Coordination in Transition:

How NGOs are Navigating and Adapting beyond the IASC

Lessons from Iraq & Indonesia

October 2025

ICVA
A GLOBAL NGO NETWORK
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HUMANITARIAN ACTION

About ICVA

ICVA is a global network of over 170 non-governmental organisations whose mission is to make humanitarian action more principled and effective by working collectively and independently to influence policy and practice.

Acknowledgements

This paper was authored by Kate Holland with assistance from ICVA, particularly from Jeremy Wellard, Asma Saleem, Eman Ismail, and Keya Saha-Chaudhury. The research team would like to thank all those who contributed their time and support, especially the participating NGO representatives. The paper was made possible with the support of DRC and USAID.

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Executive Summary

In 2025, several Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) country-level humanitarian coordination structures are planning to fully or partially transition from international leadership. Past research shows that hurried transitions can generate challenges to inclusive planning and in creating sustainable coordination structures.

This research set out to learn from past transitions of internationally led humanitarian coordination. Using two contrasting contexts – Iraq and Indonesia – it identifies lessons-learned and recommendations relevant to NGOs navigating current and future transition planning. The report is accompanied by four case studies.

Comparing two Transitions: Indonesia & Iraq

Indonesia experiences periodic large-scale disasters alongside multiple small-scale disasters every year.[1] Responsibility for disaster response has transitioned to strong national leadership – both by the government and by Indonesian Local and National NGOs (L/NNGOs). The activation of the IASC clusters in 2006 was followed by the Government of Indonesia establishing its own national cluster structure. More recently, the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) has evolved to a new platform co-chaired by national civil society.

A combination of strong government leadership and diminishing international funding forced international actors to shift away from direct implementation. Both UN agencies and INGOs have instead played an effective facilitation and support function to government and L/NNGOs – sustained over years. In parallel, many NNGOs have developed high technical capacities and response expertise, bolstered by robust domestic funding.

In Iraq, the IASC clusters were activated in 2014 for a conflict response and deactivated in 2022, with the intention of shifting from humanitarian response to recovery and development. Transition planning was done at individual cluster level, with no over-arching HCT strategy for coordination or response transition. Funding declined after the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) ceased and, while some donors continued support for remaining humanitarian needs, NGO programming has reduced substantially, with some INGOs exiting and L/NNGOs downscaling.

For those still responding two-and-half-years after deactivation, coordination has fragmented. While several sector groups continue (although in adapted form), these are not linked together or, mostly, to the durable solutions coordination structure which continues at reduced scale. The NGO forum dissolved in 2023.

The contrasting experiences of Indonesia and Iraq – while very different response contexts – demonstrate the huge value that structured coordination between NGOs brings.

Indonesia has a notably strong, and networked, civil society. Many national NGOs have strong technical and operational capacities and are now taking a leading role in humanitarian response and coordination.[2] Localisation *within* Indonesia is a topic of note: first-phase responders are often LNGOs and local CSOs; respondents discussed efforts to link these with experienced NNGOs and into NGO networks. Multiple formal NGO networks play coordination, fundraising support, advocacy, and technical support functions for their members. The transition of the HCT in late 2025 to the new Indonesia Humanitarian Coordination Platform, co-chaired by national civil society, was a significant step in L/NNGOs taking on leadership.

[1] Centre for Excellence in Disaster Management, June 2025; IFRC, *Jakarta IFRC Cluster Plan*, 2022
[2] Indonesia Localisation Lab and ID-HA/AP-KI, 2025, p.19

In contrast, the closure of the NGO forum in Iraq - the NGO Coordination Committee for Iraq (NCCI) - in 2023 was described by respondents as creating a 'big gap' in coordination. While smaller L/NNGO networks work on specific topics or sectors, its closure was a loss to collective NGO representation, coordination, and advocacy.

Cross-cutting insights

- The **benefits of international civil society suppor**t to L/NNGOs and national NGO networks were highlighted in both Indonesia and Iraq. These included: INGOs' roles shifting to bring added value in providing technical support and capacity transfer and, in Iraq, being able to engage on more sensitive topics; and NGO networks and NGO-led coordination groups benefiting from links with international networks and technical expertise.
- **Funding diversification** is a critical topic in both contexts as international funding has declined (in Iraq, quite sharply after IASC deactivation). In Indonesia, domestic funding is substantial, especially for faith-based organisations – most from public donations and *zakat* funds. In Iraq, domestic funding for NGOs is limited, and independent CSOs remain heavily reliant on international donors – creating sustainability challenges after transition. Respondents described larger NNGOs and INGOs being able to 'pivot' more easily to recovery and development (while downscaling and some INGOs exiting). Many smaller L/NNGOs have struggled to pivot and to access longer-term funding, which tends to be channelled in larger grants to larger organisations.
- The **starting point of civil society** prior to large-scale humanitarian response was also indicated as influential. In Indonesia, the environment for civil society organisations has been more enabling than in Iraq, and it has a diversity of large NNGOs, small local CSOs, and NGO networks. In Iraq, civil society space was very restricted until 2003 and, while many NGOs are now registered, navigating civil society space remains challenging. These factors influence how strong L/NNGOs have been able to be to deliver humanitarian assistance, to readjust when international funding has diminished, and to sustain a collective civil society voice at a national level and within humanitarian decision-making.

Summary Recommendations

1. Humanitarian funding after deactivation

Donors:

- Engage with NGOs and NGO forums to **communicate the funding trajectory** (e.g., any likely decrease after IASC deactivation and the HRP ending), to help plan responsible disengagement.
- Explore options for continuing to **fund civil society**, recognising its importance in long-term recovery.

NGOs/NGO forums:

- **Be realistic about the future funding trajectory**. Prepare for humanitarian funding reductions. Advocate for structures to be designed for a *future* need for coordination.
- Support L/NNGOs to **develop internal strategies to pivot** from humanitarian response toward recovery and development, and reliance on international donors.

2. Planning transitions & envisioning a new coordination structure

NGOs and NGO forums:

- **Seek to lead discourse.** Consider proposing NGOs' vision of coordination structures and priorities. Consider how to work collectively to fill coordination gaps to support NGOs.

- ☐ **"*Don't let your NGO forum collapse!*".** Prioritise maintaining platforms for NGO collaboration and representation, and plan for how these might need to change.
- ☐ **Consider the function of international civil society.** Identify any shift in the role INGOs may best play, and opportunities to connect with regional and global networks, and expertise.

UN agencies:

- ☐ **Plan for coordination after transition** to be sustainable, simple, and linked together.
- ☐ Set **adequate timeframes** for planning and implementing transition.
- ☐ As HCT members, develop **overall transition plans** – for operations and coordination.

3. Coordination roles after transition

NGOs & UN agencies:

- ☐ **If taking on coordination leadership or support, properly commit to this.** Ensure organisational buy-in, the right staff profiles, and facilitate low-level resourcing.

Donors:

- ☐ **Sustain funding for NGO coordination** (networks and forums, and coordination roles).

1. Introduction

Background

In 2025, several Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) coordination structures at country level are undertaking efforts to fully or partially transition coordination systems, and to deactivate all or some aspects of international humanitarian coordination leadership. This has been largely catalysed by funding shortfalls. In some countries, the transition is taking place at an accelerated rate, despite past research showing that hurried ones can create significant challenges for inclusive planning and in creating sustainable coordination structures. Past rushed transitions have particularly impacted NGO actors, especially national and local NGOs (L/NNGOs), who have struggled to have a meaningful voice in decision-making processes, despite continuing to work with communities whose needs have not reduced.

Aims

This piece of research set out to learn from what has happened after the transition of formal internationally led humanitarian coordination structures. Using two contrasting contexts – Iraq and Indonesia – it aims to identify lessons-learned, good practices or challenges, and recommendations that might be relevant to NGOs navigating current and future transition planning.

Content

The research was conducted through key informant interviews with participants from L/NNGOs, international NGOs (INGOs), and UN agencies in Iraq and Indonesia, and a desk review of available relevant documents.

This report looks at:

- ☐ Evolution of coordination structures in the two countries, including:
  - How structures have changed and who was involved in the decision-making.
  - How coordination structures now function (or not), who leads, influences, and participates in these, and the extent of meaningful engagement – particularly of L/NNGOs.
- ☐ Role of NGOs and civil society, and how dynamics have changed since transition:
  - Importance of NGO networks.
  - Role of international civil society support.
  - Importance of funding diversification.
  - Starting point of civil society prior to participating in the humanitarian response.
- ☐ Impact on humanitarian and protection response, and the implications of transition on:
  - Evolution in how humanitarian needs are understood (or not).
  - Decline in funding after IASC deactivations.
  - Challenges in retaining focus on specific protection issues.
- ☐ Recommendations are drawn from both the research findings, and directly from participants.

A note on terminology: 'National NGO' (NNGO) is used here to describe larger organisations with presence in multiple locations in a country, usually with capital-level offices. 'Local NGO' (LNGO) is used for smaller organisations, often operating only in one area. When both are referred to, 'L/NNGO'

is used. 'Civil society organisation' is used to include groups who are not registered NGOs, such as those at a very local level.

