posts and ministries, and which further entrenches elitism and sectarianism within the government, Sadr's parliamentary strength and rumored early negotiations with key Sunni and Kurdish allies (notably, the Taqqadum party of Speaker Mohammed al-Halbousi, which won 37 seats, and the Kurdistan Democratic Party, which won 31 seats) position him to lead a national majority government. However, rival Shia factions represented in the Shia Coordination Framework (a coalition of the major Shia parties, including Fatah, Nouri al-Maliki's State of Law Coalition, and Ammar al-Hakim's Wisdom Movement, among others) have challenged Sadr's majority, arguing that they, in fact, constitute the largest parliamentary bloc. A second parliamentary session to elect the president occurred on February 8 (30 days from the inaugural session), and the president should then nominate a prime minister from the largest parliamentary bloc. The prime minister, in turn, has 30 days to form a government. However, the dispute over largest bloc status and deepening rifts within both the Kurdish and Shia blocs threaten to undermine the consensus-based approach to government formation, as well as the selection of a president — assuring a protracted process. Furthermore, should Shia parties fail to unify, their collective influence on a future legislative agenda could be weakened, creating new "spoilers."

SECTION TWO

PROGRAM OPERATIONS

IRP I began with a transition from the Iraq Ramp-Up Option (also known as the Iraq Community Resilience Initiative, or ICRI) and concluded with a transition to the IRP I follow-on program IRP II. Operations for IRP I's final two years were defined by successful adaptation to remote and teleworking arrangements prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Notably, IRP I accelerated grant-making and expanded to new geographic areas, following an initial pause to reassess activity impacts and lockdowns beginning in March 2020. Despite pandemic challenges, the program gained momentum by introducing remote implementation and monitoring approaches. Other factors that helped minimize disruptions included the program's intentional testing of work-at-home arrangements before the office closed; the adoption of Microsoft Teams as a communication and collaboration platform; the prioritization of frequent, timely, and transparent staff communications amid uncertainty; and a commitment to staff care by USAID/OTI and Chemonics management teams. IRP I also maintained traditional program performance management processes, holding a Strategy Review Session (SRS) or Rolling Assessment (RA) annually and successfully transitioning them to a virtual format. These events provided opportunities to reinforce shared understanding of the program goal and strengthen teambuilding amid periods of uncertainty. In addition to designing activities to mitigate the pandemic's destabilizing impact and prevent backsliding recovery progress, IRP I increasingly relied on social media, engaging audiences online when in-person events were no longer possible due to public health concerns. Similarly, the program's monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) team leveraged social media, unstructured supplementary service data and text messaging to collect community feedback in lieu of in-person interviews. Annex C presents additional information on IRP I's successful social media use for a variety of programmatic purposes.

STARTUP/TRANSITION

At startup, ICRI had a sizeable portfolio of activities in Ninewa and had been operating in country for almost six months. IRP I benefited from the existing operating infrastructure, including office space and national staff already familiar with the OTI activity cycle and Chemonics' grant-making systems, to mobilize quickly. During the transition period — which occurred over five months between January and June 2019 — IRP I and ICRI staff were co-located, with national staff and mid-level ICRI managers gradually transitioning from ICRI to IRP I beginning in February 2019. Separate management teams overseeing startup and closeout facilitated a seamless transition between programs — a best practice ensuring accountability and clear lines of responsibility that was replicated for the transition between IRP I and II. ICRI and IRP I also conducted joint senior-management, yellow-light, and other programmatic meetings to facilitate learning, division of labor, and transition between programs.

In May 2019, in response to an ordered departure of non-essential U.S. government personnel, including USAID/OTI staff, Chemonics began contingency planning for an emergency relocation. As a result, IRP I developed detailed continuity plans for operations and programming, including a remote management approach and delegations of authority for national staff for essential office management functions. The plan also outlined requirements to transition to a fully "paperless" office to enhance data security. Contingency planning highlighted several gaps and considerations, including visa limitations for some expatriate staff on account of their nationality.

As tensions escalated between the U.S. and Iran toward the end of 2020, Iran-aligned PMF groups stepped up harassment and intimidation of international nongovernmental organizations and their staff operating in parts of Ninewa. In October, IRP I partners reported that the PMF's 30th and 50th brigades were collecting staff names, visiting field offices, requesting information, and threatening national staff. The program minimized risk by reducing movement and pausing procurement in affected areas in the final months of the year. Concurrently, IRP I increased security measures and training for field staff and created district risk assessments to guide the program's risk management and mitigation approach in each location. In response to the U.S. drone strike that killed Suleimani and Muhandis, IRP I temporarily relocated international staff to Turkey, which provided an opportunity to refine the program's remote management systems.

COVID-19 OFFICE CLOSURE AND REMOTE MANAGEMENT

In February 2020, Iraq reported its first confirmed case of COVID-19 following a large outbreak in Iran. As a result, IRP I implemented its pandemic and epidemic preparedness annex, which identified triggers for curtailed operations, including full office closure and departure from Iraq. Between March 12 and 17, IRP I's international staff departed Iraq in phases, due to concerns around increased instability as well as imminent lockdowns and airport closures. IRP I's international team departed, and a global authorized departure was also announced by USAID with U.S. Mission Iraq following suit with an ordered departure soon after. Erbil International Airport closed to commercial flights on March 18th and remained closed through August.

Between March and September 2020, all international staff apart from the OTI country representative (CR), who remained in Erbil, worked remotely from several countries, with all staff teleworking after the office closed in March. Ahead of the international team's return to Iraq in September, IRP I developed an office-reopening plan in anticipation of reopening in early 2021. The plan included several indicators to assess the improvement of or deterioration in public health conditions, with associated operation phases ranging from full office closure to restricted access on a first-come-first-served basis. The office reopened in February 2021 for limited staff, and access was subsequently expanded and restricted throughout 2021 based on community transmission levels and new waves of infection associated with the Delta variant.

SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM (SMT) TRANSITIONS AND PROGRAM PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT PROCESSES

In parallel with the pivot to a remote and teleworking arrangement, the SMT underwent several transitions between January and October 2020. In January, the incumbent country representative departed and was replaced by the IRP I deputy country representative, and in mid-February, the chief of party handed over the program to her replacement. In March, IRP I introduced two senior transition advisors who replaced the deputy country representatives, and a planned deputy chief of party-program transition was delayed to May 2020 due to COVID-19 travel restrictions. A final SMT transition occurred in October 2020 with a rotation in deputy chief of party-operations personnel.

In August 2020, IRP I held a successful virtual RA to review OTI programming principles, reconfirm recovery priorities and geographic footprint, and refresh context analysis and update district strategies. Notably, pre-RA staff surveys revealed that team morale remained high at this time despite multiple COVID-19 stressors. While it is difficult to point to a single factor, intentional staff check-ins via anonymous surveys provided opportunities for staff to offer period, candid feedback while anecdotally contributing to staff feeling supported. The timely sharing of staff survey results, as well as responses to anonymous staff questions and concerns, was also an IRP I best practice.

TRANSITION TO IRP II AND CLOSEOUT

In April 2021, IRP I finalized the program closeout plan, including deadlines for final yellow lights and clearances, and for all activities to be completed. The plan also detailed additional closeout staff resources needed and the proposed transition staffing plan between IRP I and II. With only minor exceptions, activities were successfully completed and closed according to the closeout plan deadlines (see box). Of the approximately $39.6 million available in TAP, approximately $39,556,000 was committed and disbursed, leaving only approximately $53,000 unprogrammed. Building on lessons learned from the ICRI-IRP I transition, IRP I maintained separate leadership teams to manage each line of effort and ensured that closeout was appropriately resourced with two, dedicated grants closeout specialists. In addition, an experienced IRP I program manager stepped in as acting deputy chief of party-program when the incumbent transitioned to IRP II. Having an experienced senior manager to oversee the remainder of IRP I implementation and provide oversight of grant-closeout staff enabled the transitioning deputy chief of party-program to direct his full attention and bring institutional knowledge to IRP II startup. Following an RA in early November to reorient staff to a new IRP II objectives, a small number of IRP I program staff transitioned to IRP II as a startup grants management unit (GMU) to establish grant-making capacity. Throughout October and November, IRP I worked closely with the incoming IRP II leadership team, including the deputy chief of party-program, to align resources with the needs of each program. For example, the IRP I closeout plan

CLOSEOUTS BY MONTH

All but three activities were closed more than a month in advance of project completion.

October – 17 closeouts
November – 34 closeouts
December – 30 closeouts
January – 3 closeouts

originally had several staff transitioning to IRP II in October; however, since IRP II was not expected to ramp up programming until after the RA, IRP I delayed the transition of staff to ensure maximum resources could be directed to closeout.

SECTION THREE

PROGRAM STRATEGY

IRP I's primary objective was to promote stability in Iraq by improving conditions enabling the durable return of IDPs in Iraq's Ninewa and Anbar provinces (PO 1). The bulk of activities assisted conflict-affected, marginalized populations as part of an overall U.S. government effort aimed at preventing the return of violent extremist groups. Beginning in Year 2, IRP I also established programming capacity to address additional, discrete threats to Iraq's stability (PO 2) and launched a limited number of pilot projects in southern Iraq. IRP I maintained four geographic GMUs that implemented recovery projects under PO 1 in Ninewa Plain, Sinjar, Mosul, and western Anbar. A fifth "national" team developed and implemented projects supporting recovery at the national level, as well as media programming designed to leverage social media's popularity in Iraq to engage a wider audience around issues related to recovery that complemented PO 1 programming. The national GMU also spearheaded programming under PO 2. Annex A shows activity counts in each of IRP I's target geographies.

PROGRAM STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

IRP I's initial objectives were to 1) accelerate recovery in liberated areas; 2) support locally legitimate Iraqi actors in providing responsive leadership; and 3) repair and strengthen the social fabric between and within Iraqi communities. Following an initial SRS in September 2019, IRP I eliminated PO 2 to reconceptualize local legitimacy as a crosscutting partner selection consideration. The revised framework for Year 2 included the following two objectives: 1) Recovery in liberated areas is accelerated; and 2) Social fabric of Iraqi communities is strengthened.

During the August 2020 RA, IRP I added three sub-objectives (SOs) to PO 1 that represented important barriers to return based on the team's updated context analysis. The sub-objectives included improved services, expanded livelihoods, and improved social conditions. This change did not represent a significant strategic shift but, instead, a formalization of specific clusters of recovery activities that the program was already implementing. The revision of PO 2 as an SO addressing social conditions more generally reflected program learning that there are social challenges unrelated to community tensions in several areas — for example, lack of social activities or infrastructure for youth — that factor into IDP decisions to return or remain. By reframing this objective, IRP I intended to provide greater flexibility to address significant social recovery challenges in each target location given local differences in demography and social conditions.

As part of the same RA, IRP I replaced PO 2 with a new objective that provided flexibility to respond to other, potentially destabilizing developments in Iraq — including those outside the program's priority geographic areas — to leverage OTI's comparative advantage to respond strategically to foreign policy priorities and U.S. Mission Iraq requests. Activities developed under this objective were developed in line with U.S.

foreign policy stabilization priorities and based on discrete challenges that required OTI's flexibility and rapid-response capabilities. Activities developed under this objective included pilot programming in southern Iraq, as well as COVID-19 emergency support, allowing the program to extend its footprint and partnerships and deepen understanding of stabilization challenges unrelated to displacement.

