

# Humanitarian Assistance and Social Safety Nets in Protracted Crises

## *A Case Study of Iraq*

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## *List of Acronyms*

HC – Humanitarian Consequences

HPC – Humanitarian Programme Cycle

IASC – Inter Agency Standing Committee

MCNA – Multi Cluster Needs Assessment

MPCA – Multi Purpose Cash Assistance

MYMP – Multi-Year Multi-Partner

PDS – Public Distribution System

PMT – Proxy Means Test

POC – Persons of Concern

SEVAT – Socio Economic Vulnerability Assessment Tool

SNFI – Shelter and Non-Food Items

SPN – Social Protection Network

SSN – Social Safety Net

## Executive Summary

This case study aims to contextualize cash assistance in a protracted humanitarian crisis like Iraq and how it can be used to transition to social protection in the long run. Humanitarian aid in the country is likely to continue to meet the needs of the most vulnerable population, especially those who have been affected by displacement. Yet, it is also recognized that Iraq is a middle-income country for which humanitarian aid cannot be a replacement for a social safety net that would help reduce socioeconomic vulnerabilities over the long-term.

Given the protracted nature of the crisis in Iraq, cash assistance has assumed a growing significance. Already, cash assistance is being used across humanitarian sectors, and there is increasing emphasis both in the literature as well as from field staff about its efficacy in meeting humanitarian objectives. However, it is also important to understand the limitations of humanitarian aid, which makes it imperative to create parallel linkages with social protection schemes that can provide sustained support to the most vulnerable people.

Current MPCA programming in Iraq is aiming to fill this gap, through facilitating potential transitions to durable solutions for those in protracted vulnerability. The new vulnerability assessment model developed for determining eligibility for humanitarian MPCA is methodologically aligned with poverty assessment models used by the World Bank. This alignment has helped create a humanitarian assessment method that can be used to identify vulnerable households for potential referrals to various social protection schemes, including those administered by the government for poverty reduction.

The study proceeds as follows: the first section discusses the nature of the humanitarian crisis in Iraq and why it has necessitated a long-term approach to humanitarian aid in the country. The second section discusses how a long-term approach is being adopted in humanitarian MPCA programming in Iraq, through an assessment tool that can be used for referrals to long-term support for the most vulnerable people, especially those affected by displacement. The third section concludes, with recommendations and way forward to strengthen humanitarian-social safety net linkages.

## Section 1: Cash Assistance in a Protracted Crisis

### Protracted Crisis

It is widely recognized that the humanitarian response in Iraq faces a situation of protracted crisis. Despite an officially declared end of war with ISIS in 2017, the region's volatile security conditions have kept Iraq in the throes of unrest and displacement. In neighboring Syria, violent conflict continues to rage on, displacing scores of people each day. At the same time, public grievances have sparked protests in Lebanon, adding to the region's heightened instability. Compounding this instability and the inevitable crisis it engenders have been protests within Iraq against a government that has grown increasingly unpopular with the public. Despite a gradual improvement over previous years, Iraq continues to be ranked amongst the most fragile states in the world (The Fund for Peace, 2019).

Continued cycles of unrest and displacement have added to the complexities of the humanitarian response in Iraq. Recurring crises have meant that conversations on potential transitions to durable solutions get sidelined as soon as a new emergency occurs. This has limited humanitarian actors' ability to deliberate on and engage themselves in a solutions-centric paradigm, instead of one that is focused on meeting immediate needs of the displacement affected population in the short term. However, there is now a growing recognition that the humanitarian response in the country needs to take a long-term approach in its strategic planning, one that can at least enable, if not facilitate, solutions for the country's vulnerable population, as well as create exit pathways for international humanitarian actors.

### Cash Transfer Programming in Iraq

Initially focused on refugees, cash transfer programming has been in use in the Iraq humanitarian response since 2014. While it was later also implemented for those affected by displacement, including IDPs, returnees, and host communities, cash actors continued to push for the provision of cash-based assistance to not be tied to with displacement alone. Multi Purpose Cash Assistance (MPCA), particularly, was adopted by a large number of NGOs and UN agencies to support the most vulnerable people. With recognition of its relevance and potential for scale, MPCA was given a separate chapter within the Humanitarian Response Plan from 2015 onwards. The wide adoption of MPCA was due to both its evident impact in addressing immediate basic needs, as well as the ease with which it could be delivered directly to intended beneficiaries, who also preferred cash to other kinds of assistance<sup>1</sup>

However, MPCA has remained short-term in nature, designed basically as an emergency response. And while widely accepted to be impactful in enabling households' basic needs, its impact is seen to be temporary at best.<sup>2</sup> As a result, MPCA programming has been lacking a long-term perspective that may help design durable solutions for the country's displacement affected populations, especially the most vulnerable among them.