2. Methodology

This research was conducted using qualitative methods: a literature review and key informant interviews.

Key Informant Interviews

Key informant interviews were conducted in July and August 2024 with participants in Iraq and Indonesia, as well as some regional contributors. Key informants were identified through a snowball approach, selected based on their relevant expertise and experience – either senior management, or staff members directly involved in coordination. Interviews were semi-structured, shaped as conversations. They were held mostly individually, and a few with two participants. All interviews were conducted remotely and in English; one used translation kindly provided by the interviewee's organisation.

A total of 34 participants were interviewed, half of whom were women. Of these, 11 were representatives from L/NNGOs, 8 from NGO networks, 5 from INGOs, 8 from UN agencies, and 1 from a regional body.

Literature review

In addition, a review was conducted of available relevant literature. This included published documents accessible online, and documents shared by interviewees and by other in-country, regional, and global contacts who were not interviewed.

The documents reviewed included, non-exhaustively: published and internal research and evaluation reports from NGOs, UN agencies, and research institutes; coordination group Terms of Reference, manifestos, and membership lists; organisational and humanitarian response plans; and minutes of meetings.

Limitations

The following are the limitations of the research findings:

- Limited voices: This work was conducted in English by a consultant from the Global North. While efforts were made to carefully select key informants to maximise different perspectives, this will likely influence the conclusions reached and may limit the voices that are reflected in the research. All L/NNGO interviewees work with large organisations operating at a national level. Due to time and language constraints, no interviews were conducted with local CSOs. This may mean that not all viewpoints were heard and included. Mitigation measures for this included starting with NGO network recommendations in each country to identify and prioritise key informants.
- Generalisability of findings: Two focus countries were selected, with a limited number of participants per country. Effort was made to identify which factors were unique to a specific context, and which could be generalised to be relevant to other settings.
- Response bias: Some response bias may have been experienced and may affect information collected. To help mitigate this, the key informant interviews were framed as conversational and informal, to encourage open sharing of experiences.
- Availability of key informants: While the interview phase was spread over several weeks, some recommended key informants were unavailable to participate.

3. Evolution of coordination in Indonesia

Context

Disasters

Indonesia has over 17,000 islands, about 7,000 of which are inhabited[3] by a population of 284 million people.[4] It faces among the highest disaster risks in the world, with natural hazards including volcanoes, earthquakes, and tsunamis. The frequency and intensity of other hazards including floods, droughts, landslides, and forest fires are being exacerbated by the climate crisis and La Niña/El Niño events. Indonesia has experienced periodic large-scale disasters, and multiple small-scale disasters occur every year.[5] Response – by state authorities, Indonesian civil society, and, decreasingly, international actors – takes place at local, regional, or national level depending on the scale of the disaster and its impact on communities.

Refugee hosting and 'social conflict'

While Indonesia's natural disaster response is the focus for this paper, it has two other smaller-scale ongoing humanitarian responses, coordinated separately: Indonesia hosts several thousand refugees. Of over 12,000 registered with UNHCR, nearly half are from Afghanistan, and a quarter are Rohingya refugees from Myanmar.[6] UNHCR, IOM, and L/NNGOs provide response. Additionally, armed conflict has been ongoing for years in West Papua, between Papuan separatist armed groups and Indonesian security forces. Violence escalated in 2018, and by mid-2025 just under 100,000 people were estimated to be displaced.[7] In a sensitive context, church networks are the main response actors, with some L/NNGOs also providing support.

Evolution from IASC clusters to national leadership

Initial IASC cluster activation and government policies

The 2004 response to the Indian Ocean tsunami – which hit Aceh in Indonesia – was a catalyst for the Indonesian government and civil society to strengthen disaster management.[8] At global level, shortcomings of the international humanitarian response were a key reason for the creation of the IASC cluster system.[9]

In the immediate years following the tsunami, international humanitarian actors took a main role in leading coordination and response. In 2006, the IASC clusters were activated in Indonesia – for the second time ever globally – to support the response to the Yogyakarta earthquake. An HCT was set up at the same time, continuing until 2025. The IASC clusters were used for at least two subsequent responses in 2009.[10]

However, the overall trajectory has been toward a strong national leadership of disaster preparedness, response, and recovery. The role of civil society organisations in delivering assistance, and increasingly in supporting coordination, is notable*: "the Indonesian approach is more accurately described as 'nationally led' rather than 'state-led'"*, through a whole-of-society effort.[11]

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[3] Centre for Excellence in Disaster Management, *Indonesia Disaster Management Reference Handbook*, June 2025
[4] BPS-Statistics Indonesia, 'Mid-Year Population (Thousand People), 2025', 30 June 2025
[5] Centre for Excellence in Disaster Management, June 2025; IFRC, *Jakarta IFRC Cluster Plan*, 2022
[6] UNHCR, *Indonesia Fact Sheet*, March 2025
[7] ACAPS, 'Latest updates on country situation', 3 July 2025
[8] Bryant, John and Adeline Kamal, *Owning the response: nationally led disaster governance in Indonesia*, ODI, 2025
[9] Egeland, Jan, 'Towards a stronger humanitarian response system', *Forced Migration Review*, October 2005
[10] West Java earthquake and West Sumatra earthquake, 2009. Global Shelter Cluster, 'Indonesia – Overview' [online]
[11] Bryant and Kamal, 2025, p.9

The Government of Indonesia has established robust domestic disaster management structures, including:

- 2007 – Disaster Management Law enacted.
- 2008 – National disaster management organisation (BNPB) and local disaster management agencies (BPBDs) established.
- 2014 – National cluster structure for disaster management adopted.

In 2018, a major disaster occurred in Central Sulawesi: an earthquake, a tsunami, and liquefaction. The Government of Indonesia activated its national clusters for the first time. It also prohibited direct implementation by international organisations, requiring them to work with and through local actors.[12]

This assertion of government leadership over disaster response and restriction for how international actors can work in Indonesia has had significant implications in the role international actors have since played. Operationally, INGOs and UN agencies have shifted toward providing a supportive role for L/NNGO implementation, in parallel to an expansion of Indonesian civil society capacities in disaster response – in turn supported by domestic funding. UN agencies have continued to support government coordination leads.[13]

Leadership and membership of the clusters

Indonesia's national clusters are standing mechanisms for preparedness, response, and recovery – a wider remit than IASC clusters. Each has a designated lead ministry/government institution, with the BNPB having inter-cluster coordination responsibility. The government revised the national cluster regulation in 2024, reducing from eight clusters to six, and updating their taskings. The clusters and lead ministries are:

- Search and Rescue – led by the National Search and Rescue Agency.
- Displacement and Protection – Ministry of Social Affairs. Under it sit eight sub-clusters and three working groups, including for shelter, WASH, evacuation sites, child protection, and Gender Based Violence (GBV).
- Logistics – BNPB.
- Health – Ministry of Health. Under it sit five sub-clusters and three designated support teams.
- Education – Ministry of Education and Culture.
- Recovery – Ministry of Home Affairs.[14]

The clusters have core members with specific tasks and functions, including other government ministries and institutions. General membership is open for NGOs, NGO networks, UN agencies, and other actors.

Respondents described how significant time and effort has been required to support the establishment of the clusters. Much of this has been from UN agencies. Coordination support is provided by a designated international actor: mostly UN agencies, mirroring IASC Global Cluster leadership. However, NNGOs are increasingly taking on coordination support roles and becoming part of 'supporting teams'.

Nationally-led response delivery

Response to a disaster is delivered through a combination of government authorities and military response, complemented by civil society organisations delivering humanitarian assistance[15] For the

[12] Robillard et. al., *Perspectives on localization in the response to the 2018 Sulawesi earthquake in Indonesia*, 2020
[13] Robillard et. al., 2020
[14] Prawisuda, Erry, BNPB, 'Disaster Management Clusters: Decree of Head of BNPB No. 308 Year 2024'
[15] Key informants; Bryant and Kamal, 2025; Indonesia Innovation Lab and ID-HA/AP-KI, 2025

government, the scale of the disaster dictates who leads the response (national, provincial, or district-level), and – correspondingly – where resources are raised from. The military's response roles include search and rescue, cleaning debris, emergency shelter provision, and transportation and logistics.[16] Civil society response – and whether national as well as local NGOs respond – is also largely dictated by the scale of the disaster.

Many large NNGOs have strong capacities and humanitarian expertise. Depending on the disaster, these NGOs may deploy national teams, or work through local offices or volunteer networks. Multiple NGO networks support their members' response (see 'Importance of NGO networks). A domestic funding base has supported NNGOs' growth as independent response actors (see 'Funding diversification').

However, first responders are often local civil society organisations. In a small disaster, NNGOs may not deploy, meaning civil society contribution to the response is also localised. These local organisations are less likely to have humanitarian experience, often working in development.

Localisation *within* Indonesia has been a feature in recent years – including during the 2018 Central Sulawesi earthquake response, where NNGOs formed implementing partnerships with LNGOs better able to access affected communities[17]. Some NNGOs now work on transfer of knowledge and capacity, and in connecting LNGOs into national-level networks.