The strategic framework finalized after the August 2020 RA guided programming for Year 3 and included the following POs and SOs:

PO 1 – Improve conditions that allow for durable returns in areas liberated from ISIS

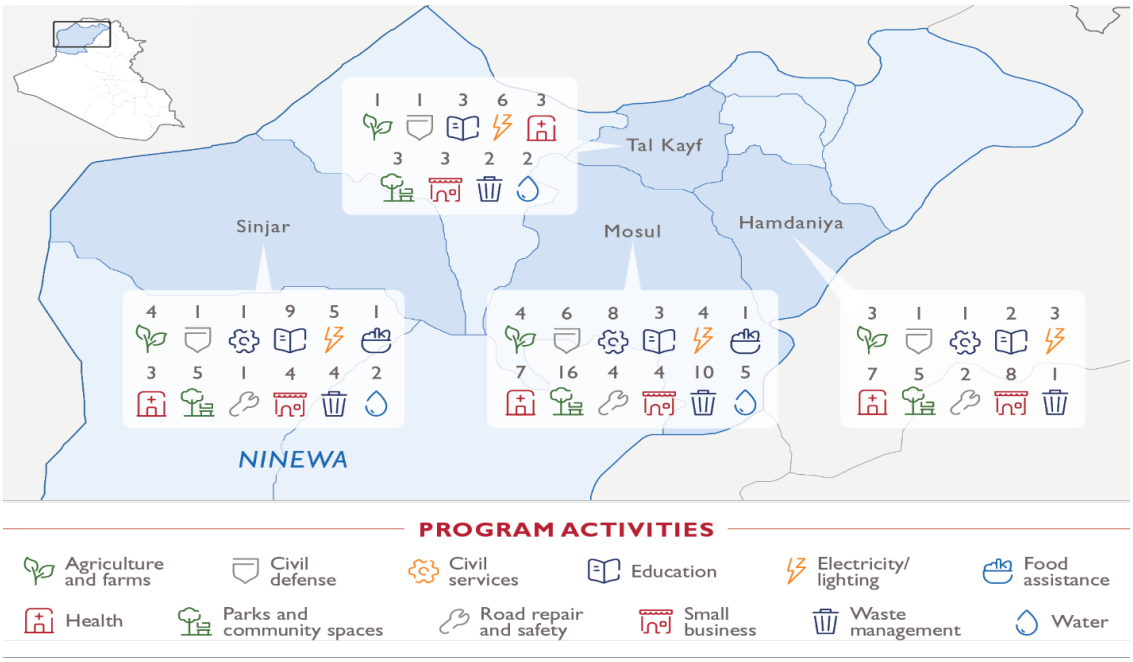
- SO 1.1 – Improve the delivery of public services prioritized by communities.
- SO 1.2 – Expand livelihoods
- SO 1.3 – Improve social conditions

PO 2 – Mitigate discrete challenges that threaten overall stability

A LOCALIZED APPROACH TO GEOGRAPHIC PROGRAMMING UNDER PO 1: DISTRICT STRATEGIES

PO 1 prioritized Ninewa and Anbar provinces for programming due to their severity of physical destruction and displacement level. However, while both share a history of ISIS occupation, local differences in demography, armed activity, tribalism, and/or regional influences create distinct recovery challenges. Accordingly, IRP I adopted a localized approach to implementing the strategic framework, developing "district" strategies tailored to the local context (see Exhibit 2, below). These were developed for Sinjar

Exhibit 2. PO 1 Activities in Ninewa Province



district, Mosul district, and Ninewa Plain (including the districts of Tal Kayf and Hamdaniya) in Ninewa province and were developed for the western Anbar region (including the districts of Rutbah and Al-Qaim.) Across all PO 1 activities, IRP I's approach aimed to deliver immediate, tangible, and sustainable benefits to communities in an inclusive and representative manner. While the types of activities were generally similar, district strategies allowed GMUs to prioritize specific communities, define approaches, and identify desired outcomes and learning agendas for each area.

Exhibit 3, below, summarizes key details of geographic strategies for IRP I's final year.

EXHIBIT 3. DISTRICT STRATEGIES FOR IRP 1'S FINAL YEAR

	COMMUNITIES	RECOVERY CHALLENGES/PRIORITIES	APPROACHES AND ACTIVITIES
WESTERN ANBAR	• Al-Qaim district • Rutba district • Rummana district	• Damaged and non-existent infrastructure associated with public services (e.g., water and electricity networks, healthcare facilities, government buildings) • Absence of, or weak, public service delivery in district centers slows recovery there and in outlying periphery areas reliant on central administration • Damaged and destroyed agricultural infrastructure slows the return of farmers, whose activities contribute significantly to the local economy • Private commercial infrastructure damaged in the conflict further stalls economic recovery	• Restore/improve essential services and infrastructure (water, electricity, schools, and health clinics) • Revive the agricultural sector through support to farms, farmers, and agricultural infrastructure and markets • Support strategic market areas and shops, including small businesses and factories that contribute to economic recovery
MOSUL	• Old City • West Mosul periphery neighborhoods	• Damaged public infrastructure in West Mosul and inadequate services have led to slow recovery progress • Lack of livelihood opportunities (small businesses and agriculture) due to damage and destruction to spaces and equipment • Physical scars of conflict and slow progress reinforce a perception of government neglect and marginalization, which is particularly pronounced in periphery neighborhoods of West Mosul	• Improve general municipal services • Increase rubble removal from private properties in targeted areas • Increase livelihood opportunities and improve the enabling environment (infrastructure, markets) for business activities • Reduce the visible scars of conflict through cleaning and beautification campaigns and restoring symbolic public and cultural spaces
NINEWA PLAIN	• Hamdaniya district center and Bartella sub-district • Tal Kayf district center and Wana sub-district	• Stagnant economic recovery due to destruction of the agriculture sector and linked industries that previously provided livelihoods • Basic service gaps prolong displacement in some areas (center-periphery migration) and create mistrust and tension	• Restore businesses and factories that were key sources of employment prior to ISIS • Rehabilitate shops and markets in key locations and pilot other economic initiatives to identify effective approaches

	COMMUNITIES	RECOVERY CHALLENGES/PRIORITIES	APPROACHES AND ACTIVITIES
	• Bashiqa sub-district	• Lack of social infrastructure and activities results in social isolation • Youth have insufficient social and recreational outlets	• Reduce service strains that create social tensions; ensure recovery is inclusive and promotes cooperation • Revitalize social infrastructure that promotes community interaction (parks, halls, sports facilities, clubs, and other community activities)
SINJAR	• Snuni sub-district • Central Sinjar • Qairwan sub-district • Qahtaniya sub-district • Ba'aj city	• Damaged public infrastructure • Absence of public services • Absence of social and recreational public spaces • IDP returns strain already limited public services • Ethnic and sectarian differences, exploited by ISIS, underpin tensions between neighboring ethno-religious communities (Arab/Yezidi, Shia/Sunni)	• Improve basic services, particularly those witnessing recent returns • Improve road conditions to facilitate commercial and private transportation • Improve civil services • Improve livelihoods through market restoration, support to small businesses

NATIONAL INITIATIVES AND MEDIA PROGRAMMING UNDER POS 1 AND 2

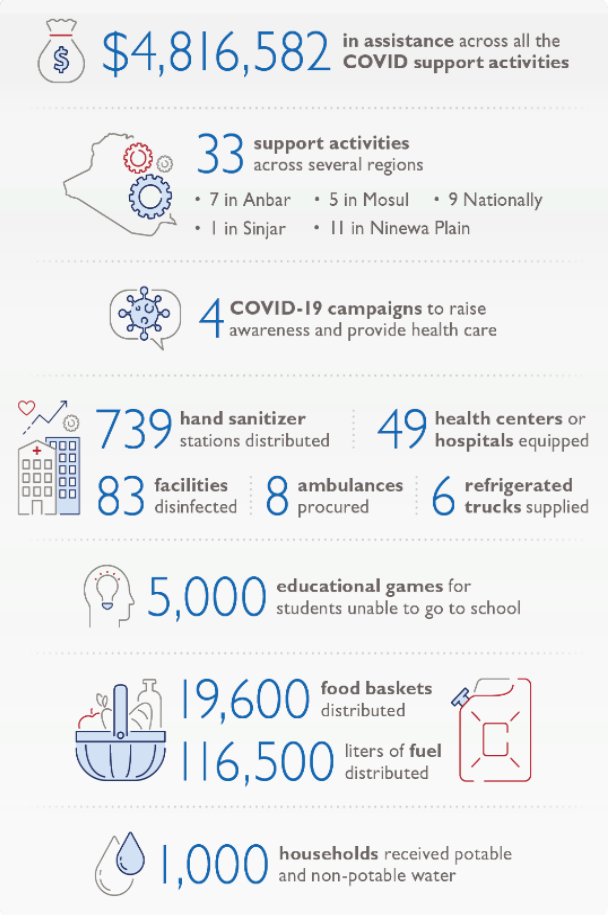
IRP I developed a diverse portfolio of national-level activities designed to complement its core recovery programming under PO 1 across four geographies in Ninewa and Anbar provinces. Programming included media activities that amplified PO 1 projects online to raise awareness and amplify positive narratives of progress in conflict-affected communities to a wider audience. IRP I's National GMU also led programming under PO 2, including activities to support COVID-19 response and pilot activities addressing community priorities and emerging threats to stability such as the re-emergence of divisive, sectarian rhetoric in the run-up to parliamentary elections.

IRP I's earliest national-level activities were developed in the wake of the October 2019 protest movement and included support to medical teams and civil defense first responders on the front lines during national protests. They also included support to credible media actors seeking to provide factual coverage and debunk false stories designed to divide communities and inflame tensions. Later, amid the COVID-19 pandemic, IRP I took a national and multi-pronged approach to mitigating the crisis — providing much-needed medical and non-medical supplies to hospitals in Baghdad and the KRI and conducting a complementary online campaign to promote COVID-19 awareness and to dispel rampant misinformation undermining the efforts of public health authorities. Through its national GMU, IRP I also implemented projects in central and southern Iraq through a series of pilot activities designed to provide feedback to USAID/Iraq on programming challenges and opportunities in locations with limited U.S. government assistance to date.

Examples of activities supporting both POs and managed under IRP I's national portfolio include:

- A national campaign to promote Iraqi-made products to stimulate local consumption and support economic recovery (PO 1)
- Creation of a social media platform to engage Iraqis from diverse backgrounds in dialogue around social issues of concern through satirical caricature art (PO 1)
- Rapid procurement of medical and non-medical supplies to Baghdad and KRI hospitals to increase COVID-19 response capacity (PO 2)
- Emergency restoration of two fire-ravaged hospitals in Baghdad and Dhi Qar providing care to COVID-19 patients during a critical period when Iraq's under-resourced healthcare system was already strained (PO 2)
- Restoration of several bookshops and cafés and the Baghdadi Cultural Center on Baghdad's famed Al Mutannabi Street to celebrate Iraqis' shared heritage and instill national pride and unity (PO 2)
- Online and offline voter awareness initiatives supporting informed electoral participation of Yazidi IDPs and returnees, as well as other marginalized communities in Baghdad, Sinjar, and Anbar (PO 2)

Exhibit 4. IRP I COVID-19 Programming



SECTION FOUR

ACTIVITIES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

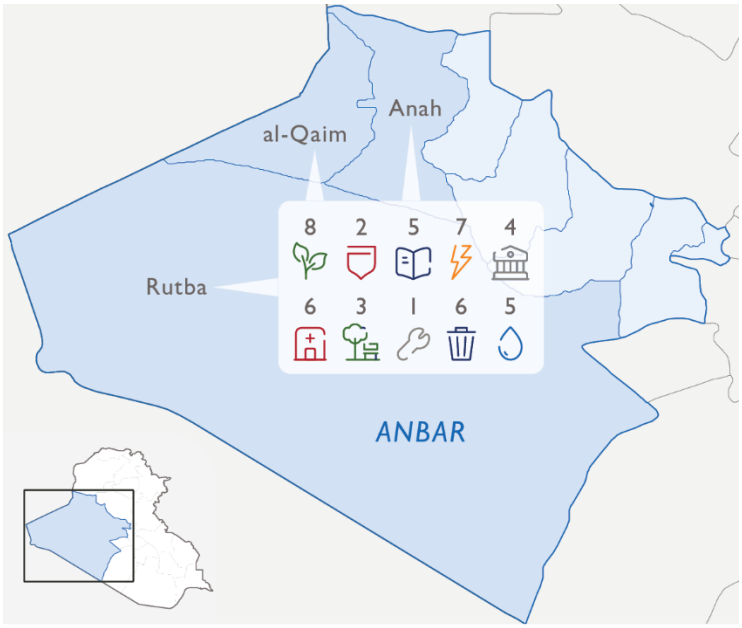
IRP I implemented a total of 290 activities valued at $39,555,920. Its 136 grantees included 42 local, regional, and national government entities as well as 94 nongovernmental organizations, including youth and cultural groups, media organizations, activists, and artists. Of these activities, 19 were non-grant-under-contract transition activities pool projects where IRP I engaged vendors and contractors directly to deliver goods, services, and technical assistance to Iraqi beneficiaries.