The humanitarian community in Iraq has been aware of this chasm. It has been known that MPCA is helpful to households for the short duration it is provided, but for the most vulnerable ones it still doesn't add up to a long-term solution, especially considering the protracted nature of displacement in the country. Latest estimates, for example, suggest that poverty remains twice as high among displacement affected populations than the rest of the country (World Bank Group, 2018). This has brought the need

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<sup>1</sup> For more on the use and effectiveness of CTP in humanitarian contexts, see Idris, 2017 or Smith, et al., 2017

<sup>2</sup> Currently, the maximum length of MPCA for IDPs in Iraq is 3 months; see Khan, et al., 2019

for a social safety net for those affected by displacement and in protracted vulnerability to the fore of social policy debate in Iraq.

### Displacement and Poverty

Continued waves of displacement in the country have contributed to increasing overall poverty. Latest estimations from the World Bank indicate that at nearly 38 percent, poverty among displacement affected populations is nearly twice as high as the rest of the population. Following the emergence of ISIS and the war that ensued, gains made in poverty reduction quickly reversed, with poverty showing a marked increase in all parts of the country after 2014. The Kurdistan region, for example, experienced an increase in poverty from 3.5 to 12.5 percent as large numbers of displaced people continued to come to the region during and following the war (World Bank Group, 2018). Consumption experienced a major 40 percent drop in governorates held by ISIS, whereas in the South, poverty remained persistently high (High Committee for Poverty Reduction Strategy, 2018).<sup>3</sup>

The new Poverty Reduction Strategy 2018-22 was developed in recognition of this reality. Along with the National Development Plan, the strategy aimed at establishing an effective social safety net, in addition to creating income generating opportunities and developing human capital. One of the key activities planned in the context of social protection was improving the targeting system for existing programs and reforming the social protection system, particularly the Public Distribution System (PDS) and the social safety net. Another key activity was response to emergency, which placed an emphasis on displaced people and returnees (pp 4, (High Committee for Poverty Reduction Strategy, 2018).

### MPCA and Durable Solutions

Periods of conflict-led displacement, along with economic shocks, have hampered the progress made on enhancing the scope and coverage of social protection in Iraq. Based on analysis using the most recent Multi Cluster Needs Assessment data, up to 2.8 million people in the country can be considered to be vulnerable.<sup>4</sup> With the state's capacity seriously constrained, humanitarian aid, in the form of MPCA, remain a central mechanism for supporting the needs of vulnerable populations, including those affected by displacement. Multipurpose cash grants have been a recommended intervention in the humanitarian sphere. Indeed, it has been noted that in humanitarian contexts where markets are functional, the use of cross-sectoral cash grants should be increased. For example, the agenda for action for social protection and cash-based programmes recommends increased cash-based programming and risk-informed, shock-responsive systems. Such systems, the agenda notes, should be based on economic and risk-related (such as conflict or forced displacement) criteria (FAO, 2016).

Furthermore, beneficiaries prefer cash too. A recent study from Iraq notes that deciding freely what to spend their cash transfer amount on is one of the most emphasized responses from beneficiaries. However, a more critical finding from the study is that given the uncertainty about the duration of cash assistance, beneficiaries are unable to factor it for long-term planning. This limits the potential of the cash assistance in furthering individual outcomes (such as eliminating negative coping strategies). Participants

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<sup>3</sup> More recently, protests against the government also indicate the persistent nature of deprivation felt in the country.

<sup>4</sup> This analysis was based on the application of Socio Economic Vulnerability Assessment tool (SEVAT) on MCNA data. The SEVAT estimates household consumption, the indicator for meeting minimum needs. For MCNA, see REACH, 2019.

in the study also noted that they are likely to remain vulnerable, knowing well that the assistance would be discontinued soon (Sagmeister, et al., 2018).

