



GP2.0 Webinar

Returns and durable solutions – a comparative perspective on operational approaches from Iraq and Sudan

30 May 2022 – [Recording available here](#)

Summary

This webinar compared operational approaches adopted in Iraq and Sudan to support Internally Displaced Persons who have voluntarily chosen to return to their areas of origin. This webinar was organized in partnership with the teams of IOM, CCCM Cluster and Returns Sub-Working Group in Iraq, and with UNHCR and the Durable Solutions Technical Working Group in Sudan. 126 practitioners from permanent missions to the UN, national authorities, local and international NGOs, UN, and academia logged into this event from 28 countries.

Key messages:

1. Supporting voluntary returns is a collective effort that requires multi-sectoral, and multi-tiered approaches on the part of the Government, as well as broad coalitions of local and international partners. These broad partnerships have been strategic for data collection, support to livelihoods, protection and community engagement.
2. The engagement with Government is key for the long-term success of interventions supporting returns. At national level, speakers mentioned that policy frameworks and engagement are key to unlock sustainable durable solutions processes. The role of national authorities is particularly significant for the resolution of political issues and conflict dynamics that prevent returns and voluntary movements in general.
3. The leadership of local authorities and local community leaders is equally indispensable for the operational implementation of returns, and the continuation of durable solutions processes at local level, particularly when dialogues, and policy making at national level are disrupted. In Sudan and Iraq alike local authorities have been particularly helpful in supporting the provision of security, land and services in the areas of return.
4. Large investments in data collection and analysis in both contexts have laid the foundations for inclusive processes, making it possible for displacement affected communities to participate later on in planning services and priorities to make returns sustainable. In the case of Iraq, data on the barriers to return informed the methodology of the Toolkit on Facilitated Voluntary Return.
5. Large-scale sampling of populations affected by displacement and thorough case management have allowed partners supporting returns to prevent situations in which local elites benefit from external support intended for vulnerable populations. This level of granular information has also been helpful to better understand the psychological impact of displacement, and broader dimensions of human security.

Opening remarks by Mr. Ali Jahankeer, Director General of Branches in the Ministry of Migration and Displacement in Iraq.

The displacement crisis that started in 2014 with the offensive against ISIS resulted in the creation of 175 camps hosting 280,000 internally displaced households. Conflict and displacement had an impact on state institutions, and it was thanks to broad partnerships with NGOs and international actors that an initial response could be set in place. From 2016 the Government prioritized returns and coordinated the work of various actors on this

process. Partners assessed conflict affected areas, and the needs for reconstruction and stabilisation. “Go and see” visits enabled displaced families to participate in the planning of their return, and they could monitor progress on the reconstruction of their homes and services in their communities. The removal of barriers to returns was not easy. It involved many actors and required the support of local leaders. These issues cannot be resolved by one entity only. Government branches had to coordinate in order to ensure the provision of security at local level. Collaboration and support from international community, particularly regarding information on the areas of return, helped families making a voluntary decision. The Iraqi experience was not perfect, but many elements were successful and could be replicated in contexts experiencing similar situation.

Presentation on the Iraq Facilitated Voluntary Return Volume of the Durable Solutions Toolkit – Ms. Valentina Bacchin, IOM and Ms. Kate Holland UNHCR.

Since the beginning of the offensive against ISIS in 2014, which displaced 6 million people, 1.2 million Iraqis remain in IDP camps. Spontaneous returns begun towards areas that had stabilised but, in 2018 and 2019, there was increased pressure to close camps, resulting in forced returns. Partners started reflection on how to ensure that returns could be safe, dignified, and voluntary and a durable solutions network was established to begin coordination on joined-up initiatives. The Facilitated Voluntary Return Programme begun in 2019, with pilots that were extended to two camps in June 2020. In March 2021 additional camps enrolled in the Programme and the Durable Solutions Technical Working Group, began documenting approaches and methodologies used during the implementation.