A. PO 1: IMPROVING CONDITIONS THAT ALLOW FOR DURABLE RETURNS IN AREAS LIBERATED FROM ISIS

IRP I implemented a majority of activities under this objective, which reflected the program's core mandate. In total, 258 activities in support of PO 1 were implemented across the Ninewa Plain, Sinjar, Mosul, and western Anbar. Activities mostly reflected community-identified priorities around improving public services and livelihoods, which were considered the most significant determinants of return durability within the program's manageable interest. A smaller but significant cluster of activities focused on improving social conditions in these communities. Collectively, these programming streams reflected the three SOs.

SO 1.1 IMPROVE THE DELIVERY OF PUBLIC SERVICES PRIORITIZED BY COMMUNITIES

Exhibit 5. PO 1 Activities in Anbar



The majority of IRP I's PO 1 activities supported the community-prioritized improvement of services, as these are among the most significant obstacles to return. IRP I's target communities were neglected by the central and provincial governments even before the ISIS occupation, and liberation battles wrought greater destruction on public service infrastructure. In total, IRP I implemented 158 activities to improve delivery of public services, including 37 activities in Anbar, 53 activities in Mosul, 33 activities in Ninewa Plain, and 31 activities in Sinjar. Across all activities, IRP I partnered with service directorates, municipalities, schools, hospitals, and civil society organizations (CSOs) to supply critical equipment, vehicles, furniture, school equipment and supplies, and other resources critical to provisioning essential services. Projects across all areas contributed to: improved access to water; enhanced lighting and roadways to improve perceptions of safety; improved electricity access; rubble removal to increase access to property to facilitate rebuilding; improved learning conditions and teaching capacity in schools; and a better customer experience when seeking government services such as obtaining civil records. Annex B includes a summary of IRP I's successful approach targeting multiple sectors and layering several smaller activities to achieve recovery in the district of Hamdaniya, Ninewa province. In addition, the following examples are included to illustrate the breadth of IRP I's assistance across multiple service sectors and geographies and are not intended as an exhaustive list.

Teams from the General Company of Northern Electricity Distribution (GCNED) install streetlights in West Mosul.
PHOTO: IRP I/Chemonics

In Mosul, IRP I implemented multiple service improvement projects on the western side of the city, including western periphery neighborhoods. These areas were among the most severely destroyed and have seen very limited recovery to date. When ISIS captured the city, it became deeply entrenched in West Mosul, which was the last area to be liberated during the Battle of Mosul, and reinforced local perceptions that Moslawis living on the west side are sympathetic to ISIS. Residents of West Mosul see the lack of recovery assistance from the government as evidence of their marginalization and collective punishment. Given the scale of destruction and limited resources, IRP I targeted key service sectors with visible activities demonstrating tangible recovery progress. To increase visibility and awareness, IRP I engaged professional media companies to produce emotionally resonant videos documenting conditions "before and after," including resident impact testimonials, that were shared online. IRP I also incorporated lessons about the importance of door-to-door outreach and community engagement to inform residents about IRP I recovery efforts and provide information about raising concerns during service improvement projects.

One example is a cluster of activities designed to improve electricity, in partnership with GCNED, a branch of the Iraq Ministry of Electricity. Under one activity, IRP I supported GCNED with equipment and spare parts to connect 2,500 houses in West Mosul to the national electricity grid. Another activity helped GCNED install 6,000 lights in strategic areas of West Mosul's Old City and Zanjili neighborhoods, with a third activity supporting an additional 305 lights in Ma'amoon neighborhood. A fourth activity equipped GCNED with service vehicles and safety gear to improve electrical maintenance teams' responsiveness to service requests. IRP I support to GCNED is one example of how the program leveraged its rapid, in-kind procurement capability to complement larger-scale, complex infrastructure improvement projects funded by other donors. For example, while the United Nations Development Programme's mandate allowed it to rehabilitate large electrical substations and provide high-tension transformers to GCNED to improve the electricity grid, it was unable to replenish stock of essential spare parts and tools necessary to deliver greater power supply to Moslawis. Here, IRP I was able to fill critical gaps in donor assistance. The improved lighting at night was visible to residents and improved local perceptions or safety (see box), contributing to the resumption of normal life, including commercial activity.

IMPROVED SAFETY

The owner of a café near Al-Nuri Mosque confirmed that people longer hours in the café at nights due to improved lighting on the main streets. He reported that they used to close the café at 11:00 p.m., but now remain open until 2:00 a.m., especially on Thursdays and Fridays. "We stay open late because the citizens know that they can return to their homes safely … staying longer at night certainly increases the income of the shops," he said.

In Sinjar, IRP I responded to a wave of returns by helping to clear residential streets after years of waste accumulation and supporting local authorities' capacity to manage these services. IRP I supported the #BeautifulWhenClean clean-up campaign in neighborhoods across Rambosi, Tal Aziz, Qabosi, and Tal Banat in southern Sinjar, which bore signs of conflict, including uncleared rubble and garbage that posed health concerns in addition to being unsightly. The campaign aimed to welcome home returnees to clean neighborhoods where waste receptacles were also provided. The campaign resulted in the clearance of 3,500 tons of rubble and trash from Sinjar communities and the provision of 250 waste receptacles. A subsequent activity supported the Sinjar

IRP I supported the #BeautifulWhenClean campaign, which included murals encouraging residents to keep neighborhoods clean.
PHOTO: IRP I/Chemonics

municipality in improving its garbage-collection services through the provision of two garbage compactors, waste containers, and related tools.

In another activity, IRP I aimed to provide access to non-potable water. Recognizing the extensive damage and time required to repair water, sanitation, and hygiene infrastructure, IRP I responded with an immediate solution to provide 250 families across eight communities in Sinjar with weekly water via water trucking over a two-month period. In addition to supplying water to families at no cost, IRP I also provided each family with water storage tanks, since returnees often have limited financial resources for recovery. To amplify these efforts, IRP I partnered with Nadia's Initiative — a Yezidi advocacy organization founded by Nobel Peace Prize winner and Yezidi survivor Nadia Murad — to conduct outreach efforts, including an online campaign, #HappyforReturnees.

A water tanker fills a water tank with non-potable water to be delivered to households in Sinjar.
PHOTO: IRP I/Chemonics

In western Anbar, the magnitude of destruction, slow recovery efforts, and long-standing feelings of neglect among residents are major obstacles to durable returns and recovery. The region was the first to fall to ISIS given its strategic location near the Syrian border, lack of government presence and services given its distance from the provincial capital, and perceptions of marginalization as a majority-Sunni province under a Shia-dominated central government. These factors have historically made the area a hotbed of Iraqi insurgency, with groups like ISIS and Al Qaeda in Iraq effectively exploiting sectarian grievances to gain support. For these same reasons, western Anbar remains a potential regrouping and launch area for ISIS.

Five generators were repaired at Rutba Diesel Power Station, providing a more consistent supply of electricity to an estimated 25,000 residents.
PHOTO: IRP I/Chemonics

The deliberate destruction of public and government infrastructure in western Anbar by ISIS is extensive. Rutba, for example, was cut off from the

national electricity grid and water supply when ISIS destroyed its 200 miles of electricity supply lines and 12 water substations. To this day, the district is entirely reliant on large generators at the Rutba Diesel Power Station, several of which were heavily damaged and either offline or working at reduced capacity, limiting available electricity to district residents, government offices, and medical facilities while also impacting the district's water supply.

IRP I partnered with the Rutba district office to implement two activities that repaired five generators at the power station. These repairs, which the district office did not have the resources to fund independently, increased the hours of electricity available to district residents and established a more stable electricity supply with fewer voltage fluctuations and unplanned outages. As a result, Rutba's Dhab'aa water station (which was also rehabilitated by IRP I) experienced an increase in electricity from 6 to 12 hours daily, improving water supply to households and for agricultural purposes.

SO 1.2 EXPAND LIVELIHOODS

Workers at the al-Umar'a jam factory, which has seen increased production and doubled its workforce.
PHOTO: IRP I/Chemonics

At the start of IRP I, unemployment in areas impacted by the ISIS conflict were estimated to be twice that of Iraq's national average, with unemployment especially acute in rural areas of Ninewa and Anbar where agriculture has been an important livelihood source. While Ninewa is among the most fertile provinces in the country, decades of conflict, poor land management policies, climate-related events, and Turkish and Iranian water management policies have reduced agricultural production and impacted livelihoods. When ISIS fled these areas, it left lasting widespread damage, deliberately looting or destroying agricultural infrastructure (including water irrigation systems and greenhouses), agricultural equipment and machinery, livestock, and destroying and contaminating land and water sources. Because agriculture was an important anchor in local economies, IRP I implemented several activities to support farming, repair of agricultural infrastructure, and improved market access. Given Iraq's vulnerability to climate change, several activities incorporated environmental impact and climate risk mitigation measures, including the use of renewable energy.

In addition, IRP I helped small business owners re-establish or expand operations, which contributed to local job creation. Many Iraqis not employed in the public sector earn a living as shopkeepers and local business owners. Many businesses were looted, destroyed in fighting, or vandalized during ISIS' occupation. IRP I support included rehabilitating destroyed shops and providing rent assistance and commodity support for several small businesses — including groceries, electrical appliance stores, gardening

supply shops or nurseries, mechanics, cafés, and other enterprises — to help returnees establish income sources and increase availability of goods locally.

Workers at al-Shahbaa factory, which has seen an increased tahini production, from 10 to 15 tons per week.
PHOTO: IRP I/Chemonics

For example, prior to ISIS, Bashiqa had a strong and diverse economy that supported thousands of jobs in the town and surrounding villages, many of which centered on the local agricultural economy and ancillary services. However, many local small businesses were destroyed or abandoned during conflict, and many returnees lack sufficient financial resources to rebuild and restart operations. Returnees that have resources are often unable to restore them to full operational capacity. IRP I partnered with a local organization to equip five small businesses in Bashiqa that produce tahini, halwa, and jam — all local specialties — as well as concrete, with the necessary machinery and supplies. As a result of IRP I's support, all five businesses increased production and reported the ability to hire additional staff, contributing to economic recovery of the area.