Yet, humanitarian response, including MPCA as well as any other emergency tool, cannot be the panacea for permanently reducing vulnerabilities, especially in a protracted crisis context. Neither can it function as a social safety net for the most vulnerable. In 2019, a roundtable discussion on protracted crisis highlighted this gap, noting that it was worrying that durable solutions were still not a mainstream discussion in the Iraqi humanitarian context. The discussion further noted that economic security contributes to improved feelings of reintegration for affected families and therefore should be seen within the paradigm of durable solutions. On the other hand, poverty negatively affects integration and acceptance. It was also noted during the discussion that for a durable solutions framework to be effective, not only is there a need for more development actors to be onboard, but also that information from technical/field level be made available at the political level too (Returns Working Group, 2019).

The need for collaborative humanitarian and development actions and strengthening national social protection capacity has also been emphasized at the International Conference on Social Protection in Contexts of Fragility and Forced Displacement. The underlying message in calls for collective action in such contexts is to operationalize a humanitarian-development nexus and establish sustainable response mechanisms for displacement affected populations. The strategy note prepared by the UNDG Working Group on Social Protection notes that social protection and humanitarian assistance responses can benefit from working collectively towards transitions to national safety nets and social protection systems. Better alignment, for example, can improve the efficiency, transparency and accountability of humanitarian and national social safety nets, while joint piloting can contribute towards scaling up prospects of including the humanitarian caseload into long term social safety nets (Regional UNDG Working Group on Social Protection, 2016).<sup>5</sup>

### Linking MPCA and Social Safety Nets

Enhanced linkages between humanitarian assistance and development cooperation are crucial for making international assistance in crises more efficient and impactful. There can be several ways of doing this without undermining existing efforts in the otherwise disparate streams of humanitarian assistance and development cooperation (Steets, 2011). But essentially, this requires a development perspective early on in emergency settings, transition mechanisms and coordination between different forms of assistance on ground. And more importantly, creating these linkages requires a shift in the paradigms in which humanitarian and development structures operate, often separately (Bursset, et al., 2009). This is even more relevant in the context of protracted situations, where collaborative work between humanitarian and development partners can help achieve 'collective' outcomes that reduce need, risk and vulnerability over a longer timeframe (Mowjee, et al., 2015).<sup>6</sup>

Best practices for materializing such linkages exist and have been discussed at different forums. A report on strengthening linkages between humanitarian aid and government social safety nets recommends the need for establishing a seamless data sharing mechanism through, for example, a data hub with real time data updates. The report also recommends harmonizing data collection, qualification, and verification systems. This could be done by including SPN eligibility variables/criteria into humanitarian vulnerability

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<sup>5</sup> On how this is being done in Iraq, see Text Box 1.

<sup>6</sup> See also, ICVA, 2018.

assessment models so that it is easier to identify a case load that can be referred to SPN when the government has the capacity to take it (European Commission, 2019).

Another key recommendation from the report is that given that capacity development for the government SSN could take time, humanitarian actors should consider making the duration of the assistance for vulnerable households longer, while they continue working with government actors on improving harmonization of targeting criteria and referral mechanisms. Given their operational field experience, humanitarian actors can also provide support to the government in the areas of capacity building of social workers, enrolment and registration, conducting and implementing assessments, and providing assistance to displacement affected communities. Local implementation and guidance are key to making projects and policies impactful for the needs of people (International Rescue Committee, 2012). It is important to note, however, that donors' willingness in this area has remained limited.

There are successful examples of such collaborative work, linking humanitarian cash transfers with social safety nets. For example, in Yemen, Oxfam has had a successful partnership with the government's Social Welfare Fund and Post Office. Such partnerships have helped in redirecting humanitarian aid from emergency support to government-supported social safety nets that can contribute towards long-term wellbeing of vulnerable groups (Oxfam International, 2009). Similarly, the Graduation Approach for refugees, supported by the World Bank and UNHCR in emergency and protracted refugee situations in Africa uses a multisectoral support mechanism to alleviate extreme poverty. The approach, which can be replicated in contexts of IDPs, identifies the most vulnerable households and provides support in multiple areas, such as livelihoods, education, and health, while continuing the provision of cash support. There is evidence that programmes based on the approach have shown positive outcomes, including improved self-reliance and a reduction in negative coping strategies among beneficiaries. In Lebanon, the Basic Assistance Working Group works on for the harmonized provision of cash-based assistance for poverty reduction among refugees and vulnerable Lebanese people.