Coordination of response

National and sub-national leadership

The scale of a disaster determines which level of government takes leadership of the response – whether national, provincial, or district authorities. If a national-level response is required, the clusters take a fully active role – the most recent being in 2018, for the Central Sulawesi earthquake response.

However, there is **no standardised system for coordination at sub-national level**, and the cluster structure is not fully integrated into provincial or district-led response.[18] While clusters do support sub-national sectoral coordination, this is not always consistent, and for small disasters sectoral coordination is usually not used.[19]

The **quality of coordination** varies, particularly at sub-national level.[20] Respondents describe this as dependent on the local capacities and experience in disaster management. The effectiveness of the clusters also varies. Respondents attributed this to how active the lead ministry has been, their enthusiasm for leading disaster coordination, and their ministry portfolio and resourcing giving space for coordination.[21]

> *"Strengthening institutional capacities at a local level… [is a] persistent challenge and a key point of contention within the national response community."*[22]

An **increasing diversity of response actors** – the private sector and military, as well as civil society – further complicates coordination.[23] Disaster response is being increasingly led by the military in Indonesia. Navigating civil-military coordination in a disaster response is described as a challenge for NGOs in retaining humanitarian space.[24] But several respondents recounted a main challenge as often

[16] Key informant
[17] Robillard et. al., 2020
[18] Humanitarian Advisory Group and Pujiono Centre, *Local voices on humanitarian reform*, 2021
[19] Key informants
[20] Bryant and Kamal, 2025, p.20; Hodgkin, Dave, *Shelter Sub-Cluster Coordination Pidie Jaya Earthquake*, 2017
[21] Key informant
[22] Bryant and Kamal, 2025, p.20
[23] Indonesia Localisation Lab and ID-HA/AP-KI, *Humanitarian Coordination: A civil society-proposed co-leadership coordination models for a post-Humanitarian Country Team*, April 2025
[24] Indonesia Localisation Lab and ID-HA/AP-KI, 2025

being a lack of knowledge and experience of the military commanders of what a disaster response entails, what coordination structures are in place at national level, and how to run coordination and invite participation.

Challenges

Coordination challenges include:

- Coordination focused on information-sharing, not strategy and joint planning.
- Clusters acting in parallel, rather than integrated, to other government systems. Disconnect between national (cluster) structures, and how coordination is implemented at local level, especially for smaller disasters.
- Inconsistent knowledge and experience of coordination, of government civil authorities from local disaster management centres and of appointed military commanders.[25]

Several participants described seeing a need for cascading knowledge about disaster response, the role of humanitarian actors, resourcing, coordination structures, and coordination skills to local disaster management centres and to military commanders.

> *"It's not easy [to lead] if you've never been in a humanitarian response. How do you understand the priorities?"*
>
> **NNGO participant, Indonesia**

NNGO and international actor coordination roles

NNGO role in facilitating coordination

NGOs play a role in facilitating coordination between NGOs and supporting government-led structures.

Some of the larger NNGOs – with high technical capacities and response expertise – have either taken on or supported sectoral coordination at local level. One NNGO respondent, working for a large NNGO with high capacities and reach in the health sector, described how their organisation is often looked to by local authorities for both operational leadership and to support coordination for health response.

NNGO respondents also described providing a link, and advocacy, between sub-national coordination and clusters. Such as, if sub-national sectoral coordination is not going well, or sharing information and needs assessments results with the coordination leads then tasking follow-up by participating ministries.[26]

A more unusual feature of the Indonesia disaster coordination landscape is the role of some NGO networks in actively coordinating the response of their members. This includes conducting joint needs assessments, sharing and advocating with authorities on the findings, and coordinating with local authorities on behalf of members. See the accompanying case study *'Response Coordination by an NGO network'* for more detail.

International actors as enablers of government-led coordination

While the Government of Indonesia has increasingly experienced disaster management leadership, it has also benefited from *"effective and responsible international collaboration"*. Regionally, this has come from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and its coordination body for humanitarian assistance (AHA Centre). Internationally, this has come from UN agencies.[27] The AHA Centre has played a role in coordinating responses (including the 2018 Central Sulawesi earthquake,

[25] Robillard et. al., 2020; Humanitarian Advisory Group and Pujiono Centre, 2021; Indonesia Localisation Lab and ID-HA/AP-KI, 2025
[26] Key informant
[27] Bryant and Kamal, 2025, p.6 & 16

where the AHA Centre and OCHA collaborated), and in supporting the improvement of national disaster preparedness.

OCHA has played a significant role in establishing, supporting, and recently revising the cluster structure. It has also 'quietly advised' and made recommendations toward the government on an ongoing basis, for the improvements in coordination of smaller disasters.[28]

> *"NGOs try to advocate, to induce thinking at the national level. But it's not easy for them. Some work directly with ministries, but the weight of the UN still adds value to discussions with the government."*
>
> **UN participant, Indonesia**

OCHA in Indonesia has an inclusive perspective on 'national leadership' – working to strengthen and promote NGOs' prominence in coordination and decision-making, as well as supporting the government. Its role in "*acting as a low-visibility facilitator, and occasional buffer, between national and international actors"* was emphasised by research participants.[29]

Some respondents gave the example of the recent revisions to the national cluster regulations, when OCHA encouraged the authorities to consider NGOs' inputs. One NGO respondent described the ensuing process as *"quite participative"*, recounting the government hosting several meetings to provide feedback on changes.

Participants partly attributed the success of this facilitation function to an institutional mindset, and partly to the presence of key OCHA staff members (particularly Indonesian staff) with years of expertise, and associated trust and strong relationships with government counterparts.

The role of UN agencies and IFRC in working with lead ministry counterparts to support and strengthen cluster coordination over the last 10 years was also highlighted. Efforts include providing dedicated staff to support the secretariat of key clusters, providing training for government coordinators, and facilitating meetings.

More recently, NNGOs have been starting to take on more coordination support functions. The Shelter Sub-Cluster now has three large NNGOs in its 'Supporting Team' for coordination. The designated support agency, IFRC, has been working with the NNGO representatives to promote them taking on more functions. One respondent noted hoping that the newly established Indonesia Humanitarian Coordination Platform (IHCP) will help this to progress further.

From HCT to L/NNGO leadership

At the time of writing this report, a significant shift toward national leadership was taking place among humanitarian actors. Having been present in Indonesia since the activation of the IASC clusters in 2006, the HCT was wound down in 2025, and the new IHCP was put in place.

This new platform was designed in a series of participative discussions, facilitated by OCHA. Its leadership and membership are rebalanced toward Indonesian actors, both national and local.

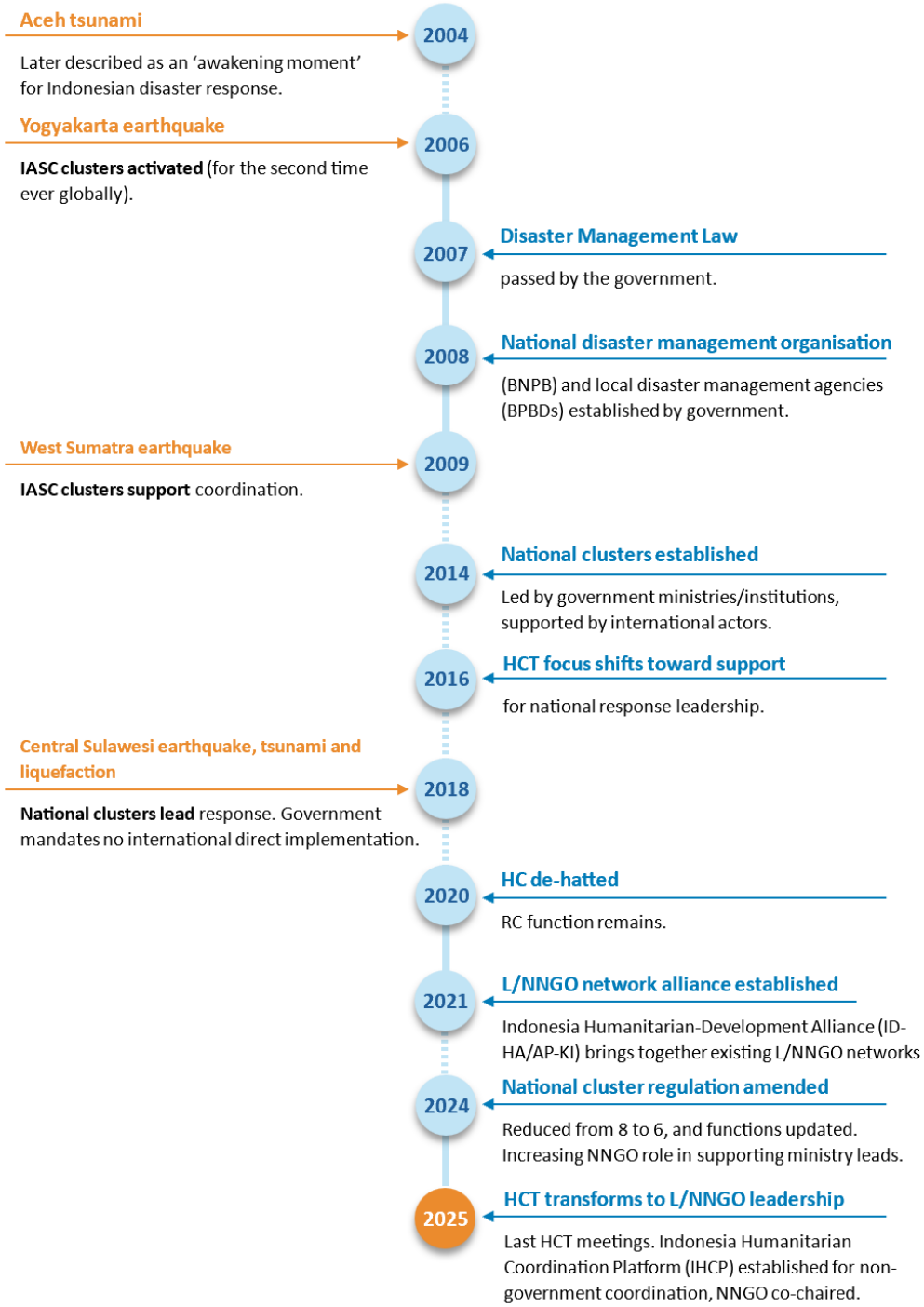
Unlike an HCT, the IHCP will have an open membership of non-government actors – NNGOs, LNGOs, NGO networks, INGOs, UN agencies, private sector, and others. The platform will be co-chaired by a national civil society body and initially by OCHA, aiming to transfer leadership toward national actors and to promote further localisation. International actors – including UN agencies – are expected to maintain a supporting role, including in terms of advocacy and engagement with the national government.