A Kaka'i farmer irrigates farmland using irrigation equipment and training provided by IRP I.
PHOTO: IRP I/Chemonics

To support inclusive recovery, IRP I provided support to 89 Kaka'i farmers, who rely on agriculture as an income source, to improve the irrigation of their farmland. Shunned by other communities due to their religious identification, this minority group resides in nine rural villages in the eastern Ninewa Plain that comprise part of the territory disputed between the KRG and GOI. As a result, the area has suffered chronic neglect and has been targeted by religious extremists, including by ISIS. While 90% of the population has returned since liberation in 2016, the agricultural sector — which has historically been a key source of livelihoods — has yet to fully recover due to a lack of equipment and resources. The limited farming capacity has had a direct impact on local income generation. Of the nine villages, IRP I selected Wardak and Gazakan as their collective population of 5,500 people is most reliant on agriculture. IRP I provided water

pumps, piping, and training in alternative irrigation methods to increase production and income. As a result, farmers report being able to irrigate more efficiently and have incurred lower fuel expenses. Several have also indicated an intent to expand their farming area due to increased farmland irrigation.

> **"Previously, the farmers spent five hours irrigating crops through water sprinklers; the process was time and fuel consuming. This activity contributed to decreasing fuel consumption and number of hours required for irrigation to two hours maximum for the same plot of land."**
>
> **— KHAZER ORGANIZATION FOR PROTECTION OF KAKA'I**

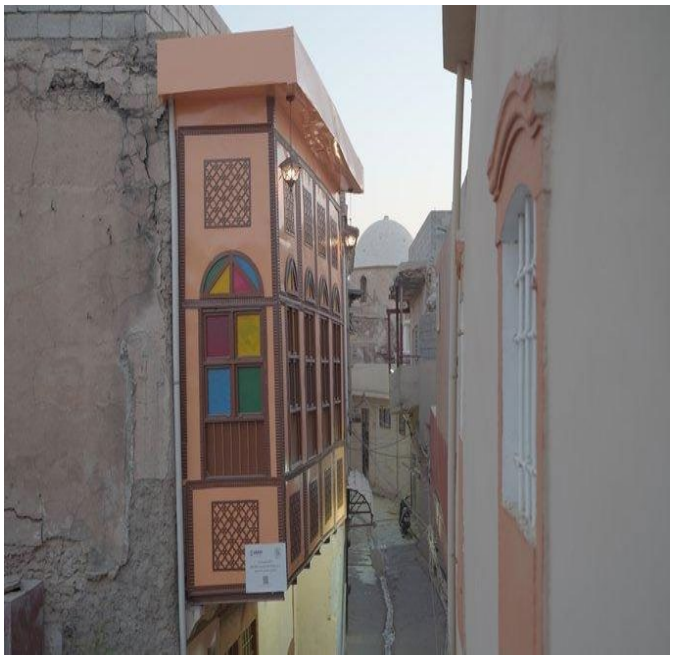
Similarly, in western Anbar, tens of thousands of farmers were left without livelihoods in the wake of the ISIS conflict. The extent of the destruction to water and electricity infrastructure, loss of agricultural equipment, and delays in government compensation for conflict-affected families have all been obstacles to recovery of the agricultural sector, which has traditionally been a source of livelihoods for families in the region. During the conflict, ISIS kidnapped and killed hundreds of men who were household heads and breadwinners for their families, leaving widows struggling to rebuild their lives with no source of income. Recognizing the role of women in the region's recovery, IRP I partnered with a local agricultural union to provide 40 polytunnel units, including seeds and irrigation equipment, to 139 women farmers. The activities supported women who had previous experience with farming and aimed to increase agricultural outputs by providing year-round farming capacity. IRP I provided support in two phases; the success of the initial activity, which targeted 64 farmers, led to a second phase to support an additional 75 women farmers. Fifteen women farmers interviewed after the second phase reported successful eggplant harvests and increased income due to the high demand for eggplant in winter and the higher crop yield. Women interviewed after the first phase — which produced mostly cucumbers — reported several harvests that were sold at the local market in Rummana or harvested for personal consumption to offset the cost of food.

Women farmers tend to eggplants in one of the polytunnels provided by IRP I.
PHOTO: IRP I/Chemonics

In total, IRP I implemented 40 activities to expand livelihoods in target communities, seven activities in Mosul, eight in Anbar, eight in Sinjar, and 16 in Ninewa Plain. One national activity consisted of a "buy local" campaign designed to raise awareness about

the quality and availability of Iraqi products on the local market. This activity illustrates IRP I's approach to layering complementary activities to create an impact multiplier. In this case, national-level media programming and partnership with a CSO with national mobilizing capacity helped increase local awareness — and demand — in other parts of Iraq, spurring local economic recovery in IRP I target areas.

SO 1.3 IMPROVE SOCIAL CONDITIONS

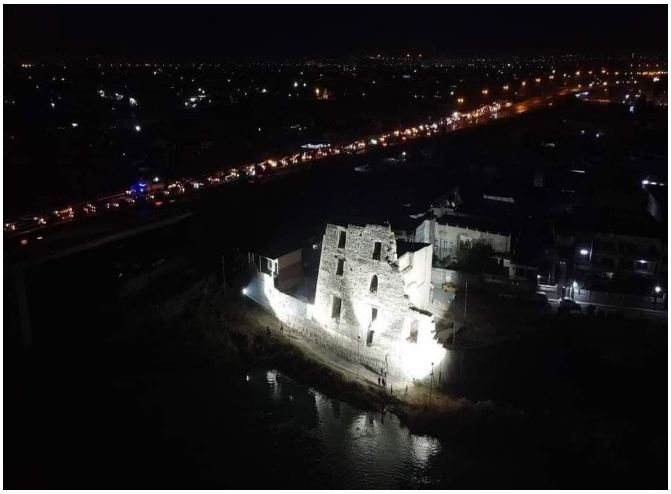


A "shanasheel" in the Old City of Mosul, restored with IRP I support.
PHOTO: IRP I/Chemonics

IRP I activities under this SO were designed with a range of social outcomes in mind, reflecting the spectrum of social challenges in IRP I's target communities. In Ninewa, Iraq's most diverse province, historic friction between various ethnic and religious components (Sunni Arabs, Kurds, Christians, Yazidis, Shabaks, Turkmen, and Ka'kai) is at the heart of social tensions. Saddam-era policies that engineered demographic change and were reinforced through decades of discriminatory land policies (i.e., "Arabization" of areas historically claimed by ethnic and religious minorities) created divisions that deepened with successive cycles of conflict and continued with government marginalization and/or cooptation by the KRG or GOI as part of efforts to control disputed areas in northern Iraq. Fear and mistrust of Sunni Arabs believed to have supported ISIS, and tensions between Shabak and Christian communities due to center-periphery migration and government policies granting land to those who fought ISIS as part of the PMF, are examples of renewed sources of tension due to ISIS conflict.

Recognizing the sensitivity and complexity of these social tensions — including earlier program learning that discrete, short-term activities are unlikely to alter social dynamics — IRP I designed activities with modest objectives and/or did not address social tensions directly. Some activities were designed to improve social life for youth returning to communities with few social options and outlets, creating risks of youth involvement in unproductive activities or disincentives for families to return. In Ninewa, activities designed to improve social conditions included convening community Iftar dinners attended by Christian and Muslim neighbors; restoring community and cultural centers and public halls, which were venues for social gatherings and community celebrations prior to ISIS's destruction; and supporting recreational activities such as a youth marching band and all-girls soccer and martial arts programs to build social ties between youth from different ethnic and religious communities.

In Mosul, IRP I supported a local CSO to restore several of the city's most distinctive architectural and historic landmarks that are intrinsic to its cultural identity. For example, Mosul's shanasheel — balcony veneers with a distinctive style from the Ottoman era that are synonymous with Mosul's Old City — sustained significant damage when houses were targeted during the Battle of Mosul. The dilapidated balconies, once a source of pride for Moslawis, have become casualties of war, serving as daily reminders of the city's lost heritage and continued neglect. IRP I partnered with a local CSO to refurbish 10 shanasheel, restoring recognition of the importance of these features and reaffirming the historic value of these properties in the Old City.



Qara Saray was one of seven cultural landmarks cleared of trash and illuminated with lighting with IRP I support.
PHOTO: IRP I/Chemonics

In another activity — widely covered on Iraqi media — IRP I supported a respected local volunteer group to install lights and conduct a cleaning campaign for several of Mosul's most famous landmarks. In addition to damage caused by the campaign to liberate Mosul from ISIS, the terrorist group perpetrated a systematic campaign to "purify" areas of conquest of their diverse and multi-faith cultural and religious sites, resulting in the destruction of several ancient sites including mosques, churches, and mausoleums. The result was a disintegration of Mosul's unique cultural identity. By cleaning and lighting up seven sites of historical importance — including the Bab Shamis wall, Pashetha'a castle, Qara Saray palace, Martuma church, Baab al Shaat, and Al Barood Khana castle — IRP I increased local and national interest in Mosul's cultural heritage and restored a sense of community pride.

> **"I and my family are very happy with what Sawa'ad Mosulia and USAID have done to Qara Saray. I know some people who started to read more about Qara Saray after [seeing it illuminated] at nights. These projects are no less important than any other service delivery projects.**
>
> **— MOSUL UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR**

Finally, IRP I designed several activities to support social recovery by leveraging social media to increase the reach and target audience for programming. Examples of these activities include: a social media campaign to create empathy toward IDPs and a more supportive environment for their return; a campaign spotlighting domestic violence and its potential to compound trauma experienced in post-conflict communities; and a media campaign to raise awareness and destigmatize mental health issues, an initial step

toward the social recovery of communities traumatized by ISIS. Additional information on IRP I's diverse media portfolio is included below in Section C.

Altogether, IRP I implemented 61 activities to improve social conditions, including three activities in Anbar, nine in Sinjar, 15 in the Ninewa Plain, 24 in Mosul, and 10 at the national level.

B. PO 2: MITIGATE DISCRETE CHALLENGES THAT THREATEN OVERALL STABILITY

IRP I implemented a modest but impactful portfolio of 24 activities to mitigate discrete challenges threatening stability outside of the program's traditional geographic areas or unrelated specifically to the challenge of displacement. Importantly, this objective was designed to maximize OTI's comparative advantage as an agile U.S. foreign assistance tool to deliver assistance rapidly in response to U.S. Mission Iraq priorities, often filling a critical gap. Examples of assistance include the provision of medical and non-medical supplies, equipment and emergency vehicles to the KRI Ministry of Health and Ministry of Education, as well as national campaigns to spread awareness on COVID-19 mitigation protocols, including the distribution of 500,000 cloth masks and a complementary social media campaign on the importance of mask usage as a critical tool in transmission prevention. Notably, IRP I provided rapid support in the wake of the Ibn Al-Khatib and Ibn-Zuhur hospital fire and the al- Hussein COVID-19 hospital just a few months later in Nasiriyah — national tragedies highlighting the fragility of Iraq's healthcare system amid the national COVID crisis. At Ibn Al-Khatib and Ibn-Zuhur's December 2021 reopening ceremony, U.S. Ambassador Matthew Tueller reaffirmed U.S. commitment to Iraq and highlighted USAID's COVID-19 assistance to date. The online reaction was overwhelmingly positive, with Iraqis praising the quality and speed of response while contrasting the U.S.'s constructive role in Iraq with corrupt forces that have led to the country's deterioration.