In Iraq, efforts have been made in setting the groundwork for strengthening linkages between humanitarian, development, and state actors. At the strategic level, these include the National Development Plan and Poverty Reduction Strategy 2028-2022 and the Social Protection Roadmap 2015-19; at a more technical level, a key effort was a workshop held among humanitarian actors, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, and the World Bank (see Text Box 1: Humanitarian-Social Safety Net Linkages).

### **Durable Solutions for the Most Vulnerable Displacement Affected People in Iraq**

Durable solutions in the context of displacement imply that having been affected by displacement does not affect peoples' ability to access assistance or meet their protection needs. Displacement compounds the vulnerabilities of those at the bottom of the socioeconomic pyramid, in addition to disrupting possibilities of accessing social services in one place. Durable solutions planning, therefore, is predicated on the existence of a mechanism through which vulnerable persons can be identified and referred or transitioned to a long-term support ecosystem, such as national social safety nets. At the same time, displacement affected populations should also have access to both humanitarian and development actors, so that they are capable of meeting adequate standards of living without discrimination (Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 2010).

Within the MPCA implementing humanitarian community in Iraq, this long-term perspective on MPCA has been framed by questions on how the most vulnerable households among displacement affected

communities can be transitioned into longer term support ecosystems (such as government administered social safety nets). Such a transition mechanism can serve three crucial purposes outlined above:

- provide a long-term support mechanism for the most vulnerable households among displaced communities beyond the short duration of the current MPCA programming cycle
- create exit pathways for humanitarian actors by linking/referring the humanitarian case load to development interventions such as poverty reduction and livelihoods support
- serve as an important example of humanitarian-development nexus in similar contexts

Over the past few years, MPCA actors in Iraq have taken a rigorous approach to understanding vulnerability. This has led to a commonly understood definition of vulnerability that can serve as an entry point for enabling a potential transition to social safety nets. In 2016 and then later in 2019, MPCA implementing partners collectively reviewed their vulnerability assessment and targeting models.<sup>7</sup> As a part of the review, it was recognized that by aligning humanitarian vulnerability assessments for interventions like MPCA with poverty assessments of the government, formal mechanisms could be created for inclusion of vulnerable, displaced households into state led support systems, which of and by themselves can contribute to local integration.

### **Text Box 1: Humanitarian-Social Safety Net Linkages in Iraq**

Recognizing the lack of a coherent understanding of vulnerability in the context of MPCA as well as the need for a humanitarian-development nexus, humanitarian, development and government actors in Iraq got together for a workshop in April 2018 to discuss avenues for collaboration, and ways through which possible mechanisms could be set for identification of poor households among displacement affected communities. MPCA was seen as an important entry point for development actors such as the Bank. By working together on such mechanisms, the humanitarian community could create potential exit pathways in linking to the long-term poverty alleviation goals of the government, supported by development partners. Indeed, the objective of MPCA provided by humanitarian actors to meet basic needs for vulnerable displacement affected households could be situated squarely in poverty reduction strategies for a move towards durable solutions (Blay & Crozet, 2017).

Following the workshop, MPCA actors represented in the Cash Working Group constituted a Technical Task Force in August 2018. The task force embarked upon revising MPCA vulnerability assessment and targeting models, a key objective of the exercise being to methodologically align it as closely as possible with poverty assessments conducted by the World Bank for improving the design of government social targeting schemes. The revised humanitarian MPCA assessment model, called SEVAT, developed by the task force redefined 'vulnerability' in terms of consumption, bringing the notion closer to the concept of poverty used in social protection schemes. Methodologically, it applied a Proxy Means Test approach, the same methodology that the World Bank has been working on with government actors for improving poverty targeting in Iraq (Alkhoja, et al., 2016). With the humanitarian definition of vulnerability revised in terms of household consumption, and an assessment method that could estimate household poverty in humanitarian contexts, the new model has laid the groundwork for understanding if and how much of the humanitarian case load can be considered eligible for government-led social safety nets.