The platform also has an expanded remit compared to an HCT, intending to play an active coordination role – in support of government systems – as well as providing strategic direction and engaging in

[28] Key informant
[29] Bryant and Kamal, 2025, p.6

advocacy. More detail can be found in the accompanying case study 'Transition from HCT to L/NNGO leadership'.

[Figure 1] Indonesia: Timeline of disaster management coordination



Evolving coordination for refugee and conflict response

While the focus of humanitarian response nationally in Indonesia – and of this paper – is on natural disaster management, two other humanitarian situations – refugees and conflict response – are coordinated separately. Respondents discussed the role of NNGOs in future coordination.

Refugee response

Indonesia hosts several thousand refugees – just over 12,000 registered with UNHCR. Nearly half are from Afghanistan, and a quarter are Rohingya refugees from Myanmar. Most live in urban areas including Jakarta, while Rohingya refugees continue to arrive by boat to Aceh and northern Sumatra.[30] Both UNHCR and IOM provide support to refugees, along with some L/NNGOs working on protection and delivery of assistance. In early 2024, the government prohibited INGOs from working with refugees. Respondents describe a growing number of refugee organisations and refugee-led initiatives being set up, particularly in urban areas. In Aceh, respondents described humanitarian needs as being high among new arrivals – often living in 'semi-camp', overcrowded, conditions. While UNHCR coordinates with its implementing partners, wider coordination between actors is not (yet) formalised.

In 2025, two NNGOs convened a workshop of a small group of NGOs to discuss options for building NGO coordination around refugee issues. The interested NGOs were working on diverse issues – from social media monitoring of hate narratives against refugees, to advocacy with the government on policy amendments, to refugee rights and protection – but had identified common challenges and interests.

> *"One of the issues is decreasing funding. We need to work in collaboration more and more."*
>
> **NNGO participant, Indonesia**

Pillars of potential collaboration were identified: advocacy to influence government policy change, campaigning, and service delivery – including mutual support for capacity-building and funding. Faced with declining international funding, of particular interest was trying to access domestic funding – often more reliable from Islamic faith-based organisations who work with *zakat* donations.

Equally important was bringing together different NGO expertise: *"We want to build a bridge – between [refugee] protection organisations and disaster organisations with a lot of operational experience"*. At the time of writing, the NGOs were exploring options for formalising coordination, including whether to use an existing NGO network as a host.

Social conflict

Armed conflict has been ongoing for years in the six provinces of West Papua in Indonesia, between Papuan separatist armed groups and Indonesian security forces. Violence escalated in 2018, with spikes in conflict and displacement in 2024 and early 2025.[31] By mid-2025, just under 100,000 people were estimated to be displaced, many hosted in overcrowded shelters, with limited access to food, health care and education.[32]

The Government of Indonesia considers the security situation in the region to be extremely sensitive. The main response actors are local churches. Some NNGOs deliver assistance, mainly faith-based organisations working through church networks. With restricted access, coordination between organisations is informal.

The 'social conflict' has been outside the remit of the HCT in Indonesia, which was focused on disaster response. Some respondents expressed hope that the new IHCP coordination could eventually be broadened to include social conflict response.

4. Evolution of coordination in Iraq

Context

Internal displacement

In 2014, the violence of ISIL caused a crisis affecting millions of people, as they took control of large areas of central and northern Iraq. The IASC declared a Level 3 emergency and activated the IASC clusters in Iraq.[33] In total, nearly six million people were displaced by the conflict,[34] which caused high humanitarian needs and elevated protection concerns. In late 2017, the Government of Iraq declared 'victory' over ISIL, following a military campaign supported by a US-led coalition.[35] By the end of 2022, nearly five million people had returned. Iraq's economic situation had stabilised, and, with oil prices rising, government revenue had increased. The government's perspective was that the 'time of emergency' was over.[36] Nevertheless, 1.2 million people remained displaced, many facing continued barriers to return or fully integrate.[37]

Refugee hosting & climate crisis

Iraq hosts over 300,000 Syrian refugees, mostly Kurdish Syrians living in the (semi-autonomous) Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI).[38] The majority arrived in 2012 and 2013. A humanitarian response was led by UNHCR, with a few INGOs and L/NNGOs providing assistance alongside UN agencies. Most refugees have lived in urban areas since their arrival, with around 90,000 living in refugee camps.[39]

Impacts of the climate crisis were not a significant focus in Iraq during the ISIL crisis but are being given heightened attention now they are increasingly felt. Southern Iraq is particularly affected by water scarcity and impact on agriculture, with climate-induced displacement rising across the country.[40]

Evolution of coordination

Clusters

By the time of deactivation in 2022, the scale of the clusters had reduced, but were still led by international actors. While a few clusters had started to engage more with government and local authority counterparts,[41] at national level all were still led by the (mostly, UN) Cluster Lead Agencies. Co-coordination roles were mostly held by INGOs. The HCT had dedicated seats for INGO and NNGO representatives, plus the NGO forum, NCCI.

At sub-national level, humanitarian Governorate Coordination Meetings were led by OCHA, and some local-level Inter-Cluster Coordination Groups (ICCGs) were still held. Most coordination with authorities took place outside these mechanisms.

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[30] UNHCR, *Indonesia Fact Sheet*, March 2025
[31] ACAPS, *Humanitarian impacts of continuing conflict in the Papua provinces*, 15 October 2024 and Human Rights Watch, 'Indonesia: Renewed Fighting Threatens West Papua Civilians', Press release, 29 May 2025
[32] ACAPS, 'Latest updates on country situation', 3 July 2025 https://www.acaps.org/en/countries/indonesia
[33] OCHA, *Iraq Strategic Response Plan 2014-2015*, October 2014
[34] IOM, 'Displacement Tracking Matrix: Iraq', 31 December 2024 https://iraqdtm.iom.int/
[35] Al Jazeera, 'Iraqi PM Abadi declares 'end of war against' ISIL', 9 December 2017
[36] Key informant
[37] IOM, 'Displacement Tracking Matrix: Iraq', 31 December 2024. OCHA, *Humanitarian Response Plan Iraq 2022*, 2022
[38] UNHCR, 'Syria Regional Response: Iraq', 31 July 2025 and UNHCR, *Multi-Year Strategy 2025-2029 – Iraq*, 2025
[39] The number of refugees living in camps has been quite static from late 2014 up to the time of writing. UNHCR, 'Syria Regional Response: Iraq', UNHCR Operational Data Portal, 31 July 2025.
[40] Holloway et. al., *The lives and livelihoods of internally displaced people in Mosul, Iraq*, 2025
[41] Including the Child Protection Sub-Cluster. See IASC, *Guidance on Cluster Transition and Deactivation: Annex E*, 2025

Refugee response

The response for Syrian refugees in Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) was initially coordinated through sector working groups led by UNHCR. When the IASC clusters were activated, coordination in KRI was merged. Cluster Coordinators also took on roles as Sector Coordinators, under UNHCR's overall responsibility. Different strategies were maintained, but most coordination was merged – as largely the same partners were supporting both IDPs and refugees.