In April 2021, the Ibn al-Khatib and Ibn Zuhur hospital complex in Baghdad was ravaged by a catastrophic fire that killed at least 80 people and injured hundreds more. IRP I responded to the crisis quickly, clearing an activity in six days to refurbish and equip the complex.
PHOTO: IRP I/Chemonics

In Baghdad, IRP I helped the Baghdadi Cultural Center — a cultural icon on Baghdad's famed Al Mutannabi Street — preserve and shelve thousands of texts that were saved by Diyala public library employees from destruction by ISIS. Before IRP I support, books were in disarray since the center did not have resources to properly store them. IRP I assistance also allowed the center to open rooms showcasing the personal libraries of famous Iraqi scientists, artists, and other figures from all ethnic and religious backgrounds. The same activity also supported the restoration of five libraries that were destroyed in an electrical fire. This activity and others centered Iraq's rich cultural heritage and traditions to invoke feelings of national pride and unity while offering an alternative narrative to divisive and inflammatory rhetoric ahead of elections.

An employee dusts off books at one of the five libraries on Al-Mutannabi Street in Baghdad restored by IRP I after a fire. Famous across the region, the street is synonymous with Iraq's famed cultural and literary traditions and was the target of an Al Qaeda attack in 2007.
PHOTO: IRP I/Chemonics

IRP I's portfolio also included pilot activities responding to community priorities in central and southern Iraq. IRP I implemented two activities in the Baiji district of Salahaddin province, which was occupied by ISIS and continues to be a hotbed of insurgent activity. The activities addressed two primary community demands — increased lighting in areas bordering known ISIS hideouts to improve community safety as well as important civil records services for returning IDPs. IRP I also piloted programming in strategic cities in Shia-majority southern governorates including Basra, Qadisiya, and Dhi Qar. These locations are among the most economically depressed and neglected in the country and have seen sustained protests even after the broader national movement has become less visible. To demonstrate USAID support to these areas, IRP I identified entry points for assistance that were non-controversial and focused on restoring cultural activities and landmarks as a source of unity and pride. This work included the restoration of the central library and school of fine arts in Basra and the restoration of one of Iraq's oldest libraries in the city of Diwaniya, which fell into disrepair due to government neglect despite its high volume of visitors and popularity. While modest, these activities rehabilitated cherished community spaces that would otherwise not receive support and provided opportunities to highlight USAID assistance to neglected communities beyond northern and western Iraq — areas that have most visibly received foreign assistance.

C. CROSSCUTTING MEDIA ACTIVITIES

IRP I developed a successful portfolio of media activities designed to amplify recovery in target communities under PO 1, and to address other threats to stability, including divisive narratives and the threat of the COVID-19 pandemic under PO 2. Media programming also became an important tool for engagement when community outreach events promoting social recovery (e.g., opening ceremonies for rehabilitated community infrastructure or the relaunch of services) were suspended during the early months of the pandemic.

EMPOWERING INCLUSIVE, MINORITY-RUN MEDIA

Organizations like O Live Group in Hamdaniya and Ezidi24, which caters to the Yezidi population, are among the few minority-run media outlets that are apolitical and produce content of interest and relevance to minority communities. IRP I partnered with these organizations and others to increase the quantity and quality of media coverage of local developments that are rarely, if ever, given attention by major regional or national channels.

Media programming complemented and amplified awareness of recovery activities under PO 1 by providing returnees and displaced residents — who often have limited access to information about developments in their communities of origin — with accurate depictions of progress on the ground. Through these activities, IRP I supported the production of media content — for example, videos highlighting recovery progress in Sinjar that coincided with a wave of returnees in the summer of 2020 — and capacity building for media organizations seeking to increase coverage of local events (see box).

PO 2 activities included campaigns to raise awareness about COVID-19, promote unity, and inform voters from marginalized communities about October 2021 parliamentary elections. To mitigate the pandemic's impact on Iraq's stability, IRP I engaged Iraqi social media influencers and celebrities to amplify accurate, vetted guidance around COVID-19 mitigation protocols and promote the use of face masks. These efforts were important amid significant COVID-19 misinformation undermining national efforts to reduce the number of cases. IRP I also worked with a local media organization to build local capacity to identify "fake news" that contributes to community divisions and distrust. In parallel, IRP I celebrated Iraq's diversity through videos highlighting cultural, religious, and spiritual events that were reposted by national media outlets and

USAID Administrator Samantha Power highlights progress achieved in Sinjar under IRP I programming.
Samantha Power/Twitter

influencers online. Finally, IRP I implemented two voter education and awareness activities targeting marginalized communities to encourage informed political participation. Media activities supported local efforts to strengthen national unity, providing an alternative to divisive sectarian narratives and fear tactics frequently employed by Iraq's political actors to mobilize support ahead of elections.

In addition to media programming, IRP I's own social media platform (including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube channels) gained a sizeable following during the contract's performance period. The channels which were established during the ICRI pilot program in 2018, have become a key information source for online audiences to learn about IRP I's assistance in Iraq, including recovery progress in conflict-affected communities as well as social and cultural initiatives across the country. Notably, IRP I's social media posts were regularly amplified by Embassy Baghdad and by USAID's broader media platforms, including by Administrator Samantha Power.

SECTION FIVE

CHALLENGES & LESSONS LEARNED

A. LOCAL PARTNERSHIPS

IRP I encountered some notable local partnership challenges, including difficulties broadening its pool of local partners and unique challenges associated with working with local government entities. On several occasions, IRP I partnered repeatedly with several trusted CSOs based on past performance and successful outcomes. This arrangement was occasionally necessary due to the absence of robust civil society networks in more remote areas and, especially, a lack of organizations with sufficient technical or administrative capacity to implement IRP activities. However, OTI programs typically involve partnerships with nascent organizations with low capacity given the "in kind" grant model. IRP I could have been more intentional about investing time and resources to organize periodic outreach sessions (virtually, if necessary, due to COVID-19 concerns) to identify and inform prospective partners about the program mission and partnership opportunities, using IRP I's social media presence to generate interest and then testing new partnerships with smaller activities. This approach would have allowed the project to better map the partner landscape in each operating area, identify strengths and weaknesses of different organizations, and reduce concerns from local actors that the program's selection process was not transparent.

IRP I also encountered challenges with local government partnerships, particularly around bureaucratic hurdles associated with service directorates. For example, an early activity to equip the Ninewa Civil Defense Department faced delays because the Ninewa directorate was not authorized to receive assistance without the approval of the General Directorate of the Civil Defense Directorate in Baghdad, which created months-long delays in delivering assistance after it was procured. In this case, the directorate also did not engage a technical staff member or department to provide input into the required uniforms and supplies requested, which created a disconnect between needs of Civil Defense Directorate workers on the ground and the assistance IRP I delivered. This trend was observed with other service directorates and two best practices emerged to address the lower capacity issues: 1) the need to ensure the grantee appoints a technical committee (typically including end users) to provide detailed input into specifications for in-kind procurement and 2) the need to ensure working-level focal points within the directorate to manage day-to-day communications and deliverables to avoid bottlenecks and delays. In some cases, key tasks such as outreach were shared with CSOs (see below) or IRP supported service delivery through an intermediary civic organization.

B. EFFECTIVE OUTREACH APPROACHES

IRP I encountered persistent challenges in conducting effective community outreach but gradually gained an understanding of ways to strengthen this critical aspect of programming in the Iraq context. Frequently, activities were designed with a single grantee responsible for both the technical and outreach components of an activity. However, this scope of work proved prohibitively complex for many partners with limited organizational capacities. Local government entities were under-resourced and did not have the necessary skills and inroads into local communities to promote their work broadly. Local CSOs, on the other hand, typically lacked necessary technical expertise and knowledge for service improvement but were plugged in at the community level and could mobilize volunteers effectively. IRP I course corrected by experimenting with new partnership configurations, including engaging dedicated technical and outreach partners simultaneously based on their respective strengths and skillsets. For example, IRP I frequently leveraged Nadia's Initiative, which had limited on-the-ground resources for implementation, as an outreach partner on many activities in Sinjar with great success.

IRP I also learned that engaging online content — including emotionally resonant videos and photos stories — are often a more effective means to engaging audiences and amplifying awareness of IRP I activities. The project also leveraged IRP I's own social media channels — along with a broad constellation of partner channels — to share professional content produced by local media organizations that promoted USAID support across Iraq. A detailed review of best practices and lessons learned from IRP I's use of social media on IRP I can be found in Annex C.

C. IN-KIND PROCUREMENT

In-kind procurement was an intractable challenge throughout IRP I. Periodically goods and materials were not received in a timely manner to address a window of opportunity and/or did not meet the grantee's expectations. Several delays were caused by international and regional border closures and domestic travel restrictions imposed by the GOI and KRG in response to the pandemic, adversely affecting market availability or transport and delivery. Notwithstanding this issue, the following were common challenges:

- Delays due to lack of detailed technical specifications. IRP I frequently experienced implementation delays related to procurement, due to grantees submitting incomplete specifications for in-kind items, requiring repeated follow-up and/or incorrect items being delivered. Service improvement activities must involve technical input from subject matter experts, in addition to consultation with the relevant Iraqi government service directorate to ensure sign-off on final specifications or the bill of quantities for construction or rehabilitation of public infrastructure, which is typically standardized.
- Delays due to procurement from the KRI. While COVID-related border closures and domestic curfews were not within IRP I's control, procurement disruptions may have been minimized if IRP I maintained local procurement capacity within target

communities. While many vendors are based in the KRI — increasing the likelihood of finding specialized equipment, vehicles, and items due to the region's commercial ties with Turkey — local procurement benefits local economies while also reducing delays associated with transporting goods and materials from the KRI. IRP I increasingly implemented hybrid grants whereby larger or more complex items were procured in-kind by the project and incidental or off-the-shelf items available on the local market were procured by grantees directly in cash. This hybrid approach reduced risk and increased efficiencies during implementation.

D. REMOTE MANAGEMENT AND ACTIVITY MONITORING

The COVID-19 pandemic presented implementation challenges that required unique remote monitoring and evaluation solutions as the team grappled with shifting program priorities, implementation delays, and the suspension, cancellation, or re-design of activities. Iraqi-government-imposed curfews, movement restrictions, and the shift to remote work all prompted a reorganization of the MEL team's workflow, priorities, and data-collection mechanisms. With limited capacity to conduct in-person site visits, the team compiled a directory of trusted local stakeholders from each operating area, including mayors, community leaders, trusted figures, government representatives, and civil society, to verify information as needed.

To track community feedback on project activities, the MEL team worked with grantees to increase their social media presence and experimented with social media polls using popular local social media pages to gather feedback from community members. In addition, the MEL team replaced person-on-the-street interviews with phone surveys.

Finally, the nature and scale of COVID-19 response led to experimentation with creative digital approaches. For a cluster of food-basket distribution activities targeting over 18,000 households designed to mitigate the financial and food security impacts of COVID-19, the MEL team conducted post-distribution monitoring through mobile phone surveys unstructured supplementary service data. This code has the advantage of running on all phone types and operating on roaming services.

E. LESSONS FROM EARLY PILOT ACTIVITIES IN SOUTHERN IRAQ

While IRP I's engagement in southern Iraq was limited to only a few pilot activities in the final year, by the end of the program and with engagement deepening under IRP II, there have been some early insights including:

- Communities and provincial authorities are open to programming and eager to engage in local initiatives. Receptiveness to U.S. assistance is due to growing dissatisfaction with the performance of Iran-backed actors and Iranian influence more broadly, which has left communities in southern Iraq feeling isolated and deprived of their rights.
- Government entities were generally open to and supportive of USAID branding, viewing it as an affirmation of their ability to work with the international community to improve services. However, smaller youth and volunteer groups were more likely

to express concerns about USAID branding, especially in areas where activists and youth groups are more frequently targeted by attacks.

