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Rapid Response Humanitarian Assistance to IDPs in North and Central Iraq

Second Quarterly Report

Period covered: October 1 - December 31, 2014



**November distribution of hygiene kits at Algofran Mosque in Hay Wahed Huzairan, Kirkuk
Photo by Foundation of United for Relief and Sustainable Development**

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Submitted by Mercy Corps in partnership with local partners:
Foundation of United for Relief and Sustainable Development (FUAD), Media Organization for
Human Rights (MEDIA) and Humanitarian Relief Organization of Khanaqin (HRO)

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I. Introduction

In mid-August Mercy Corps began a four-month intervention to provide direct assistance to an estimated 3,000 IDP families (18,000 individuals) in north and central Iraq. The *Rapid Response Humanitarian Assistance to IDPs in North and Central Iraq* program is an expansion of Mercy Corps' existing work responding to the displacement crisis, and originally targeted four governorates where needs are most acute, leveraging the geographical reach of six local partners in Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninewa and Salah al-Din. Given security constraints in these governorates, the continued development of Mercy Corps' overall response strategy, and to maximize impact under this award, Mercy Corps focused on assistance to 3,200 households in Diyala and Kirkuk in partnership with three local civil society organizations.

In November and early December, **Mercy Corps and local partners distributed non-food items (NFIs) to 2,000 vulnerable displaced households (11,205 individuals) and cash assistance to an additional 1,200 (6,302 individuals).** Partners directly managed the NFI distributions, specifically targeting "new arrival" families that fled without basic household supplies, or those who had not previously received assistance. Three different kinds of NFI packages were distributed: kitchen sets, household kits, and hygiene kits. Each beneficiary family received a hygiene kit and either a kitchen set or a household kit. Partners assisted in the identification of 1,200 of the most vulnerable displaced families best supported through a series of cash transfers arranged through the money transfer agent system. Partners also provided Mercy Corps with lists of beneficiaries best-served through a 210 USD cash transfer.

To maximize impact and provide sustained assistance, Mercy Corps has leveraged OFDA's support as part of a broader cash-focused portfolio. Pooled resources are enabling Mercy Corps to reach 4,700 families with four cash disbursements through the harsh winter months. Additional funds are provided by DFID, ECHO and UNHCR.

II. Program Overview

The OFDA-funded program aims to improve access to essential non-food items or cash assistance for 3,000 conflict-affected families.

- **Objective: 3,000 conflict-affected families in north and central Iraq have improved access to essential non-food items.**

Performance Summary

Sector: Logistics Support and Relief Commodities	Sector Objective: 3,000 conflict-affected families in north and central Iraq have improved access to essential non-food items.				
Beneficiaries Targeted	18,000 IDPs: 17,750		Budget	\$1,000,000	
Beneficiaries Reached	IDPs: 16,801	97.3%	Amount Spent	\$ 762,184	76%
Geographic Area (s)	Diyala and Kirkuk governorates, Iraq				
Sub- Sector: Non-food items					
OFDA Indicator	Baseline	Target	Progress (Quarter)	Progress (Cumulative)	Means of verification
Total # of household kits distributed	-	1,000	1,000	1,000	Distribution list
Total # of kitchen kits distributed	-	1,000	1,000	1,000	Distribution list

Total # of hygiene kits distributed	-	2,000	2,000	2,000	Distribution list
Total USD cost of household kits distributed	-	148,048	148,048	148,048	Distribution list
Total USD cost of kitchen kits distributed	-	38,048	38,048	38,048	Distribution list
Total USD cost of hygiene kits distributed	-	87,900	87,900	87,900	Distribution list
Total # of men receiving household kits ¹	-	-	2,899	2,899	Distribution list
Total # of women receiving household kits	-	-	2,846	2,846	Distribution list
Total # of men receiving kitchen kits	-	-	2,701	2,701	Distribution list
Total # of women receiving kitchen kits	-	-	2,759	2,759	Distribution list
Total # of men receiving hygiene kits	-	-	5,600	5,600	Distribution list
Total # of women receiving hygiene kits	-	-	5,605	5,605	Distribution list
Mercy Corps Indicators					
# of displaced or conflict-affected families receive one-off hygiene kit	-	-	2,000	2,000	Distribution list
# of displaced or conflict-affected families receive new arrival household kits	-	-	1,000	1,000	Distribution list
# of displaced or conflict-affected families receive kitchen sets	-	-	1,000	1,000	Distribution list
# of displaced or conflict-affected families receive cash transfers	-	-	1,200	1,200	Distribution list

III. Accomplishments

Recruitment

In November, Mercy Corps recruited nine field assistants in Kirkuk and six in Diyala as shared staff on OFDA and ECHO-funded cash programs. Field assistants attended all cash distributions and conducted post-distribution monitoring both for cash and NFI distributions.