Durable solutions and nexus coordination

In 2020, a durable solutions coordination structure for internal displacement was put in place – led by IOM and UNDP, under the Resident Coordinator (RC). This comprised:[42]

- **Durable Solutions Taskforce** (DSTF), chaired by IOM and UNDP, providing strategic leadership. Limited membership, mostly of UN agencies. Dedicated seats for NGOs (eventually, NNGOs as well as INGOs), providing a representative role. NCCI facilitated election of the NGO members.[43]
- **Durable Solutions Technical Working Group** (DSTWG), chaired by IOM, UNDP, and an INGO (NRC), as a technical group. Limited membership, mostly of UN agencies, with dedicated seats for NGOs. Plus a few thematic sub-groups of technical actors, to develop guidance and programme approaches.[44]
- **Returns Working Group**, chaired by IOM, at one point co-chaired by an INGO (IRC). Originally set up in 2016, later shifted under the durable solutions structure. Open for any actor working on humanitarian and recovery assistance (UN, NGOs, donors). Government counterparts are invited to attend, and the Working Group's leadership liaises and advocates with ministries on returns.
- **Area-Based Coordination** (ABC) groups were set up in eight district-level locations, selected for their high actual or expected returns. Initially these were small, operational, closed groups aimed to design and deliver durable solutions assistance with local authorities; later they became open invitation.

Other humanitarian-development-peace structures included:

- **Peace and Reconciliation Working Group**, bringing together UN, NGO, and government actors.
- **Joint Coordination Forums** (JCFs). In 2024, the RC abolished most ABCs in favour of enhancing government leadership. JCFs were established in six governorates: five affected by the conflict with ISIL; the sixth, in southern Iraq, for climate crisis impacts. The JCFs are chaired by the Governor's office, co-chaired by a UN agency (now, two by an NNGO). Secretariat support was initially given by the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq, handed over in 2025 to a government body, all supported by the RC's Office. Membership is open to any actor working on humanitarian-development-peace topics.[45]

Despite notable efforts from durable solutions coordination staff to be inclusive of NGOs, 'durable solutions' remained UN-dominated both programmatically, as well as in coordination and decision-making. One report described the coordination structures as being perceived as an 'elite group of actors', with limited opportunity for L/NNGO engagement and influence.[46]

The ABCs were at times a particular focus of criticism (see box below).

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[42] Durable Solutions Iraq, 'Durable Solutions Architecture', PowerPoint presentation, 2023
[43] Durable Solutions Task Force Iraq, *Terms of Reference: (DSTF) – Updated draft*, May 2025 [draft]
[44] Including for Housing and HLP, Social Cohesion and Peacebuilding, and Sustainable Livelihoods.
[45] Joint Coordination Forum Iraq, *Terms of Reference: (JCF)*, July 2023
[46] DRC and NCCI, *NGO perspectives on the future of Area-Based Coordination Groups (ABCs) in Iraq*, August 2022

Challenges in setting up new coordination structures

While not part of the humanitarian transition, some of the difficulties reported in Iraq for the ABCs point to the challenges of designing and establishing new coordination structures. These have included:[47]

- Confusion on what a new type of group was meant to achieve, compounded by changes in Terms of Reference (ToRs).
- Mismatch between the ambition for the groups (a focus was the development of local 'Plans of Action' with the government), along with actual operational capacities and funding to deliver on these.
- Limited local authority interest and capacity to take on significant financial responsibilities.
- Workload beyond the realistic capacities of UN/NGO focal points (also a barrier to NNGO chairing).
- Few participating staff were senior enough to make decisions on behalf of their organisation.
- Need to have clear benefits to members to encourage participation. And, for members to be clear on their own reasons for joining and contribution, not just a 'fear of being left out'.
- Perception of funding access as a motivation for joining for NGOs. Participation reportedly sharply declined once it became clear that the groups were not a direct resource mobilisation source.

Cluster transition and deactivation

The transition effort in Iraq was started in December 2021 with a decision by the HC and HCT to *"hand over or simply exit most components of the joint response by 31 December 2022"*[48]. The intention was to hand over and exit from much of the humanitarian response, and to transition and deactivate the IASC clusters.

Clusters were asked to start transition planning in early 2022. While the initial process was well-supported by the ICCG, eventually overall focus was lost: "*clusters reported that the process became fragmented and siloed over time, and by late summer seemed to be off-track.*"[49] The loss of focus has been partly attributed to the departure of many international staff and rapid downsizing of OCHA,[50] the retirement of RC/HC mid-year and handover to a new RC/HC,[51] and departure of the NGO forum Director – highlighting the importance of consistency in staffing as well as in process.[52]

With most clusters having had limited engagement with government counterparts, and little prior transition planning, they were faced with a considerable workload and a hard deadline. Clusters were expected to hand over to 'national actors' (mainly government despite often low interest), and/or combine with development. Given the simultaneous push to hand over much humanitarian service provision (especially of UN agencies) to the government, focus of line ministries tended to be on operations, rather than on taking over coordination.

The durable solutions coordination structure was initially designed in parallel to the clusters. In the first part of the transition year, it was unclear whether it would take over any coordination functions, or if new

[47] IOM, *Lessons Learned: Area-Based Coordination in Iraq*, 2023 [draft, internal]; DRC and NCCI, *NGO perspectives on the future of Area-Based Coordination Groups (ABCs) in Iraq*, 2022 [private briefing]
[48] HCT meeting minutes, March 2022 *in* Global Cluster Coordination Group, 2023
[49] Global Cluster Coordination Group, *Note to the EDG: Learning from the cluster transition in Iraq,* February 2023 p.2
[50] Triggered by the Iraq humanitarian downscale and rapid scale-up in Ukraine in mid-2022.
[51] The position of DSRSG/RC/HC was maintained after the clusters deactivated, and the HC was not de-hatted.
[52] Global Cluster Coordination Group, *Note to the EDG: Learning from the cluster transition in Iraq,* February 2023

sectoral groups would link to it. While this was clarified eventually for a few sectors,[53] ideas such as durable solutions coordination taking over an inter-sectoral coordination function never materialised.[54]

Consultation with NGO cluster members, and the extent of NGO input into decision-making, varied between clusters. However, the UN Cluster Lead Agencies were ultimately the main decision-makers.

> *"While NGOs were consulted at each level of coordination, they reportedly did not feel "heard or valued" and believed decisions were made "unilaterally" by the UN without their input, damaging trust and partnership. (One UN interlocutor in Iraq clarified that NGOs were heard and certainly valued but UN counterparts simply disagreed with them.)"*[55]

Similar feelings were echoed later by NGOs on durable solutions planning and discussions on camp closures.[56]

Clusters were required to develop individual transition plans, but there was no over-arching HCT transition strategy for either coordination or operational response. Focus of UN agencies shifted to the UN Country Team (UNCT) for coordination and to the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) as a common strategy – both of which are UN mechanisms.

Respondents described there being little appetite among decision-makers for imagining what a downscale of collective humanitarian response and coordination could look like. While it was acknowledged that some humanitarian need remained, the dominant narrative was a *"need for durable solutions and development approaches, instead of continuation of humanitarian response"*.[57]

Fragmentation of coordination

When the clusters deactivated, the HCT continued, and sectoral coordination was taken forward individually with no linkage between the bodies. By mid-2025, two-and-a-half years after the deactivation of the IASC clusters, coordination has fragmented. While respondents for this research were still attending some coordination meetings, strikingly, few people interviewed – UN as well as NGO – had any knowledge of groups that their organisations did not directly participate in.

While the following groups continue, NGO participants consistently described experiencing a 'big gap' in coordination after cluster deactivation. The remaining coordination structures have been described as *"largely ineffective"* for NGOs,[58] despite organisations continuing to attend at least local or technical groups.

Several respondents described the lack of a 'big picture' understanding of humanitarian need and remaining response. This is exacerbated by the absence of an NGO forum, through which NGOs could share and receive information. After cluster deactivation, this lack of a coherent overview contributed to *"an information and coordination vacuum between agencies [and] coincided with a sharp decline in humanitarian funding"*.[59]

> *""We are continuing our work, but we are isolated. We don't know what others are doing and how to cooperate and support each other. It's weakening the relationship between all working in the field – INGOs and LNGOs, or UN agencies or donors."*
>
> **NNGO participant, Iraq**

[53] The Protection Cluster's successor, the Protection Platform, was designed to engage with durable solutions mechanisms. Some Shelter/NFI Cluster functions were incorporated into the housing, land and property subgroup of the DSTWG (CCCM, Shelter/NFI, Protection Clusters Iraq, *Updates on UNHCR-Led Clusters Transition in Iraq*, 2022).
[54] Global Cluster Coordination Group, 2023
[55] Global Cluster Coordination Group, 2023, p.5
[56] Protection Consortium of Iraq, *"Where Should We Go?": Durable Solutions for Remaining IDPs in Iraq*, 2024
[57] OCHA, *Humanitarian Transition Overview Iraq*, 2023
[58] ICVA, *Measuring Localisation in Iraq's Humanitarian and Development Landscape*, 2025 p.20
[59] Protection Consortium of Iraq, *"Where Should We Go?": Durable Solutions for Remaining IDPs in Iraq*, 2024 p 7