- Political and civic activism in Dhi Qar has brought to power independent, pro-reform figures who are eager to collaborate with communities to affect positive change, offering a unique opportunity for OTI to demonstrate to all Iraqis that a future beyond the control of malign actors is possible. Engaging moderate actors to address the lack of equity in service provisioning and to instill a sense of inclusion around services and livelihood opportunities will help rebuild citizen-government trust and empower civil society and youth actors who have long been sidelined. Likewise, increasing civic engagement opportunities and countering disinformation and divisive rhetoric will reduce polarization and sectarianism. The relatively smaller size of the provincial capital Nasiriyah means OTI activities are likely to be more visible and impactful than in larger cities, especially given that historic neglect is high and the number of actors addressing this neglect is low.
- There is a wealth of CSOs and informal volunteer groups capable of implementing successful programming. However, CSOs and youth groups in the south have less experience working with international partners than their counterparts in areas like Mosul and the Ninewa Plain, and they often lack sophisticated planning, financial management systems, and communication and outreach strategies. OTI's in-kind grant mechanism and implementation model enabled the program to support these nascent organizations with limited risk.

F. AVAILABILITY OF BASIC SERVICES AND LIVELIHOODS ARE KEY DRIVERS OF DURABLE RETURN, SOCIAL CONDITIONS LESS STRAIGHTFORWARD

Findings from IRP I's final evaluation largely corroborated the program's theory of change and findings from internal cluster evaluations found that access to services and livelihood opportunities contribute to durable returns. Specifically, the availability of basic services including water, electricity, waste management, and health and education services encouraged IDPs to return to their areas of origin, while livelihood opportunities motivated people to remain in their communities, particularly in the Ninewa Plain and Mosul. This return of services and jobs is essential to restoring a sense of normalcy and pre-war life. IRP I's approach to sequencing and layering activities across multiple service sectors and expanding livelihoods was also effective. As services improved in target communities in Ninewa Plain and Mosul, the need for livelihoods became more prominent and was reflected in subsequent updates to district strategies.

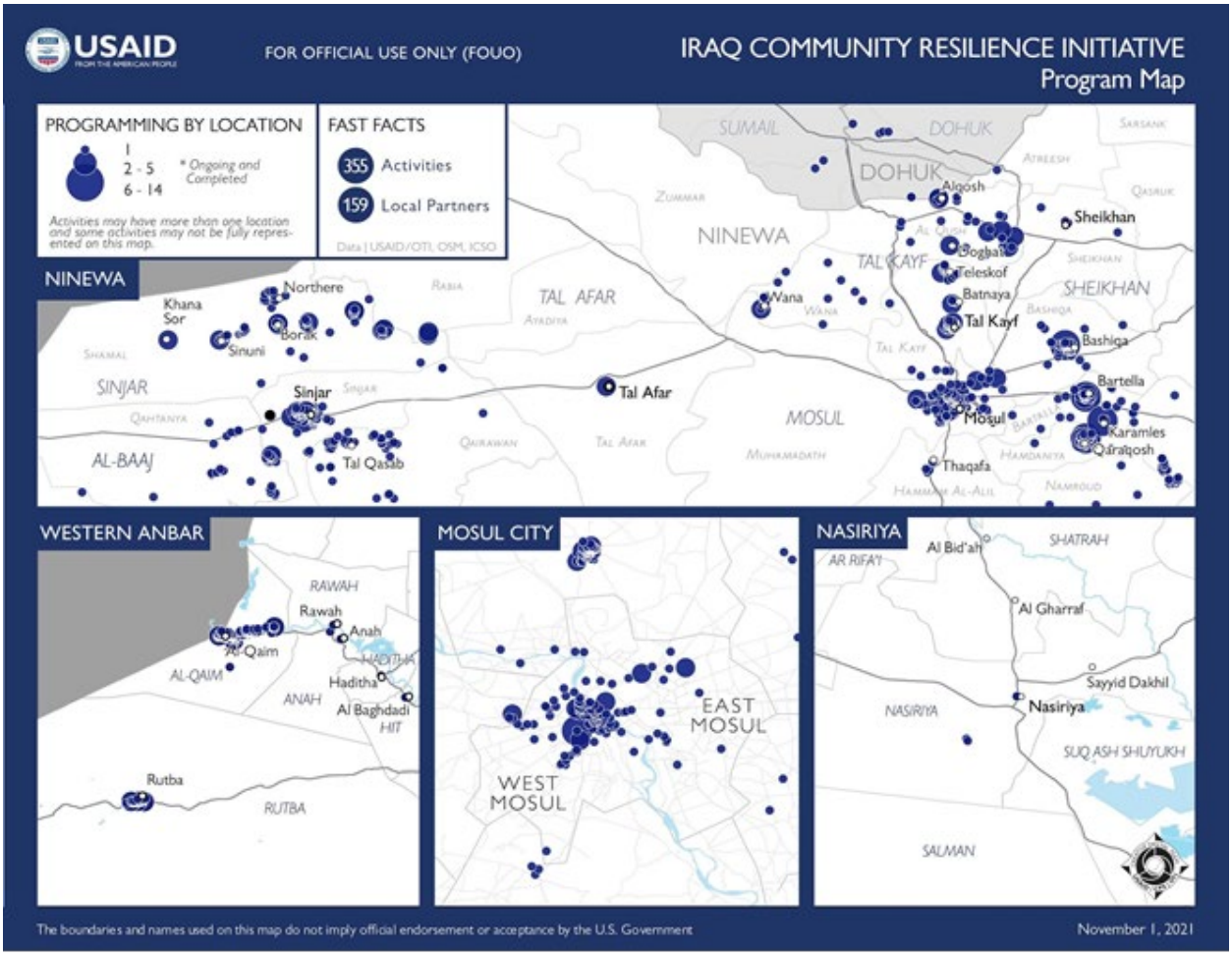
However, while the link between services and livelihoods and durable returns is clear, social conditions do not appear to significantly influence residents' decisions to return to or remain at home. Furthermore, where social tensions do exist, the IRP I final evaluation highlighted that these are typically not between different groups within the same community but are more frequently between community members and those perceived as outsiders.

Examples include residents of rural areas that have migrated to urban centers in search of better services and livelihoods or mistrust between villages comprised of ethno-religious minority groups persecuted by ISIS (e.g., Yezidis and Christians) and Sunni Arab villages whose residents have been (often unfairly) branded as ISIS sympathizers.

In other words, more emphasis could have been placed on social conditions across communities rather than on conditions within geographical communities (whether neighborhoods, towns, or villages), which were not found to be a major source of concern. The final evaluation found that, to the extent that intercommunal tension threatens the stability of an area — even if it does not factor into residents' desire to return or remain in their communities — there are opportunities to strengthen community bonds between diverse communities by emphasizing shared experiences of a conflict and collective healing. This recommendation is timely and relevant given IRP II's emphasis on reducing polarization and sectarianism and building narratives of unity.

ANNEX A. IRP I PROGRAM MAP

ANNEX A. IRP I PROGRAM MAP



ANNEX B. IRP I SUCCESS STORY: HAMDANIYA – RESTORING DIVERSITY IN THE WAKE OF ISIS

USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives

Iraq Program Highlights

The Mar Mattai Cultural Center in Bartella, rehabilitated by USAID/OTI, stages poetry events, concerts, and festivals to promote social cohesion.

Hamdaniya: Restoring Diversity in the Wake of ISIS

February / 2022

Located on the eastern edge of Mosul, Hamdaniya district is known for its economic, ethnic, and religious diversity. The district capital, Bakhdeda[1], maintained strong trade ties with Mosul and flourished as an economic hub for the southern portion of the Ninewa Plains. The countryside of Hamdaniya was home to hundreds of prosperous farms.

However, the brutal occupation of Hamdaniya by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) caused a mass displacement of its Assyrian, Chaldean, Yezidi, Shabak, Turkmen and Kakai communities in 2014. Essam

[1] Hamdaniya's district capital is known both as Bakhdeda and Qaraqosh.

Behnam was among those who fled, eventually making his way to France. "I thought I would stay there for good," he recalls. Back home, the devastation wrought by ISIS included the widespread destruction of public and private property. Bakhdeda, once the largest Christian town in Iraq, was completely abandoned. Battles to liberate the region in late 2016 added to the ruinous ISIS occupation.

"But how can you forget your roots?" asks Behnam. In 2017, he visited Bakhdeda. "No matter how desperate the situation is, you always miss your extended family, friends, and neighbors. I was one of the first to return and it was like a ghost town." Although many families expressed a desire to go back, returns were slow and soon stagnated as people became disillusioned with the pace of recovery. As frustrations grew, so too did ethnic tensions. Behnam felt a calling to help revive the district. In 2018, he became Hamdaniya's mayor. At the time, approximately 40 percent of the district's 350,000 residents had returned, raising concerns that Hamdaniya's diversity would never be restored.

Hamdaniya Mayor Essam Behnam (right) and Emad Sabeh of the Youth Messengers Organization (left) visiting a health facility rehabilitated with USAID/OTI support at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Beginning in mid-2018, Hamdaniya was the focus of nearly three years of sustained efforts by USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) to create conditions for more robust and durable returns. Working in collaboration with the Hamdaniya District Office, led by Mayor Behnam, USAID/OTI partnered with local government entities, civil society organizations, faith-based groups, and informal volunteer groups to improve essential services; support the expansion of livelihoods; and encourage social and economic interaction across ethnic and religious lines.

USAID/OTI programming was led by local actors determined to make a difference. This approach helped ensure Hamdaniya's future belongs to and is owned by Hamdaniya. Today, nearly 70 percent of the district's original population is back.

GETTING THE BASICS COVERED

Mayor Behnam recalls how the Hamdaniya District Office and USAID/OTI worked in tandem. "When the government managed to pave the main road, for example, [USAID/OTI] stepped in to provide traffic signs and streetlights." Behnam is referring to the installation of nearly 200 streetlights and other safety measures along a seven-kilometer stretch of road that serves as Hamdaniya's gateway to two important Iraqi cities: Mosul and Erbil. "Likewise," continues Behnam, "when we reopened the electricity department, the program provided the vehicles and maintenance equipment we needed to work effectively."

A teacher holding a class at a school playground to make learning more fun for students, made possible by USAID/OTI support to rehabilitate and equip the school building and playground

USAID/OTI support aimed to ensure the local government's success in changing perceptions of recovery and fostering a basic sense of security through the delivery of essential services and infrastructure. Whether providing desks and chairs for thousands of students attending newly rehabilitated schools, removing rubble from homes in rural Shabak villages, equipping the civil defense to better fight fires, or installing streetlights, the mayor insists these efforts had an impact.

"The main road was in complete darkness and there were no traffic signs. Sadly, we lost loved ones because of this. The street lighting decreased fatal accidents." The lights also eased restrictions on freedom of movement and boosted economic activity, as locals, especially women, felt unsafe being on or near the road after sunset. Today, roadside shops are open late into the evening for much-needed local commerce.

When the COVID-19 pandemic struck, USAID/OTI support to the health sector helped officials better monitor and respond to the crisis. Six government health clinics in rural areas received generators, while three urban health centers received furniture, medical materials, and personal protective equipment (PPE). "I was afraid to approach patients who were infected, but now I feel much safer with the PPE," noted a nurse at Bartella Health Center. Equipped with chairs for the waiting rooms, staff can also enforce social distancing more effectively.

