

IRAQ

Core Housing Units for Post-Conflict Returnees



PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Country: Iraq

Project location: Tobzawa, Qarqasha and Kharab Sultan. Mosul and Hamdaniya districts, Ninawa

Project Duration: 2 months for design and community engagement processes, 80 days for construction (total 4.5 months)

Target Population: 247 individuals of 52 households

Project Budget (USD): \$253,000 (direct contractor costs)

Cost per unit built (USD): \$6,800(approximate)

Donor(s): Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA)



What did CRS do?

With the support of USAID’s Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance, CRS piloted 37 Transitional Core Housing Units (TCHU) in three villages in Ninawa Plains. TCHUs are newly-built structures consisting of one or two living rooms, a kitchen, toilet and shower. The core unit is designed with the ability for it to be expanded horizontally, and structurally to carry an additional second floor. Several designs were tailored to the number of individuals living in the home, family member preference and plot limitation(s).

Background

In 2014, the Islamic State (IS) captured large swaths of Iraq, uprooting an estimated 6 million people – with 3.5 million internally displaced at any one time throughout the crisis. Iraqi authorities announced in 2017 that they had retaken IS-held areas throughout the country. Even so, in early 2019 the UN estimated that 8.7 million Iraqis remained in need of humanitarian assistance. The occupation of IS, and the military operation to retake areas from its control, led to large scale destruction of houses as a result of fire, rockets, airstrikes and other weaponry. The damage of the houses varied from light to destroyed houses. Catholic Relief Services (CRS) has been working closely with Caritas Iraq to support more than 350,000 people across Iraq since 2014. We continue to provide humanitarian assistance on the basis of need, while further scaling up supports to families returning home.

Problem Statement

While almost 2 million people remain displaced in early 2019, as many as 4 million Iraqis had returned home. Families whose homes had suffered light to medium damage are able to repair their houses with the assistance of the UN and NGOs, including CRS. However, for families whose homes were structurally damaged or destroyed, most face an enormous challenge to return and rebuild their homes. Based on CRS assessments in several locations across the Ninawa Plains, **most families who owned structurally damaged or destroyed homes described not being able to return because they are without any kind of shelter to live in.** Though some families have returned, they have been hosted by other families or have lived in rented accommodation under poor conditions.

Cash grants for repairable houses

CRS also supported more than 900 families across Ninewa Plains whose homes had sustained non-structural damage. Families received cash grants, as high as \$5,500, based on the assessed needs. Restricted to use for house repairs, the grants were typically used by families for materials and labor to replace broken doors and windows, repair electrical systems, re-plaster burnt walls, and repair the water and sanitation infrastructure in the house.



Totally damaged house in Kharaba Sultan village of Ninawa, Iraq. Photo: CRS

Project Process

Assessments & Coordination

The team coordinated with official representatives, community leaders and families to understand and assess the needs and gaps in both rural and urban locations.

In urban areas, various factors led to CRS determining it too complex to pilot TCHUs: the need for debris removal, damaged foundations, limited land, families' high expectations for complete reconstruction of their houses, and stringent municipality requirements. However, in rural areas, where many families own large pieces of open land next to their damaged home—and where the municipalities granted permission more readily for the pilot—it was more feasible for CRS to support families to construct the TCHUs.

Community Engagement

CRS consulted with official representatives, community leaders, and affected families to gather input on the design of the TCHU. The team held separate meetings with the officials, community leaders and the families to:

1. Obtain the lists of the affected families.
2. Form a committee for each village to confirm family status, and develop the criteria of selection.
3. Have consultations to ensure the design fit the family context and the site conditions. The engineers adjusted designs following consultations to include separate toilet and shower units, and to separate the living rooms from the kitchens.
4. Confirm ownership and land tenure.
5. Document the required agreements from the municipality.
6. Design Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between CRS and the families with confirmation of the local sub-district council.



Building walls and molding for reinforced concrete roof of the core housing unit in Tobzawa village of Ninawa, Iraq.

Photo: CRS

Family Participation

TCHUs are intended to become permanent homes, and designed to be expanded and upgraded when families are able to do so. Therefore, families showed great interest and contributed to the construction of their TCHU. Mostly, this took place by ensuring that the foundations, walls, roofs and floors were continuously watered while the concrete was curing. CRS engaged contractors to construct the homes, and managed the relationship to ensure families were protected from any conflict that could arise with the contractors.

Technical Designs

The engineers designed a total of 28 models for a range of family sizes between 4 and 10 individuals. CRS offered each family four design options, from which they could choose their preferred model. This allowed them to consider their needs, family size, available land, and plans for potential expansion. CRS also provided drawing designs of the expected TCHU expansions for each family.