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<sup>7</sup> See CCI, 2016 and Khan, et al., 2019

## Section 2: Using SEVAT for Facilitating Humanitarian-Development Transitions

Since 2019, MCPA actors represented in the Cash Working Group of Iraq have been using the Socio Economic Vulnerability Assessment Tool (SEVAT) for identifying vulnerable households that can be provided assistance. The SEVAT looks at multidimensional vulnerability and can therefore facilitate cross-sectoral referrals.<sup>8</sup> Its application for targeting MCPA along with its potential for facilitating referrals is in line with one of the key recommendations of the Grand Bargain, that cash assistance as a single multisector transfer should be linked with local and national protection systems (Inter Agency Standing Committee, 2016). Given its proximity with poverty assessments of the World Bank, the SEVAT provides an opportunity for designing long-term and context specific interventions aimed at durable solutions for the most vulnerable, including those affected by displacement and currently being assisted by humanitarian actors.

This section discusses how the application of the SEVAT can not only help identify people in need of specific humanitarian assistance but can also lead to a humanitarian-development nexus through referral pathways. Once identified as vulnerable according to the SEVAT, households can be provided immediate MCPA to meet basic needs, but also be referred to parallel streams of assistance that either provide complementary support or a social safety net. The SEVAT was created using the Multi Cluster Needs Assessment (MCNA) as its primary data source.<sup>9</sup> Identification of households in need of assistance is based on application of SEVAT on this data, leaving out in camp IDPs. The SEVAT yields predicted consumption of each household, based on which it could fall in a severity of vulnerability category. Cross sectoral referrals rely on these categories, shown in Table 1 and developed following IASC 2020 Humanitarian Programme Cycle (HPC) guidelines. Based on the most recent estimates of poverty in Iraq, the threshold for vulnerability for humanitarian MCPA in Iraq is IQD 110,000 per capita per month.

Table 1: Severity of vulnerability

Household predicted consumption (IQD, per capita per month)	Severity category
92,000 – 110,000	Severe
72,000 – 92,000	Extreme
72,000 – 40,000	Catastrophic
Less than 40,000	Catastrophic in protracted vulnerability

The SEVAT represents an efficient operationalization of the IASC guidelines to assess needs from a cross-sectoral perspective. The distribution of households across a spectrum of socio-economic vulnerability as indicated in Table 1 also reflects the design of the Humanitarian Programme Cycle’s four Humanitarian Consequences (HC), where those at the bottom (catastrophically vulnerable) are exposed to well-being consequences, those in the middle to living standards consequences and those at the top to resilience and recovery.<sup>10</sup> Protection is an overarching concern across all vulnerability categories. Such reflection of socio-economic vulnerability allows to program the MCPA response within the humanitarian consequences framework with clear linkages between severity group and cross-sectoral referrals.

<sup>8</sup> For more details on the development of SEVAT, see Khan, et al., 2019.