- **Sectoral coordination**. Several sectoral coordination groups set up after the clusters deactivated continue to exist.[60] Their remits have expanded to include longer-term issues and climate crisis impact, with less focus on humanitarian issues. Two were explored in more detail for the research: Cash and WASH (see accompanying case study on '*Sectoral Coordination Evolution*'). Cash continues to have open membership, co-chaired by an NNGO after transition from initial international leads (similarly for GBV). WASH coordination is supported by UNICEF for internal government coordination, with some NGO participation in technical sub-groups. Activities by the Protection Platform had remained narrow, and it seemed to have either ceased or be on hiatus in 2025.
- **Joint Coordination Forums at governorate level**. These were described by respondents as useful forums for interaction with government directorates, although limited funding has meant they function mainly as information-sharing platforms. Momentum is driven by the UN/NGO co-chairs, not government leads. While INGOs and L/NNGOs are members, as little funding is available, their programming is often now at a very small scale – giving them much less prominence and influence in the bodies.
- **Ad-hoc local government-led coordination seems to have increased**.
  - KRI government's Joint Crisis Coordination Centre calls ad-hoc meetings with some NGOs.
  - Local authorities in some districts call ad-hoc meetings to get information from UN/NGOs.
- **Durable solutions coordination** (DSTF and DSWTG) continues, although at a reduced scale. NGO seats are retained in both, and the DSTWG is now co-chaired by an NNGO. However, without an NGO forum, NGO participation is based on individual organisations, not collective representation, and influence on decision-making seems limited.
- **HCT**. Met twice in 2024 and was disbanded at the end of the year. Discussions in mid-2024 to replace it with an Emergency Response Preparedness Working Group, to include NGO representatives as well as UN agencies and the Red Cross/Red Crescent,[61] had not moved forward at the time of writing.
- **Returns Working Group**. Still meets regularly and is a key source of information-sharing as a well-established and well-known body. Its open membership and momentum of chairing have continued.

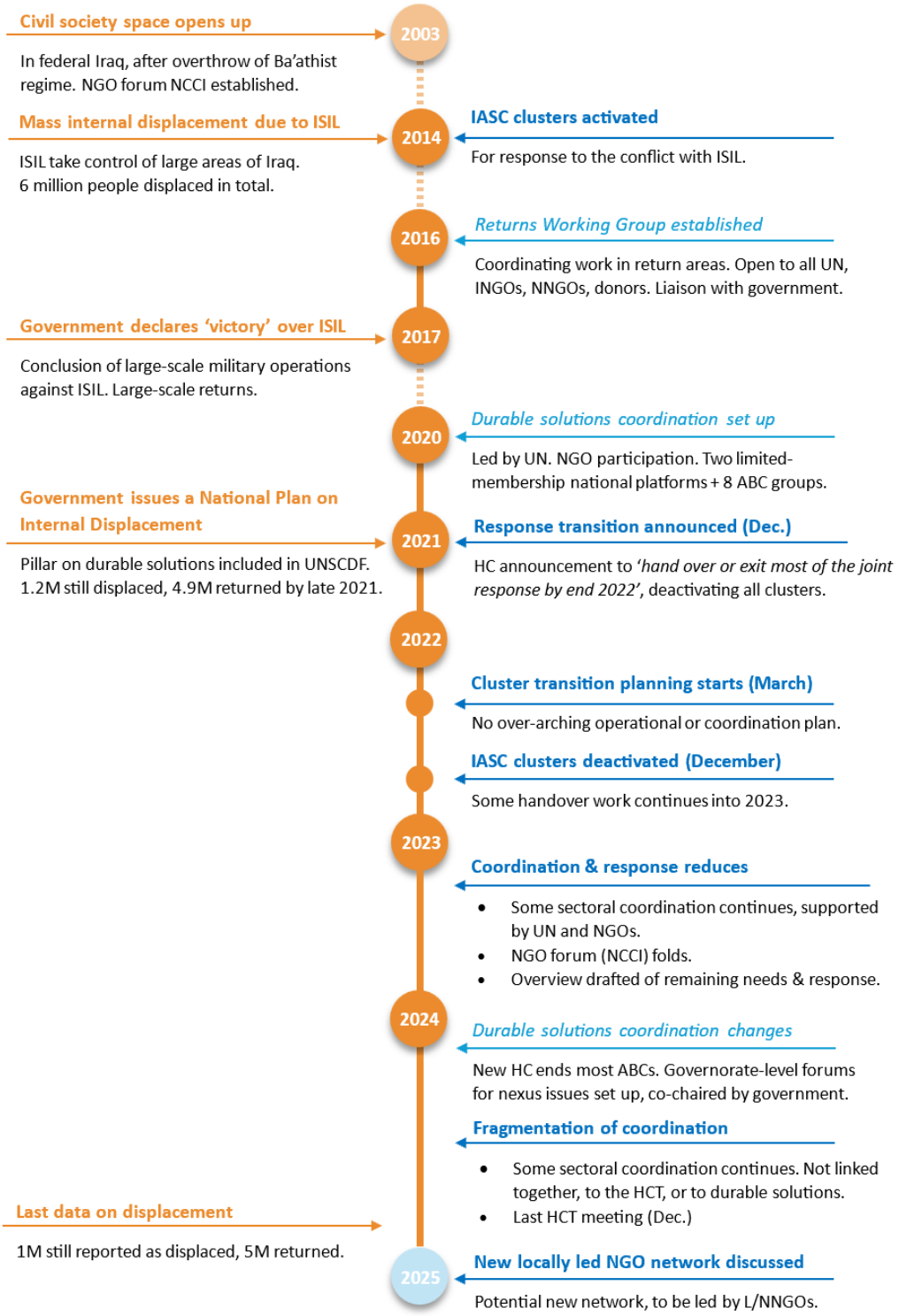
Shift to development coordination: theory not reality for NGOs

While the theory of cluster transition in Iraq in 2022 encouraged transition to development coordination, this has largely not been the reality for NGOs. While some development coordination structures do exist in Iraq, these involve government, multilateral institutions, donors, and UN agencies – working on issues often quite separated from those civil society actors engage in.

The transition of three clusters did include merging of humanitarian and development coordination: WASH, child protection, and education. However, these have evolved to be primarily government-oriented, especially as humanitarian response has decreased. For WASH, the Cluster Lead Agency UNICEF worked in parallel to the cluster transition to establish coordination between government ministries/institutions, for development work and remaining humanitarian response. The evolution of these has been to a government focus, with NGOs partly included for technical contributions (see accompanying case study). For child protection and education, respondents report that some coordination for NGOs remains – linked to, but separate from, the main government and development actor mechanisms.

[60] Non-exhaustively, coordination groups for WASH, cash, education in emergencies, GBV, and child protection operate in 2025 although in changed structures. Protection and mine action continued until at least 2024.
[61] *Emergency Response Preparedness Working Group Iraq*: *Draft Terms of Reference*, September 2024

[Figure 2] Iraq: Timeline of humanitarian response coordination



5. NGOs and civil society

Importance of NGO networks

The experiences of Indonesia and Iraq – while very different contexts for humanitarian response – both demonstrate the huge value that structured coordination between NGOs brings.

Taking leadership in Indonesia

Indonesia has a notably strong, and networked, civil society. Despite civil society space contracting in recent years, as described by respondents, Indonesian NGOs continue to take more of a leading role in humanitarian response and coordination.[62] Many national NGOs have strong technical and operational capacities, and have taken an increasingly prominent role since the Central Sulawesi earthquake response in 2018, where the government restricted direct international implementation.[63]

As well as large number of civil society organisations, Indonesia has multiple formal NGO networks – for humanitarian and development NGOs, and local and national NGOs. These play, variously (but not only), coordination, fundraising support, advocacy, and technical support functions for their members. Several of the largest networks are faith-based, including multi-faith networks and networks for Islamic organisations that channel *zakat* funds. Some play a coordination function for their members' disaster responses: see accompanying case study 'Response Coordination by an NGO network'.

In 2021, an alliance of NGO networks was set up. The Indonesian Development-Humanitarian Alliance (ID-HA/AP-KI) has established itself as an advocate for civil society involvement in policy and decision-making. It now comprises the eight largest NGO networks, which represent over 1,000 national and local NGOs.[64]

Respondents described how NGO networks have increased collective capacities and voice for L/NNGOs. The ID-HA/AP-KI has taken a proactive role in shaping both coordination and localisation discussions. Following OCHA's announcement in April 2025 of the intention to transition the HCT, the ID-HA/AP-KI drafted a counterproposal for an alternative structure. Joint discussions then led to the creation of the new Indonesia Humanitarian Coordination Platform. See case study *'Transition from HCT to L/NNGO leadership'*.

Closure of the NGO forum in Iraq

Recent experience in Iraq provides a counterexample to the experience in Indonesia in demonstrating how important NGO networks can be in providing a voice to NGOs, playing a coordination function, and facilitating consistent representation of civil society in government- or UN-led bodies.

The NGO Coordination Committee for Iraq (NCCI) was established in 2003 and expanded in 2014 when the IASC clusters were activated – providing a representation function for both national and international NGOs. During and immediately after cluster transition it particularly worked on localisation and supporting local and national NGOs. However, NCCI closed in 2023 due to a combination of funding challenges, registration barriers, and internal governance issues.[65]

This created a significant gap in collective NGO representation, coordination, and advocacy. Multiple respondents – from NNGOs, INGOs, and UN agencies – described NCCI's closure as a 'big gap' in coordination and as a 'big loss' to NGO representation.