During construction, the team received several requests to change or add items to the design, such as:

- Add more electric lamps and power sockets to the living room and kitchen
- Build extra walls and a main door to enclose the TCHU
- Change the roof of the pit from iron sheets to reinforced concrete
- Add other living rooms to the TCHU

Each model consisted of at least one living room with the minimum space of 3.5m² per person, a kitchen with an area of 6.25m², a toilet closet, and a shower room area of 2.6m². The floor to ceiling height of the TCHU is 3m based on typical Iraqi housing. Each home has a 1,000 ltr water tank installed on the roof, and an 8,000 ltr pit covered with iron sheets for toilet sewage. The rooms all have an electric lamp, ventilation, door and window. The living room contained 2 windows of 1.5m². The kitchen, toilet and shower are installed with water systems and a water tank.

Load-bearing walls were made from concrete blocks that were plastered externally with cement, and internally with gypsum. This was due to the local availability of cement, gypsum and aggregates, and that most of the houses in Ninawa are built with concrete.

CRS procured three contractors – one in each location – and selected them based on their technical capacity to deliver the designs. Each of them built 10 to 15 TCHUs within their communities. The contract duration was for 80 days for the construction work, following two months for consultation, selection and design.

Monitoring

To ensure acceptance of the construction, the engineers managed the relationships with the community actors and families. Official representatives were involved from the beginning of the process for support to the team and community. CRS teams displayed posters with project and contact details at several locations in the villages, and distributed postcards with CRS free contact numbers for families to reach out with requests for information, clarifications and/or complaints, which were followed up confidentially.



Abdullah's family in their newly built transitional home in Qarqasha village, Ninawa Plains region, Iraq.

Photo: CRS

Participant Selection

CRS selected families for the pilot TCHU based on the following criteria:

- The house was damaged as a result of armed conflict or actions by occupying armed forces.
- Houses were structurally or totally damaged and cannot be repaired.
- Families had already or partially returned to their area of origin.
- Proof of ownership of the damaged house and land was required.
- The land needed to be clear of unexploded ordnances (UXO).
- The families agreed to the certificate to build on the specified land.
- The families did not own any other living properties in the return area.

Learning & Recommendations

At the end of this pilot project, a variety of key lessons were identified that would facilitate improvements and scale-up:

- Geographical targeting to reach vulnerable families is a major challenge since the level of vulnerabilities differs widely among communities and locations. Vulnerability criteria should be explored to enable targeting of families in most need.
- Payments were delivered to the contractors at the end of the work; a tranche-based payment arrangement may have facilitated improved liquidity for the contractors.
- Additional beneficiary contributions and participation should be explored to enrich the conventional process of implementation, especially for selecting finishings such as plaster, doors, and windows, and responsibility for connections to electricity, water, and sewage systems.

As a result of this project, 52 families whose houses could not be repaired owned new, dignified homes in which to live.

Family Story

In August 2014, Abdullah, his wife Rana, and 13 extended family members crowded onto a single tractor at 3 AM, and drove east. They had received word that the Islamic State (IS) was quickly advancing toward their village.

“We travelled only with our clothes,” says Abdullah.

He left behind his home and a small plot of land in Qarqasha, a village in the Ninewa Plains region of northern Iraq, where he practiced animal husbandry.

Over the next three years, Abdullah and his family moved four times, with Abdullah working as a shepherd tending other people’s sheep in exchange for food and a place to sleep.

“Often it was fifteen of us sharing one room,” he recalls. “Our kids were constantly sick.”

In April 2017, after Qarqasha was retaken from IS control, Abdullah moved back with his family and found their home had been destroyed during a military airstrike. A relative offered them refuge in one room of a mud house in the village, which was also severely damaged. Abdullah worried constantly about his three children and their health, living in such conditions.

In summer 2018, CRS contractors began working with Abdullah on his land to construct a TCHU consisting of a living room, kitchen, and bathroom. The structure was designed in close coordination with Abdullah to ensure he and his family had the safe, habitable living space necessary to return to their property and begin re-establishing their lives. In the future, when Abdullah has the means and resources, he can expand his TCHU to become one room in a larger home.

Abdullah and his family moved into the TCHU in October 2018.

“When we returned, we only needed a roof to protect us,” he says. “When I heard about [the CRS house project] it was a dream for us.”

Since moving home, Abdullah has resumed raising animals in the village and has begun rebuilding a life for himself and his family.

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