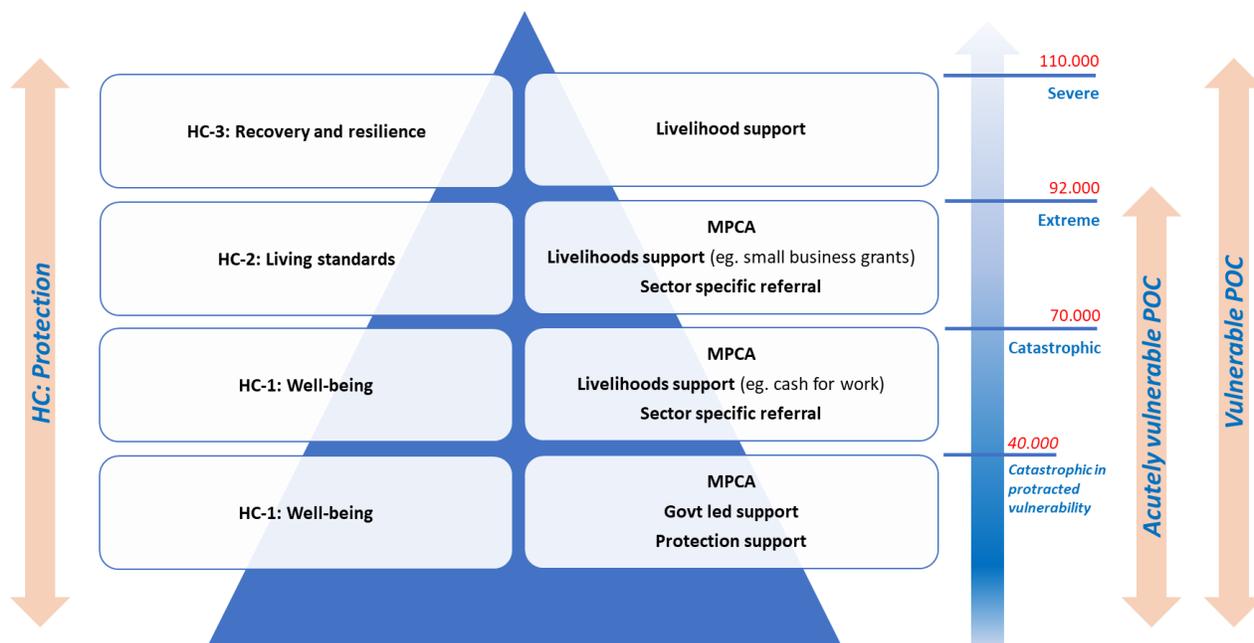
<sup>9</sup> The MCNA is used for response strategy and planning by all the humanitarian clusters. For the latest MCNA referred here, see REACH, 2019.

<sup>10</sup> For more on this framework, see UN OCHA, 2019.

Through an array of multi-sectoral indicators, the SEVAT can facilitate activation of referral pathways to protection, livelihood and SNFIs actors and could be potentially reviewed to include other sectors.<sup>11</sup>

In Iraq, HPC guidelines for 2020 recommend a programming focus on acutely vulnerable. This means that the vulnerability categories identified for MPCA would be restricted to the first two in the table above i.e. catastrophic and extreme. Figure 1 shows humanitarian consequences, vulnerability categories, and the kind of referral pathways that can be activated for those falling in these categories.

Figure 1: Complementing referrals



Source: Authors

Note that all those categorized as acutely vulnerable would be eligible for MPCA. However, from a longer-term perspective, referrals could be activated for those falling in each category. For example, in addition to MPCA, multiple referral streams could be activated for those falling in the catastrophic category. For those with a predicted consumption less than IQD 40,000 per capita per month, referrals could be for government administered social safety net, one of which is the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs' cash transfer programme for poor households (Text Box 1) as well as for protection support, provided by partners in the protection cluster. MCNA data indicates that 95% of those falling in this catastrophic category reported relying on at least one negative coping strategy during the previous 30 days. People falling within this category are likely to remain vulnerable in the medium to long term and therefore require tailored humanitarian assistance from protection partners and structured efforts to be included in existing social protection schemes to ensure sustainability of assistance in the long-term.

<sup>11</sup> Indicators for MPCA recommended by the USAID Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance are reflected in the SEVAT; see USAID/OFDA, 2019. For SEVAT indicators, see Khan, et al., 2019.

In 2019, the SEVAT was adopted by the Shelter Cluster to prioritize households for its sector specific interventions. The adoption of SEVAT has allowed Shelter partners to focus their interventions at those most in need according to a commonly understood definition of vulnerability.

Similarly, those falling in the catastrophic category and with a predicted consumption between IQD 72,000 and 40,000 per capita per month could be referred to protection support as well. Nearly all the households identified in this consumption bracket are likely to have protection concerns; 16% could also be referred to emergency livelihoods support, based on preliminary MCNA analysis. In the extremely vulnerable category, 14% of households could be considered for livelihoods support, as can 10% of households falling in the severe vulnerability category.<sup>12</sup> Note that the average employment rate for vulnerable households is 18%, compared with 33% for those considered to be not vulnerable, and therefore the percentage of households that might require livelihoods support among the former could be higher.<sup>13</sup>

In creating such linkages with social safety nets, the SEVAT and joint assessment methodologies based on it give an operational form to recommendations to enable durable solutions through joint data gathering exercises that look at poverty among displaced communities (Blay & Crozet, 2017).<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Percentages for emergency livelihoods referrals indicate households where the head did not have a regular source of primary income.