Informal coordination between NGOs has continued based on personal relationships, including among INGO Country Directors, but even this has been disrupted with turnover in staff.

Respondents described missing the role of an NGO forum in information-sharing from, to, and between NGOs, in coordinated advocacy, and in representation. Even where NGOs still sit in coordination bodies, they now do so as individual organisations rather than as representatives.

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[62] Indonesia Localisation Lab and ID-HA/AP-KI, 2025, p.19
[63] Humanitarian Advisory Group and Pujiono Centre, *The journey towards humanitarian reform in Indonesia*, 2021
[64] SEJAJAR et. al., 'Uniting forces, CSOs/NGOs formed humanitarian alliance', Press release, 21 April 2021; FOZ et. al., *Establishment: AP-KI ID-HA Manifesto*, 2021; Indonesia Localisation Lab and ID-HA/AP-KI, 2025.
[65] Key informant

The loss of the weight of a collective NGO voice with the UN, donors, and government was emphasised by multiple respondents – from NNGOs, INGOs, and UN agencies. An NGO forum's role as a trusted, neutral interlocutor was also reflected on, particularly as many NGOs face bureaucratic barriers, missing a trusted way to discuss and align on sensitive issues.

> *"NGOs need to fight for the space. NCCI used to be really good at fighting for this.""*
>
> **UN participant, Iraq**

At the same time, there are an increasing number of smaller networks among L/NNGOs, for those working on specific topics or sectors. However, while respondents who participate in these described valuing their presence, these are mostly smaller-scale and are often linked to projects meaning that activities may scale back when funding ends. One NNGO respondent recounted how their attempt to form a mechanism to coordinate with the authorities on a particular topic faced significant pushback. The ambition of the attempt was then dialled back to only coordinating among NGOs.

At the time of writing, NGOs in Iraq were exploring setting up a new locally led NGO network. This hopeful establishment was being supported by ICVA for the set-up of governance mechanisms and initial funding, on the request of both NNGOs and INGOs. Initial workshops had been held to establish what the potential members may want a new network to achieve. Respondents discussed both their hopes for establishing a new platform – and challenges to be overcome. These included navigating different backgrounds and aims between NGOs, and balancing dynamics between larger national NGOs and smaller local NGOs.

International civil society support

In both Indonesia and Iraq, respondents spoke about the benefits to L/NNGOs and national NGO networks of the *right* type of international civil society support, at the right time – from INGOs, global NGO networks, and regionally. In Iraq as the humanitarian response phases out, and in Indonesia as national and local civil society takes on a strong role in both response and coordination.

Complementarity

The Government of Indonesia's restriction on international assistance has forced INGOs to rethink their roles from implementers to supporters, while in Iraq most remaining INGOs retain an implementation role. Respondents in both countries emphasised seeing the added value of INGOs in providing technical support.

> *"It's not about funding, but about international expertise and networks that are more valuable to us."*
>
> **NNGO participant, Indonesia**

In Iraq, two participants discussed still seeing a role for INGOs in operational and advocacy work on more sensitive topics. They emphasised the ability of INGOs to work on topics that L/NNGOs likely face more pressure if they try to engage in – particularly on sensitive protection issues and working with specific marginalised communities. They also described seeing a role for INGOs in humanitarian advocacy – able to speak out nationally on topics that L/NNGOs might find it more difficult to engage on, and able to pull on regional and global resources. (Although this was not still happening to scale in Iraq.)

In Indonesia, several INGOs have 'nationalised' in recent years – partly in response to the government's restrictions on international implementation. (Since 2018 for disasters, and since 2024 for refugee response.) Respondents describe the need to carefully navigate the space these 'nationalised' NGOs take – in complement to, not competition with, L/NNGOs. These organisations are usually connected with their global affiliate network, benefiting from shared technical expertise and funding.

Capacity transfer

In both countries, some respondents emphasised the role of INGOs in supporting L/NNGOs to continue to build internal financial control and accountability systems, both benefiting their ongoing work, and necessary to be able to directly receive international funding – if and when that may be available. NNGO respondents in Iraq placed particular emphasis on this.

> *"International organisations have many experiences in different contexts. They bring this experience, so we can modify – to find our own response."*
>
> **NNGO participant, Indonesia**

International networks

Respondents also described NGO networks as having benefited from international links. In Indonesia, the NEAR Network has provided support on localisation issues. In Iraq, ICVA is supporting L/NNGOs to discuss the hopeful set up of a new locally led NGO network. NNGO participants engaged in that process emphasised the continued role they would like to see INGOs take: to share experience and support its functioning.

The benefits of maintaining and building technical links were also highlighted. In Indonesia, some NNGOs and NGO networks are connected to global and regional technical initiatives. In Iraq, the Iraq Cash Forum, now led by an NNGO, is still connected to the CALP Network – unlike the other sectoral coordination groups whose connection with the Global Clusters ceased either on or soon after cluster deactivation. Its members can access CALP resources and trainings, and its chairs receive support and connect with other coordinators.

Funding diversification

Domestic funding in Indonesia

International funding for humanitarian response in Indonesia has significantly declined in recent years, reflecting its middle-income status. While the government's budget allocations for disaster management *"remain insufficient to meet the scale of needs, particularly for disaster risk reduction and preparedness activities"*,[66] domestic funding for L/NNGOs is substantial, especially for faith-based organisations.

In discussions in early 2025 on the impact of global funding cuts to the international funding still present in Indonesia, NGOs discussed ways to further diversify funding and to boost the main sources of civil society funding: public donations and *zakat*. Zakat funds bring reliable funding for Islamic NGOs, some of which are not only big actors in Indonesia, but also increasingly implementing international humanitarian response. Taking lessons from COVID-19, the NGOs noted how *"community cooperation played a major role in crisis response"*, and that fundraising success was supported by the media encouraging public donations. Infrastructure investments were also noted as a potential source for further diversification.[67]

Creation of domestic pooled funds in Indonesia has also recently been discussed – both within the government, about pooled funding to be channelled for humanitarian response, and between NGOs on the possibility of establishing national humanitarian civil society pooled funds. ID-HA/AP-KI – the alliance of NGO networks – has been leading discussions among its members.[68] Respondents

[66] Indonesia Localisation Lab and ID-HA/AP-KI, 2025, p.19
[67] Humanitarian Advisory Group and Pujiono Centre, *Local voices on humanitarian reform*, 2021; Human Initiative, 'Minutes of Meeting: Public Discussion on the Impact of USAID Funding Freeze', 12 February 2025; Indonesia Localisation Lab and ID-HA/AP-KI, 2025
[68] Discussed in its 2024 Localisation Conference: ID-HA/AP-KI and NEAR, 2014. See also: Forum Organisasi Zakat et. al., *Establishment: AP-KI/ID-HA Manifesto*, 2021; Worden et. al., 'Turning the Grand Bargain upside down', 2021.

described looking to learn from Indonesian zakat and philanthropy organisations, who generate substantial, and reliable, funding.[69]

Reliance on international funding in Iraq

Many civil society organisations in Iraq are relatively new, established in an era when international funding was high – after the 2003 US and coalition invasion, and then for humanitarian response after 2014.[70] Domestic funding for NGOs is limited and often connected with specific affiliations.[71] Independent CSOs therefore remain heavily reliant on international donors, presenting sustainability challenges after transition.

Large NNGOs as well as INGOs were described by participants as able to shift their strategies 'more easily' after the humanitarian transition, to engage with donors on recovery and development. However, respondents described many smaller L/NNGOs who were reliant on international funds and focused on humanitarian response as struggling to pivot afterwards. This included difficulty in shifting back to, or re-defining, a core mandate for the organisation, and in a *"struggle to think in terms of development initiatives, and to articulate strategies for mid- or longer-term solutions"*.[72] While some L/NNGOs still receive international grants, durable solutions funding – for example – tends to be channelled in larger grants to large organisations, with less dispersed to civil society partners than when humanitarian pooled funds are in use.

This reliance on international funding, coupled with shrinking civil society space, was described by some as an impediment to L/NNGOs being able to thrive.

Some efforts were made to support L/NNGOs during transition, including by NCCI to link L/NNGOs with donors, and by durable solutions coordinators running workshops on transition of approach to longer-term work. However, diversification of L/NNGO funding base was not explored as part of the humanitarian transition.

> *"We could have done better at helping NGOs working on humanitarian issues to look at their own mandates and opportunities to shift toward development or other issues."*
>
> **UN participant, Iraq**

Some NNGO participants expressed enthusiasm to learn from NGOs in other countries on sustainability of funding, interested in 'innovative models' and if public fundraising and private company donations could be more explored in Iraq (noting though, with some concern, that this would rely on economic stability).

Civil society starting point

The starting point of civil society prior to large-scale humanitarian response has been – expectedly – influential in both Iraq and Indonesia in how strong L/NNGOs have immediately been able to be in delivering humanitarian assistance, in their ability to pivot when international funding has diminished, and in their ability to sustain a collective civil society voice at a national level and within humanitarian decision-making.