REVITALIZING THE LOCAL ECONOMY

"Livelihoods and job opportunities are key factors influencing the decision to return," notes Mayor Behnam, adding, "people need a way to make a living." Returning families typically used any savings they brought with them to make their homes inhabitable. Few had sufficient resources to reopen their businesses and workshops. USAID/OTI worked with local organizations to help revitalize the economy.

In the urban centers of Bakhdeda and Bartella, the program rehabilitated, and in some cases equipped, 75 small businesses, including auto repair shops, nurseries, flower shops, clothing and grocery stores, and maintenance shops, among others. Although pandemic-related closures were a major deterrent for recovery for some shop owners, many businesses reported growing demand and increased regular income. Dulfeeqar, the owner of Al-Akhawayn garage in Bartella, said the support allows for better and quicker performance. "Earlier, we could repair three cars a day. With the new equipment and tools we now finish 5-6 cars per day."

Flowers are blooming in Bartella, as are livelihoods. A nursery supported by USAID/OTI offers a variety of pots and plants to residents and provides a source of income for two families.

Hamdaniya is also home to roughly three dozen villages. Some of these villages are historically impoverished while others are known for their high agricultural output. USAID/OTI provided farming equipment to 150 farmers in Karamles and 89 farmers in the marginalized Kakai villages of Wardak and Gazakan to increase their agricultural production capacity. It also rehabilitated and equipped four poultry farms, helping revitalize what used to be a key industry in Hamdaniya. The support boosted business not only for farmers, but also for feed shops, veterinary clinics, chicken hatcheries, and local stores.

Many residents, including Mayor Behnam, believe economic revitalization is the surest way to increase social cohesion in Hamdaniya. "When people have jobs and businesses," insists Mayor Behnam, "they will interact." Locals applauded the mayor for restoring services and supporting livelihoods without fueling divisions.

ENCOURAGING INTERACTION ACROSS ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS LINES

"Hamdaniya is like a rainbow," says Mayor Behnam, proudly, "and this is what makes it special." Unlike neighboring areas, the district has neither an Arab nor Kurdish majority, but instead consists of an array of ethno-religious groups. Despite a shared history of persecution among these communities, Hamdaniya is not without social and ethnic tensions. A lack of trust of 'the other' is common and fears of demographic change abound. Challenges accessing essential services and recovery assistance often exacerbate these tensions.

By tapping into common interests, USAID/OTI and its local partners found creative ways to encourage interaction across ethnic and religious lines. In Bartella, for example, a community-managed electricity cooperative was established that is shared by Shabak and Christian families in three neighborhoods. The cooperative provides electricity to more than 150 families, including several underprivileged households who receive subsidized electricity. In the same town, a local organization transformed a 600-meter-long median into a community park, linking an Assyrian neighborhood with a Shabak neighborhood.

USAID/OTI also helped enhance, and in some cases restore, the functionality of shared spaces like cultural centers, community halls, and schools. In Karamles, St. Joseph's Cultural Center expanded its activities after receiving a generator, sound system, and furniture to include offering remedial classes for Christian and Shabak students. "During the conflict, my family was displaced to Mosul and my [Christian] friends went to Iraqi Kurdistan," recalled a Shabak student named Younis who attended summer school at St. Joseph's. "I lived under ISIS control the whole time, but when my family returned, I was able to rejoin my friends."

DODGING CURVEBALLS

The COVID-19 crisis inevitably undermined hard-won progress towards recovery. "Many businesses we worked so diligently to restore were forced to close again during the pandemic," recalls Behnam. As much of the district's economic activity came to a halt in 2020, thousands of families were cut off from vital income. To help mitigate the pandemic's economic burden and safeguard gains, USAID/OTI provided food baskets to 5,000 of Hamdaniya's most vulnerable families. Hikmat Ali Yazidy and his family were recipients. A day laborer and father of six from the village of Bozan,

Doctors and nurses in Hamdaniya feel safer working with proper

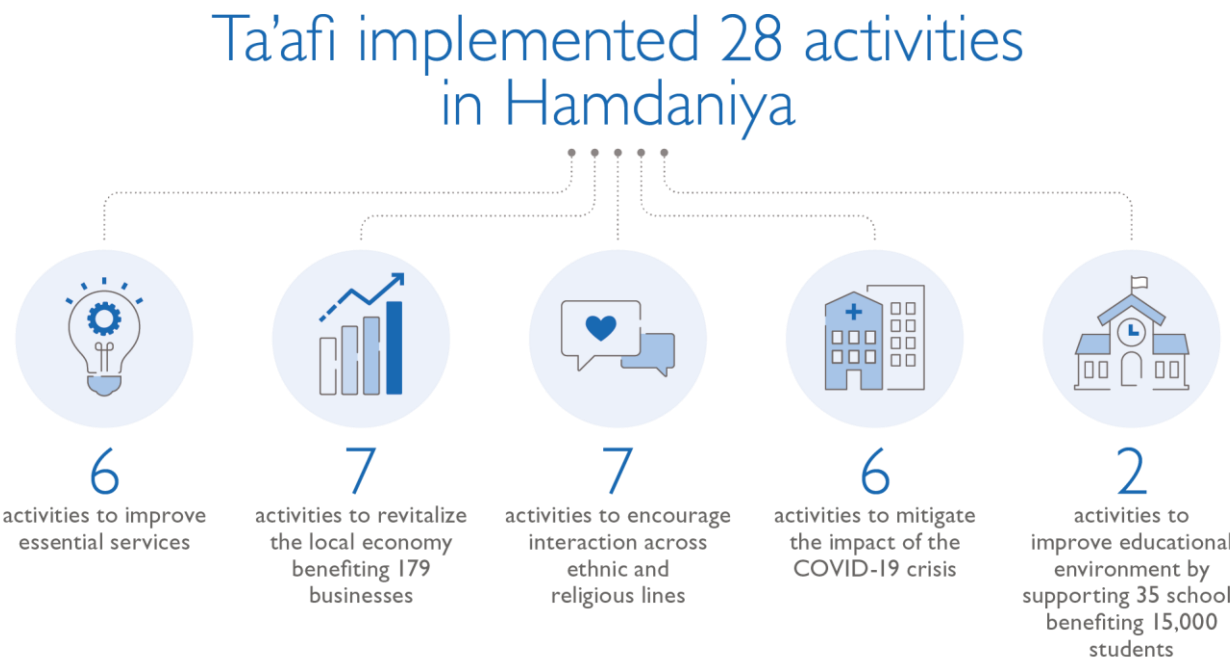
Hikmat earned just enough to make ends meet. But construction work plummeted amid curfews, closures, and rising prices. Suddenly, the prospect of feeding his family was daunting. "The [delivery] was sufficient to feed my family for 20 days," said Hikmat. "It eased my worries and lifted the burden." For some families, the supplies lasted nearly two months.

LOCALIZATION PAVES THE WAY FOR GENUINE TRANSFORMATION

The case of Hamdaniya exemplifies USAID/OTI's bottom-up and highly localized approach to programming in Iraq. Asked what made the support unique, Mayor Behnam replies, "The assistance reached Hamdaniya's center and its peripheries, and benefited all groups. It complemented our work and our efforts."

Hamdaniya's path to recovery is far from complete. The district is large and many needs remain unmet especially in rural areas. Frustrations persist and it is unlikely that Hamdaniya will ever experience a return to its pre-ISIS population. "Destruction was massive, so rebuilding the district will take time," notes Behnam, "but we are moving in the right direction."

By extending trust to Hamdaniya's communities and leveraging local expertise, leadership, and resources, USAID/OTI helped achieve sustainable impact.



ANNEX C. SOCIAL MEDIA APPROACHES AND HIGHLIGHTS

USAID
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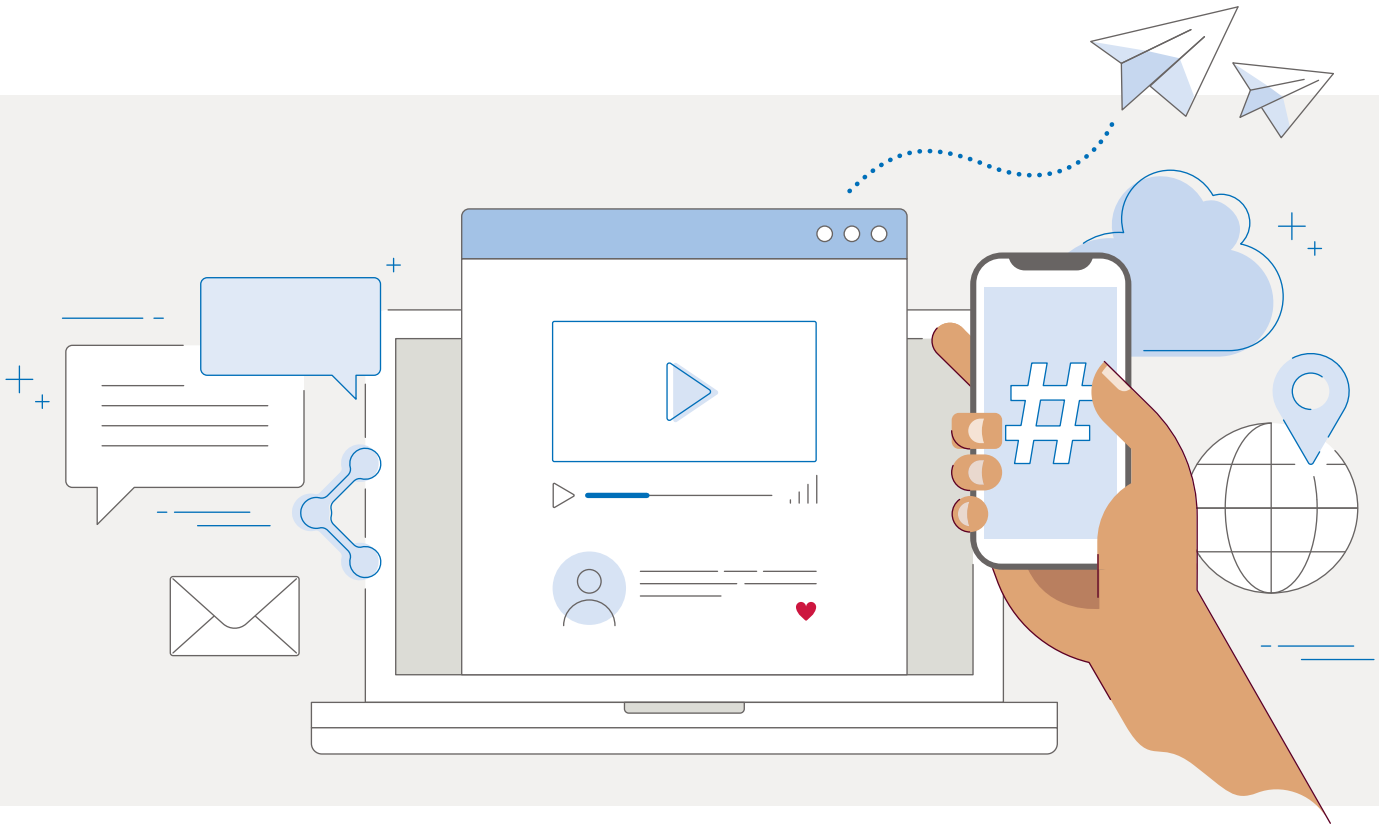
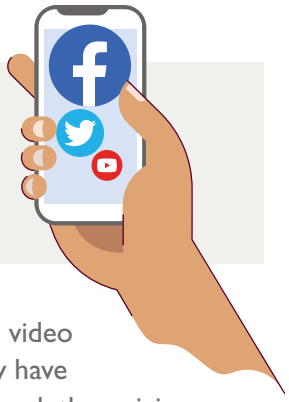


IRAQ REGIONAL PROGRAM

Social Media Approaches and Successes

In September 2018, United States Agency for International Development's Office of Transition Initiatives (USAID/OTI) launched the Iraq Regional Program (branded locally as Ta'afi), to increase stability in Iraq by improving conditions that allow for durable returns of people displaced by ISIS' occupation of Iraq and the subsequent liberation operations. IRP implemented activities across Ninewa and Western Anbar, in addition to pilot activities in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region, Baghdad and southern Iraq that improved delivery of priority public services, expanded livelihoods, and improved social conditions. Concurrently, the project leveraged the popularity of social media — Iraq has one of the fastest growing social media user bases, with more than 19M subscribers across multiple platforms — for a variety of programmatic objectives with great success. IRP used social media, including the project's own social media platforms, to launch online awareness campaigns, to address social issues through online dialogue, and to collect community feedback and perspectives to better understand local priorities and sentiment.