<sup>13</sup> This implies that vulnerable households are larger and members other than the income earning individual could be referred for livelihoods services to support the household.

<sup>14</sup> A pilot of joint humanitarian actors' MPCA vulnerability assessments and the World Bank's poverty assessments has been planned in the year 2020.

## Section 3: Conclusion and Way Forward

MPCA remains an important component of humanitarian response in Iraq, and its significance is likely to increase given the nature of protracted crisis in the country. At the same time, it is recognized that humanitarian response alone will not be enough to sustainably meet the needs of the most vulnerable people on a long-term basis. It is therefore important to find ways to create linkages between humanitarian and development interventions, without a sudden discontinuation of the former. As the high-level panel on improving humanitarian cash transfers recommends, cash transfers should be leveraged to create linkages between humanitarian assistance and longer-term development and social protection systems (ODI, 2015).

At the same time, the evidence on cash transfers as a humanitarian tool not only suggests its effectiveness and feasibility, but also its impact on poverty reduction (ODI, 2015). The UNDG Guidance Note on Durable Solutions for Displaced Persons also notes that poverty reduction strategies should include the needs of displaced people and the communities that host them. Extreme poverty and hunger are among the durable solutions indicators that should be taken action on in the context of displaced populations (UNDG Programme Group, 2004).

A common understanding of vulnerability amongst humanitarian and development actors is crucial to operationalizing long-term solutions for the most vulnerable among displacement affected populations in the country. MPCA in Iraq and the SEVAT used for determining eligibility for it aim to provide that common understanding and create linkages through which a humanitarian case load can be transitioned into development programmes, including reduction of poverty and hunger. These linkages will be extremely important for making displaced populations and their needs recognizable in broader debates in both humanitarian response as well as social policy and planning. However, it is also important to recognize that the operationalization of such linkages would depend on the existence of a cross-sectoral data management system. The multiplicity of humanitarian sectors makes it difficult to identify a consolidated humanitarian case load that can be referred for a government-led social safety net. A cross-sectoral data management system helps overcome this by bringing together the case-loads being separately assisted by different clusters.

The reason why now is good opportunity to create these linkages is because effective targeting has become one of the central tenets of poverty reduction strategies of both the federal as well as the Kurdistan government.<sup>15</sup> Embedding the humanitarian response (particularly for displacement affected populations) within institutional arrangements for social protection is the best way to capitalize on this opportunity. In Iraq, this is currently being explored through potential joint vulnerability assessments between humanitarian actors and the World Bank: where the latter can contribute in improving targeting methodologies and analyses, the former can contribute by making its field resources available for assessments of displaced communities. Such joint assessments can serve as an important operational example of working collectively for the systematic integration of vulnerable displaced populations into social safety nets in contexts like Iraq, which continue to be marked by waves of unrest and displacement.

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<sup>15</sup> See High Committee for Poverty Reduction Strategy, 2018 and Kurdistan Regional Government, 2016.

Other opportunities exist too. For example, strategic institutional engagement has already made headway with the establishment of the Joint Data Centre set up between the World Bank Group and UNHCR. The data centre can help provide exactly the kind of data harmonization that has been recommended for enabling a humanitarian-development nexus. The Iraq operation could be mainstreamed into the work of the Joint Data Centre for technical analyses on transitions.

Similarly, Multi-Year Multi-Partner strategies can be an effective template to strategize long term outcomes for the country's displaced populations (UNHCR, 2019). A MYMP strategy can be conceived for operations like Iraq undergoing situations of protracted crises in a fragile state context. Support can also be drawn from the Poverty Alleviation Coalition, of which several MPCA implementing partners in Iraq are already members.

Displacement affected people in Iraq remain highly vulnerable even as the Iraq humanitarian response graduates into a post-conflict, post-emergency phase. It is therefore important that a readjustment of the humanitarian response recognizes these needs and is matched by accompanying efforts to enable long-term solutions for the most vulnerable population groups. Cash transfers such as MPCA provide an effective entry point for enabling partnerships among government, humanitarian and development partners for collective action to reduce risk, vulnerabilities and needs of the most vulnerable people, including through a responsible and timely transition to a government-led social safety net. Given the protracted nature of the crisis in Iraq, the need for systemizing such efforts has become both more significant and urgent.

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