In December, Mercy Corps hired a project officer based in Khanaqin to support the team in Diyala. A Sulaymaniyah-based data officer was also recruited to work a proportion of time on data management.

Partnership

In November, Mercy Corps signed contracts and held one-day pre-distribution meetings to cover tools and requested processes with Foundation of United for Relief and Sustainable Development (FUAD), and Media Organization for Human Rights (MEDIA) in Kirkuk, and Humanitarian Relief Organization of

¹ Note that the team is awaiting disaggregation details for 230 families who received household and hygiene kits; Mercy Corps has calculated beneficiary totals based on a combination of actuals and estimated demographic breakdown of these 230 families.

Khanaqin (HRO) in Diyala for beneficiary identification and NFI distributions. In advance of beginning implementation, partners were also invited to a one-day training with Mercy Corps Regional Economic Opportunities Adviser regarding market assessment methodology and monitoring techniques. Partners also received training to improve management of their warehouses (covering goods received notes, waybills, and stock records). Once activities were completed, Mercy Corps met all local partners to discuss challenges and lessons learned in order to lay the groundwork for improved collaboration in the next stage of crisis response efforts.

NFI distribution

Local partners identified beneficiaries in early November to receive NFIs. Distributions began on November 18 and were completed during the first week of December. Through FUAD and MEDIA, Mercy Corps distributed 700 household kits, 700 kitchen kits and 1,400 hygiene kits in Kirkuk Governorate. In Diyala Governorate, 300 household kits, 300 kitchen kits and 600 hygiene kits were distributed through HRO.

During distributions, local partners collected key information from beneficiaries (family size, vulnerability criteria, date of arrival, governorate of origin) and compiled them into a database that they provided to Mercy Corps within a week of distribution. Mercy Corps is compiling all data on NFI and cash beneficiaries into a master database to have a better understanding of the vulnerability of conflict-affected people in each target governorate.

Mercy Corps' NFI assistance reached 337 households headed by women, 541 families including persons with severe medical condition or persons living with disabilities and 340 families with pregnant or lactating women (several criteria may apply to a single family). A significant proportion of families (51%) did not have access to regular income due to the lack of job opportunities in new hosting communities. The lack of job opportunities (and therefore income) presents a major challenge, as 1,618 beneficiary households (81%) indicated they are paying rent for their accommodations.

Post-distribution monitoring was carried out for 10% of beneficiaries in each location. The majority (95.2%) were satisfied with kit contents. When asked about priority needs not met through the kits, respondents indicated needs for the following: a heater (45 respondents); food (23 respondents); cash (20 respondents); and gas or oil (19 respondents). These items reflect the timing of distributions in early winter.

Cash transfers

Local partners led the identification of 1,200 beneficiaries for cash transfers. FUAD, MEDIA and HRO collected names of displaced families from the Governor's Office, mukhtar and community leaders based on Mercy Corps' established vulnerability criteria, for example: families with limited capacity to generate income, female-headed households, or those including people with disabilities. During the selection process, Mercy Corps and local partners jointly coordinated on communicating the program's main objectives and implementation strategy with key local stakeholders (such as the Ministry of Displacement and Migration (MoDM), the Governor's Office and the *Asaish* - National Security Agents). This coordination also enabled Mercy Corps' access to the government's lists of displaced persons. Local partners led a random verification of 20% of beneficiaries selected from stakeholder's lists prior to the first distribution. Mercy Corps staff performed random verification visits along with the partner in addition to leading a number of independent house visits to confirm beneficiary eligibility. Mercy Corps assessed the remainder of beneficiaries during distributions to ensure that 100% met targeting criteria.

The cash disbursements took place from November 20-29. Mercy Corps disbursed 210 USD for 100 beneficiaries in Daquq City, 600 in Kirkuk City (both in Kirkuk governorate) and 500 in Khanaqin

(Diyala governorate). Of the total 1,200 households reached, 1,153 were IDP families, and 47 were vulnerable host community families. This inclusion was intended to mitigate against tensions between displaced and local families within host communities. Mercy Corps disbursed funds to 351 female-headed households and 430 families included an individual with a disability or severe medical condition (several criteria may apply to a single family).

During the disbursements, Mercy Corps collected baseline data on 10% of recipients as an initial reference for post-monitoring distribution (PDM). The team completed two rounds of PDM in December. The first was held from December 8-15, 10 days after the first cash disbursement to maximize recipients' ability to recall what they'd spent their money on. A follow-up round was carried out from December 23-31 to complete high-quality data for the full 10%. In reviewing the data collected from the initial set of PDM responses, which were done on paper, the team found a number of incomplete surveys. Mercy Corps has now transitioned fully to the use of tablets for mobile data collection; tablets were used with the follow-up PDM and ensured complete responses were provided. Moving forward, the team will maintain a schedule of targeting PDMs carried out via tablet approximately 10 days following cash disbursements.