Iraq

In Iraq, civil society space was historically very restricted, although more open in the Kurdistan Region than in central and southern ('federal') Iraq. After the fall of the Ba'athist regime in 2003, a *"vast number"* of NGOs were established, particularly in federal Iraq.[73] By 2014, around 600 NGOs were registered with

[69] Key informant
[70] Key informant and World Bank, *Iraq Systematic Country Diagnostic,* 2017
[71] IRFAD, 2015 in World Bank, *Iraq Systematic Country Diagnostic,* 2017
[72] Key informant
[73] ICVA, *Measuring Localisation in Iraq's Humanitarian and Development Landscape: Baseline Report*, 2025

NCCI, – approximately 70 of which were engaged in humanitarian response after the IASC cluster activation.[74] By 2025, respondents for this research report that the number of registered NGOs was in the low thousands. However, civil society space has been shrinking,[75] and navigating these pressures pose a continued challenge to L/NNGOs.

ICVA's recent baseline report on localisation in Iraq found mostly limited evidence toward localisation, with L/NNGOs having limited influence on agendas, policy, and decision-making. In most coordination structures, even when L/NNGOs are present they usually have limited influence on decision-making.[76]

Respondents also noted that, given funding reductions, many L/NNGOs now have small-scale programming and therefore – individually – aren't large operational actors in these coordination groups, and without an NGO forum lack collective representation. While INGOs continue to have somewhat better access to coordination spaces than L/NNGOs, the post-cluster durable solutions response and nexus coordination remains mostly dominated by UN agencies.

Indonesia

In Indonesia, the environment for civil society organisations has been more enabling. While civil society space was narrow during military rule, it increased from the 1990s onwards.[77] Some of the larger NNGOs, particularly faith-based organisations, have been established for decades. The high number of NGOs, and interest of NGOs in being part of networks, has been partly attributed to a strong cultural mutual aid tradition.[78] Prior to large-scale international humanitarian assistance, Indonesian civil society was already varied – from some large, strong NNGOs, down to small local civil society organisations.

These factors, coupled with an existing domestic funding base for some organisations, has enabled NNGOs to professionalise their disaster management work, and increasingly take leadership roles at national level – from the initial transition from IASC clusters to national government leadership, to the ongoing shift of non-government response and coordination from international to national actors.

[74] OCHA, *Iraq Strategic Response Plan 2014-2015*, October 2014
[75] BTI, 2016 *in* World Bank, *Iraq Systematic Country Diagnostic*, 2017
[76] ICVA, 2025
[77] Key informant
[78] Bryant and Kamal, 2025

6. Recommendations

The following recommendations are drawn from both the research findings, and directly from participants who have experienced transition processes and have engaged in post-transition coordination structures.

Humanitarian funding after deactivation

Donors:

- ☐ Engage with NGOs and NGO forums to communicate the funding trajectory (e.g., any likely decrease after IASC deactivation and the HRP ending), to help plan responsible disengagement.
- ☐ Explore options for continuing to fund civil society actors and NGO coordination, recognising that civil society is instrumental to long-term recovery and development.
- ☐ Consider consortium models that support NNGOs to build capacities as consortium leads.

NGOs / NGO forums:

- ☐ Acknowledge the future funding outlook - and its impact on LLNGOs and the response
- ☐ Plan for reductions in humanitarian financing. Seek to understand if any shift to durable solutions or development financing will actually happen. *E.g., how financing mechanisms work, donor landscape, how funding is channelled, and how to position as civil society actors*.
- ☐ Advocate for coordination structures to be designed for *future* coordination needs, which might be significantly downscaled from the current response.
- ☐ Advocate for response-wide planning for *operational* downscale, not just for coordination.
- ☐ Help L/NNGOs to develop internal strategies to pivot from humanitarian response.
- ☐ If L/NNGOs are reliant on international donors, explore options for diversification of funding.

Planning transitions

UN agencies:

- ☐ Set adequate timeframes for planning and implementing transition. Longer planning and transition timeframes are likely to lead to better outcomes. Experience demonstrates that rushed transitions are less likely to be inclusive – including of the preferences of actors (e.g., government authorities) taking over coordination lead roles – or sustainable.
- ☐ As HCT members, develop transition plans – for operations and coordination.
- ☐ Plan for responsible collective disengagement from ongoing humanitarian programming, based on a realistic understanding of the expected funding trajectory.
- ☐ Identify any specific groups or locations with remaining high humanitarian and protection needs, and how these will be collectively monitored and prioritised for remaining response.

Envisioning a new coordination structure

NGOs / NGO forums:

- ☐ **Seek to lead discourse.** Consider proposing NGOs' vision of coordination structures and priorities.
- ☐ **Consider how to work collectively to fill coordination gaps to support NGOs' own response.**
  - A joint NGO assessment, briefing, or report won't have the same weight as an HRP, but shared analysis can help create focus for collective response.

- Identifying collective priorities among NGOs, e.g., specific populations with high humanitarian needs or experiencing high protection risks, may help target residual programming.

☐ **Seek to understand UN agencies' mandates and intentions – to inform NGO propositions, advocacy, and potential coordination gaps for NGOs that might arise.**

- Seek to understand if UN agencies may maintain an outward focus or shift to UN- and government-centred coordination through the UNCT and UNSDCF, and the implication for NGOs.
- Understand any UN internal and global commitments relevant to coordination once CLA function ceases. *E.g. UNICEF's internal commitment to support sector coordination. In Iraq UNHCR's protection co-chairing was partly motivated by the Agenda for Protection.*

☐ ***"Don't let your NGO forum collapse!"***

- Prioritise maintaining platforms for NGO collaboration.
- Plan for how an NGO forum might need to change, based on the likely changes to/downscale of the response and reduction of NGO operations.
- Plan for how to maintain NGO collective representation in limited-membership groups.

☐ **Consider the role of international civil society and INGO support to L/NNGOs.**

- Identify any shift in the role INGOs may best play *e.g., from implementors to technical support*.
- Look for opportunities to connect L/NNGOs with regional and global networks and expertise.

UN agencies:

☐ **Plan for the coordination structure after transition to be sustainable and linked together. Simple structures may be easier to sustain.** If any functions will be handed over to durable solutions or development coordination, ensure these are clear, realistic and inclusive of NGOs.

Coordination roles after transition

UN agencies:

☐ **Continue coordination support after IASC transition – to government and L/NNGOs.**

- Most successful coordination handover to government has been accompanied by former CLAs in 'coordination support' roles, usually for multiple years after transition.
- Understand and act on examples such as Indonesia, which demonstrate the success of UN agencies in undertaking 'quiet facilitation' toward national leadership – where 'national' means civil society as well as government – in line with localisation commitments.
- Identify ways to not only support government but also NNGOs to progressively take stronger response and coordination leadership functions, at national not just local level.

NGOs & UN agencies:

☐ **If taking on coordination leadership or support, properly commit to this.**

- Ensure staff supporting coordination bodies have the right profile and training, with a dedicated percentage of their time allocated to the role.
- Ensure organisational buy-in so coordination doesn't fade when one staff member leaves.
- Provide or facilitate low-level resourcing, such as meeting, hosting and coordinating trainings.

Donors:

☐ Sustain funding for NGO coordination, e.g., networks and forums, after IASC deactivation.

- ☐ Include NGO coordination roles after transition in funding grants, even if in split/double-hatted roles. Multi-year funding for coordination helps support stability.

Acronyms & Abbreviations

ABC	Area-Based Coordination
AHA Centre	ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BNPB	Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Bencana [national disaster management agency]
BPBD	Badan Penanggulangan Bencana Daerah [local disaster management agency]
CLA	Cluster Lead Agency
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DRC	Danish Refugee Council
DSRSG	Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General
DSTF	Durable Solutions Taskforce
DSTWG	Durable Solutions Technical Working Group
ECHO	European Commission's Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations
EDG	Emergency Directors Group [of the IASC]
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
HC	Humanitarian Coordinator
HCT	Humanitarian Country Team
HFI	Humanitarian Forum Indonesia
HRP	Humanitarian Response Plan
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
ICCG	Inter-Cluster Coordination Group
ICF	Iraq Cash Forum
ICVA	International Council of Voluntary Agencies
ID-HA/AP-KI	Indonesian Development - Humanitarian Alliance / Aliansi Pembangunan - Kemanusiaan Indonesia

IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
IHCP	Indonesia Humanitarian Coordination Platform
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IRC	International Rescue Committee
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria and the Levant [also ISIS, IS, Da'esh]
JCF	Joint Coordination Forum
KRI	Kurdistan Region of Iraq
LNGO	Local Non-Governmental Organisation
L/NNGO	Local or National Non-Governmental Organisation
NCCI	NGO Coordination Committee for Iraq
NEAR	Network for Empowered Aid Response
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NNGO	National Non-Governmental Organisation
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UN Human Rights)
RC	Resident Coordinator
WASH	Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene
UN	United Nations
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations Refugee Agency
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNSDCF	United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
USAID-BHA	United States Agency for International Development - Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance

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