Starting in November 2018 to October 2021 (time of writing), IRP owned 3 social media accounts; its Facebook page has 34K followers, 790 followers on Twitter, and 119 subscribers on YouTube.



Different Tools for Different Audiences

IRP media initiatives operated on Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, WhatsApp, and ClubHouse. IRP strategically chose a platform(s) based on the target audience's geographic location, media habits, and preferences. For example, to reach a Mosul-based audience, the program developed a relationship with one of the most popular Facebook pages in Mosul. Defining the target audience and social media platform enabled IRP to reach men and women of different ages, and from different ethnic, religious, educational, and social backgrounds based across Iraq's provinces.

Diverse Content Aligned with IRP Objectives

To ensure the outreach was aligned with program objectives, IRP program staff developed outreach messages that were consistent with the desired outcomes of each activity. IRP used diverse content to amplify its messages and engage different target audiences, including pictures, videos, music, infographics, animations, caricature, animated videos, and personalized stories that have received high audience engagement and are frequently reposted, occasionally by local and regional celebrities. For example, an animated video was created to raise awareness on wildfire prevention measures. The video targeted farmers who may have limited education background, thus, giving instructions through animation would resonate better for farmers. IRP worked with an Iraqi talent to establish a social media brand to raise awareness on various community issues that operates on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, and has become a safe interactive online community for almost 23K (and counting) Iraqis. To promote program impact on communities, IRP presented short-personalized stories. For example, IRP highlighted a story of a retired schoolteacher whose home library was destroyed during the war and IRP retained some of his books during its rubble removal campaign in Mosul. The story showed IRP impact, promoted a survival story, and echoed the experience of many people who lived in conflict-affected areas and lost beloved belongings. The story received high audience engagement and was reposted on several local pages. Eventually, the story was recognized by one of the most notable Arab female novelists, Ahlam Mustaghanmi. Videos were used to reinforce IRP activities' objectives. One of IRP social media initiatives highlighted the story of a Yazidi woman who survived from ISIS grip, returned to Sinjar after its liberation, and started her own business. The video promoted a positive recovery story in Sinjar. The story's

Needs a short caption

online audience has grown quickly and facilitated opportunities for the subject with UNDP and international recognition by the German broadcaster Deutsche Welle.

Localization of the Program

To emphasize that IRP is a Iraqi-led program funded by USAID, the team used dialogues in local languages, celebrated local holidays, cooperated with local influencers, local social media pages, and highlighted Iraq's historical sites and different communities' culture and pride. In addition, the program was locally branded with an Arabic name, Ta'afi, which means "recovery." This strategy promoted transparency as well as local ownership by the community, and led to local social media pages, local influencers, and official government sites following and interacting with IRP's content. For example, IRP collaborated with a very well-known prominent Iraqi actress and influencer, Alaa Hussain, to produce a video of her encouraging people to follow COVID-19 health prevention measures. The video reached millions of people all over Iraq, was recognized by Iraq's Health Ministry, and re-published on their official social media account.

IRP Social Media Network

IRP expanded its social media network by linking with local social media pages across Iraq, as well as with U.S. Mission in Iraq social media pages. IRP reached out to select social media page administrators for content sharing after monitoring the social media landscape to identify key media actors and content that reflected similar themes and narratives promoted by IRP. IRP also linked program partners with each other to share content for media amplification. For instance, IRP partners Nasir Ibrahim (caricature artist) and No for Domestic Violence Youth Group collaborated to support each other's media campaigns. Moreover, Yalla, an IRP partner and a national social media page with 3 million FB followers, amplified IRP media initiatives content on its own page and distributed it within its own network. Finally, IRP continuously shared content with USAID/Iraq's Development Outreach Coordinator who, in turn, helped amplify IRP content across USAID/Iraq, USAID Middle East, US Embassy Baghdad, US Consulate Erbil, USAID/OTI, and USAID social media accounts. USAID Administrator, Samantha Power, highlighted IRP's biggest activity in Sinjar on her official twitter account *(see below)*. These partnerships represented zero cost media amplification of IRP content, enabling the program to form a strategic network of key media actors and well-established organizations that contributed to the program's success in getting its message out.

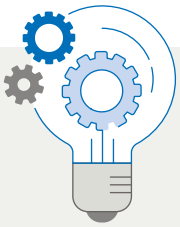
Power of Hashtags to Bridge Online/ Offline Conversations

IRP recognized the power of online hashtags to create a specific theme and unify the program's online and offline outreach efforts.

For example, while IRP delivered in-kind assistance to schools across conflict-affected areas, the program launched an online campaign "#ReturningToLearning" to promote the importance of education in rebuilding the future of Iraq. The hashtag was used online and promoted on branded assistance to educational facilities.

Social Media for Data Collection and M&E

IRP utilized social media to collect data and community feedback in a timely, inclusive, and comprehensive manner. Social media emerged as a powerful tool to keep a pulse on community perceptions and obtain nuanced real-time feedback. This was done through publishing surveys, open ended questions, polls, monitoring comments and direct messages on IRP's own social media platforms and/or IRP social media network. The polls and questions were done on the program's social media platforms, while the surveys were done through a grant partnership with multiple social media pages. For instance, social media came in handy when the team changed its approach in monitoring activities while adhering to COVID-19 restrictions and curfews. In person site visits and interviews were replaced with social media surveys. The team used Google form to conduct surveys, which provides data to the back-end user. While for questions and polls, the team monitored the interaction on the post itself. The results of the surveys were heavily dependent on writing activities' final evaluation report and cluster reviews. The team continued using social media to monitor activities even after the ease of COVID-19 restrictions and lift of curfews.



Best Practices

- Link online and offline outreach efforts by including a QR code on branded and marked assistance that automatically directs to social media platforms.
- Keep the program team engaged and aware of social media updates by sharing weekly highlights that include brief analysis of audience engagement on top posts, results of any polls published on the program's social media, and best practices and lessons learned for branding, marking, and community outreach.
- Encourage program partners to tag IRP social media accounts to amplify program content.
- Engage followers and the online audience by developing fixed responses to the most common messages. This promotes two-way communication while ensuring it does not become too time intensive.
- Create a program "brand" and attract media outlets to publish/share program posts by creating diverse, high-quality, and engaging content that appeals to different ages, backgrounds, and ethnicities.
- Engage specialized media production companies through service agreements to establish long-term relationships with providers that understand program messaging objectives and can provide high-quality content.
- Use social media to monitor activities! Social media can be used to post anonymous surveys, which can, in turn, encourage interaction with beneficiary communities and solicit candid input on priority needs and salient community issues, even on sensitive political topics.

ANNEX D. IRP I SUCCESS STORY: RETURNING HOME AND FINDING HOPE AFTER ISIS

USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives

Iraq Program Highlights

February / 2022

Returning Home and Finding Hope After ISIS

Upon returning to Bashiqa after its liberation from the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), Abdi Ali struggled to revive his family farm in the fertile Ninewa Plain region. His generator and agricultural tools were stolen or lost, and without them, the task seemed impossible.

"I tried to depend on the [unreliable] national grid," he recalls, "but a lack of electricity and rainfall greatly hindered my work. I couldn't water the crops or cultivate all my land, so my family and I started thinking about leaving farming altogether."

Abdi Ali, a farmer who returned to Bashiqa after its liberation from ISIS, walks through his olive groves.

This changed when USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) equipped Abdi and 11 other farmers in Bashiqa with solar panel systems for their agricultural wells. The solar-powered water pumps offer a reliable source of irrigation year-round. "I went from planting one dunum[1] to being able to plant anywhere from 5-11 dunams," recounts Ali. "The solar panels saved me from leaving the life and livelihood I inherited from my grandparents."

[1] One dunum equals approximately ¼ acre.


Threatened with renewed displacement, a solar-powered irrigation system enabled Abdi Ali to stay on the farm that has been in his family for generations.

An estimated three million people were displaced across northern and western Iraq by the rise and fall of ISIS from 2014-2017. The region's gradual liberation prompted massive waves of returns, driven by the hope among war-weary residents that some sense of normalcy could finally be restored to their lives.

Going home, however, is just the first step toward rebuilding lives, livelihoods, and communities, and returnees were often confronted with unfavorable conditions that cast a shadow of doubt over the decision to return.

Ghaiab Mosa and his family faced countless struggles upon returning to Shat Al Arab, a small village belonging to Rummana district in Western Anbar. "People say that water is the source of life, but we saw firsthand that water *and* electricity are sources of life!" notes Ghaiab Mosa. "The district was in complete darkness after sunset. There were no generators and the electrical grid only worked at half capacity, hindering all of our day-to-day activities."

In 2020, USAID/OTI provided Rummana district with six generators and rehabilitated the local power grid the following year. USAID/OTI also supported the municipality's waste collection efforts and furnished 15 schools in the district, among other activities. "My kids had to walk nearly five kilometers to school in the neighboring village," recalls Ghaiab, "because our local primary school didn't have any furniture."

USAID/OTI furnished 15 schools in Rummana district, including the Shat Al Arab Primary School.

"All this support helped us recover from war and stand on our own two feet," says Ghaiab.

Improving essential infrastructure and services also helped expand livelihood opportunities for returnees. In northern Sinjar, for example, USAID/OTI's rehabilitation of Sinuni Road led to the reopening of dozens of shops, revitalizing the thoroughfare as a commercial area.

When a local businessman first encouraged Ziad Khalaf to rent his shop along Sinuni Road, he rejected the offer. "I needed to find a small shop to open my business," recollects the young returnee, "but the road was dusty and disorganized, and I knew working there would never be profitable."

Ziad wasn't alone with this sentiment. Empty shops lined the sides of Sinuni Road and nearly 40 percent of owners said they were unwilling to reopen or start new businesses, citing terrible road conditions, regular traffic jams, and the absence of safety measures for pedestrians.

Ziad decided to rent the shop after the rehabilitation of Sinuni Road. "I opened a business to sell auto parts and it is now my source of income to support myself and my family," he says proudly.

Ziad Khalaf (left) stands in front of the auto parts shop he opened along Sinuni Road after its rehabilitation (right).

USAID/OTI partnered with local government entities, civil society organizations, and informal volunteer groups across the Ninewa Plain, Sinjar, Mosul, and Western Anbar for nearly three years to improve conditions for durable returns. Despite the plethora of challenges returnees face, the testimonies of Abdi, Ghaiab, and Ziad reflect an important impact of these efforts: a hopeful outlook for the future.

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