Three main types of barriers were documented and related to housing, infrastructure and services, communal and reconciliation issues as well as related to conflict. A thorough case management methodology was developed to implement protection safeguards and strengthen cooperation between humanitarian actors operating in camps, and recovery partners working in the areas of return. This information created evidence to inform the toolkit, which contains guidance for partners to: (i) help families gather the information they need to make an informed choice, (ii) assess the situation in camps as well as in area of returns, (iii) facilitate movements to return area and positive reception by local communities, and (iv) plan longer term support for community reintegration. The steps described above are people centered, and to the extent possible, community driven.

Lessons incorporated in the toolkit, and drawn from the implementation of the programme, indicate that cooperation, and coordination with local authorities and partners is essential for the success of these initiatives. The facilitation of voluntary returns has also been a powerful advocacy tool to begin a discussion with communities and authorities on local integration and resettlement. Other aspects of the programme require further thinking. For example, understanding when it is the right time to begin the facilitation of returns, how to ensure that community engagement remains effective, and how to enhance coordination between humanitarian and recovery actors, also with regard to unlocking financing for sustainable returns. The experience was positive overall, and partners are working to adapt the methodology to local integration as well as resettlement.

Informing and planning sustainable returns in Darfur, Sudan: Participatory action plans and durable solutions interventions – Khadra Elmi, UNHCR (on behalf of the Sudan DS Working Group)

23% of the 2.5 million Internally Displaced Persons in Darfur returned to their areas of origin. These movements occurred in a socio-political context that in 2019-2020 established momentum for durable solutions through the Constitutional Declaration and the Juba Peace Agreement. At local level, these frameworks recognise the role of local authorities to lead and deliver durable solutions. In order to organically support durable solutions, a large-scale assessment funded by the Peace-Building Fund (PBF) and supported by UNHCR, JIPS and the Durable Solutions Working Group has gathered evidence needed for action and helped establish avenues for community engagement.

The assessment gathered information on 11,000 households in eight districts. With reference to returns it evidenced that returnees had specific challenges accessing water and sanitation, and education, and they had

greater exposure to food insecurity and robberies when compared to the non-displaced populations. Findings were validated with communities and the data was used by the communities to generate Locality Action Plans, jointly with the Native Administrations and local leaders. The Locality Action Plans are being finalised and costed. The Durable Solutions Working Group in Sudan is looking at them to inform the formulation of UN joint programmes and to advocate to fund them.

Closing Remarks – Samuel Cheung

Removing the obstacles necessary to ensure that returns can be a foundation for durable solutions, and changing the circumstances of displacement, are not seamless and perfect processes. Establishing broad partnerships to ensure that durable solutions can be delivered is essential. Multistakeholder engagement and partnerships at local level are a powerful incubator of durable solutions, particularly when complex national-level processes are being discussed and negotiated. Local dialogues in Iraq were essential to ensure that returns remain safe, dignified, and voluntary. In Sudan community-centred and driven locality plan enabled durable solutions processes that started at national level in 2019 and 2020 to continue.

The experiences in Iraq and Sudan show that durable solutions deal with human development. With the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement as a foundation, the implementation of the programmes in Sudan and Iraq could fulfill the provisions on responsibility by National Authorities but also on the protection of rights, needs and legitimate interests for IDPs. To understand the progress of durable solutions, particularly in the post return phase, aspects of political economy, funding, durability, and scalability were particularly important.

Thirdly, the examples from Iraq and Sudan touched on the importance of states in the protection of IDPs and whole-of-government approaches, not only intended as multi-sectoral, but also as inclusive of local authorities. These elements that have been prominent in the report by the UN SG High Level Panel on Internal Displacement and in the Action Agenda. For this reason, practices emerging from Sudan and Iraq can greatly benefit from the support and guidance from Special Advisor on Durable Solutions.

Recommendations and way forward:

- Continue to look at ways to reduce siloes between humanitarian and recovery approaches and funding to displacement;
- Iraq and Sudan Durable Solutions Working Groups (and DSRS/RC/HC) to engage with the Special Advisor on Solutions on sustaining successful practices and scaling them up;
- GP2.0 network to engage with the teams and authorities in Iraq and Sudan to share learning and knowledge that can be used in other contexts affected by internal displacement.