In total, Mercy Corps conducted post-distribution monitoring on 208 households (17.5% of transfer recipients). As a coping strategy, 50% of respondent households mentioned borrowing money to meet their needs, 30% have reduced their number of meals per day and 14% are buying on credit. Results from the initial analysis of PDM data indicate the following: around 80% of households used a portion of the transfer to buy food (the average amount spent on food was 120 USD); 50% used a portion toward paying rent; 30% used a portion to pay back debt; 20% used a portion to purchase NFIs; and 20% used a portion to buy clothing.

Market assessment

After the price baseline established by local partners in early September, Mercy Corps staff collected data on prices before and after the November disbursements in order to monitor for price fluctuation and assess continued availability of key items in Kirkuk and Diyala markets. No major changes were noted.

IV. Challenges and Key Points

Targeting and verification

As Mercy Corps originally anticipated, the lists of displaced people provided by key government offices (MoDM, the Governor's Office, and the Asaish), and the muktars contained outdated and incomplete information. Lists are not regularly maintained with updates and do not keep track of IDPs continued movements. The lists also did not consistently cover information such as family size, PDS number (Public Distribution System – PDS is a ration card issued by the central government), and date of arrival within the hosting governorate. Mercy Corps' strategy has been to refer to lists from multiple stakeholders in target governorates (both from MoDM and from muktars, for example). The challenge of sorting through each list and creating a master beneficiary list for the cash program inevitably resulted in a few cases of duplication and inconsistencies in vulnerability data. At each disbursement, Mercy Corps staff caught a handful of inclusion errors to be replaced with more vulnerable households for subsequent disbursements. Mercy Corps removed 99 beneficiaries between the first and the second transfer.

In light of the challenges for beneficiary targeting given the current government registration processes, Mercy Corps is evaluating options to ensure ongoing cash programming is implemented in an efficient manner that reaches those most in need. Mercy Corps will undertake direct targeting and registration of beneficiaries where possible. In addition, Mercy Corps is using a referral system with local and international NGOs to coordinate needed assistance. Mercy Corps will verify 100% of future beneficiaries prior to distribution.

Partner capacity

Whilst local partners enable a deeper reach into communities, the first cash disbursements exposed a number of capacity gaps. The main issues identified included: quality of work and lack of attention to detail that led to errors on beneficiary lists, including duplication of names, and incomplete collection of vulnerability criteria data. In addition, partners underestimated the amount of work involved and did not dedicate sufficient staff to Mercy Corps' programs, which led to delays. Since most targeted operational areas are only accessible to local partners and local staff with limited experience, more support and time were needed to ensure partners have needed capacity and adequate understanding of quality expectations and the scope of work. Upon realizing these gaps, Mercy Corps staff compensated with enhanced engagement to support partners' work more directly and make corrections to incomplete data. These considerations will be emphasized in planning for future projects.

Cash liquidity

There is a shortage of hard currency in the local market that has affected large transactions. Although the actual causes of this liquidity issue are not known, large inter- and intra-bank transfers have been a challenge. Mercy Corps' first cash disbursements were disrupted because money transfer agents were unable to withdraw adequate cash from the banks. In order to address this issue, Mercy Corps initiated high-level communications and coordination with the bank to provide sufficient time for preparing payments.

Money transfer agent record-keeping

Although the disbursement process was simple and organized with the support of Mercy Corps staff, money transfer agents did not have a systematic way of capturing adequate records of transactions. This caused discrepancies between the agent's number of transfers disbursed and Mercy Corps' tracking on the number received during this initial November disbursements. For example, in Kirkuk Mercy Corps disbursed cash to 600 beneficiaries, but 7 were not registered by the money transfer agents, and forgot to sign the distribution list. To remedy this for the second round of disbursements, Mercy Corps created a simple form for the agents to fill during each disbursement day in order to track total beneficiaries and amounts transferred. In addition, Mercy Corps began requesting an individual receipt for each beneficiary. Finally, after noting the issue with the initial round, Mercy Corps staff supporting at the transfer sites took pictures of beneficiaries' ID cards during the December transfers. With these measures in place, Mercy Corps did not face any discrepancies in the second round.

Security

Local governments and security forces have forbidden large gatherings due to the security situation across Iraq. This has had implications for Mercy Corps' cash disbursements and NFI distributions, particularly in Diyala, as approval must be obtained from security forces for each public activity. This increases the importance of planning to phase distributions and mitigate potential crowds, and Mercy Corps' team has initiated close coordination with local security agents to ensure approval is secured in advance of distributions in all operational areas.

V. Next Quarter

In the program's next quarter, Mercy Corps will pursue a cost modification to implement continued crisis response activities. Though the agreement is formally in effect through August 2015, the original program planned and approved by OFDA was for a four-month period, thus Mercy Corps has successfully carried out all proposed activities and is prepared for a further stage of response. This has been discussed with OFDA at field-level in Erbil and assessment is ongoing to inform the next phase of response.