Iraqi American Diasporic Philanthropic Remittances to Iraqi Refugees in Jordan: Past Projects and Potential for Future Partnerships

*Caroline Blayney*¹

---

¹ Caroline Blayney was a J. William Fulbright Fellow to Jordan from 2009-10 and is currently with the Danish Refugee Council in Iraq.
Abstract

Following the 2003 American-led invasion and ensuing sectarian fighting, many Iraqis have sought refuge in Jordan. As of 2010, it is estimated that up to half a million Iraqis reside in Jordan. In response to the invasion and refugee crisis, some members of the Iraqi American diaspora have sought ways to contribute to the support of refugees. In the United States, members of the Iraqi American diaspora have created philanthropic organizations to help meet the assistance needs of these Iraqi refugees. These organizations hold mandates for promoting educational exchange, poverty alleviation, and medical aid. Founded and funded in the United States, they have not only assisted Iraqis in exile but also have fostered community and relationships amongst members of the Iraqi diaspora. By examining established diasporic philanthropy organizations and their mechanisms for providing assistance to refugees, conclusions can be drawn about what component factors are important to leverage and sustain these organizations and their work. This deeper understanding of the Iraqi diaspora’s work in Jordan reveals the challenges diaspora organizations can face in Jordan’s institutional environment as well as their potential as partners for international aid organizations.

Diaspora Development and Assistance

The study of transnationalism and the diaspora is a developing field of research. Often combining multiple academic disciplines, its aim is to better understand how individuals and diaspora groups relate to their place of origin or ancestry. These connections can be economic, social, and political. However, they frequently are overlapping and varied. Transfers of money, social capital, time, and information flow between groups as well as individuals throughout the world, not just the country of origin. Transfers are as diverse as the groups or individuals from which they originate and vary by destination. Because of the new prominence of transfers to and from diaspora groups, academics, policymakers, and development practitioners have begun examining patterns to better understand how, why and through what means diasporas engage in transnational activities.

The potential of diasporas as partners for development has recently received academic attention. This concept is premised on the understanding that members of the diaspora have an advanced knowledge of the internal factors in their country of origin which can be shared to design more effective international development (i). Therefore, diasporans or diaspora organizations can partner or inform international aid research, planning, and programming in their country of origin. Such partnerships between diasporans or diaspora organizations and international organizations can link common programs, co-fund projects, or provide support and capacity-building (ii), (iii).

The role of the diaspora in conflict and post conflict reconstruction is also a valuable topic for current study. Specifically, in regards to this research are questions concerning remittances as forms of livelihoods or assistance for those in exile. The vast majority of countries currently experiencing post-war transitions are “highly dependent” on remittances (iv) as are groups such as internally displaced persons and refugees who are left vulnerable after conflicts with their livelihoods threatened. In protracted cases of exile, remittances can provide a vital source of income and ameliorate life conditions (v) Savage and Harvey make the case that humanitarian actors should better understand remittance patterns, delivery, and ruptures in conflicts to inform...
their own work\textsuperscript{vi} and to be aware of specific resulting vulnerabilities. Under consideration in the case studies presented here are two Iraqi diaspora organizations supporting refugees in Jordan. Therefore, this research is situated in the larger context of the diaspora as partners for international development and assistance as well as diaspora support of those in exile.

**Diasporic Organizations and Philanthropy: Key Terms**

The term diaspora refers to a group of people (diasporans) who live outside their country of origin, but who maintain linkages to that country\textsuperscript{vii}. This simple definition is expanded on by Scheffer: “Modern diasporas are ethnic minority groups of migrant origins residing and acting in host countries but maintaining strong sentimental and material links with their countries of origin – their homelands.” \textsuperscript{iv} Membership in a diaspora requires both a heritage of migration as well as active engagement with others in either the country of origin or settlement.

Just as a diaspora member’s identity can be grounded in multiple sites of belonging, so too are diasporas usually heterogeneous; comprised of multiple groups in terms of generation, gender, religion, class, or clan. In this research, the term diasporan refers to a person who either originated, or whose ancestry can be traced, to the modern territory of Iraq. Additionally, a diasporan in this context actively engages with people of this background in either the country of origin or in settlement. The Iraqi diaspora is heterogeneous, with individuals and groups identifying along varied religious and ethnic lines. Additionally, the Iraqi diaspora is “layered by periods of out movement from Iraq, including both exiles and voluntary migrants.” \textsuperscript{ix}

Remittances are transfers sent between the diaspora and the country of origin. They can take the form of financial, social, or human capital as well as information. The majority of remittances are private or are sent to individuals from diasporans.\textsuperscript{x} Alternatively, collective remittances from diaspora groups often have a philanthropic agenda and are intended for public use.\textsuperscript{xi} The greater part of remittances examined herein are monetary and are given by diaspora groups with a philanthropic aim. However, remittances of time and information are also present in the findings.

Philanthropy is the voluntary giving of goods, services, or social capital from private actors for public purposes.\textsuperscript{xii} Thus to use Johnson’s framework, we can understand diaspora philanthropy as characterized by: “1) charitable giving from individuals who reside outside their homeland, who 2) maintain a sense of identity with their home country, 3) give to causes or organizations in that country, and 4) give for public benefit” \textsuperscript{xiii}. Even though the two organizations presented below channel remittances to Iraqis in exile, the above definition is still relevant as transfers for civic means flow from the diaspora to those at home or near in settlement.

What does the term ‘diasporic organization’ mean in this context? Within the literature on transnationalism and diaspora, typologies have been created to categorize different kinds of diasporic groups based on their purpose and means of cohesion. Moya offers what he calls a generic definition of voluntary associations as “secondary organizations that exist between the primary links of kinship and the equally non-voluntary arrangements of tertiary institutions like the state.” \textsuperscript{xiv} In response to the vague nature of definitions such as ‘association’ and ‘immigrant’, he offers a set of categories based on the defining characteristics of the group. In the context of this study, ‘hometown associations’ is the most adequate definition.
Moya describes the actions of hometown associations in two ways. Their first purpose is to “preserve and promote connections with the area of origin” through civic projects.\(^{(iv)}\) Secondly, hometown associations offer spaces for migrants to interact and socialize in the country of settlement.\(^{(vi)}\) Waldinger et al. describe hometown associations as fostering social ties “here” and development “there.”\(^{(vii)}\) The organizations presented below perform both of these functions. Other definitions of hometown associations require that the civic projects be carried out in a specific region or locality by immigrants from that same area.\(^{(viii)}\) The organizations in this research do not remit directly to the founders and members’ specific place of origin. Since remittances go to Iraqis in general, I chose to employ “diasporic organization” instead of “hometown organization” to better fit the organization in this study.

This paper is divided into two sections. The first examines four organizations founded by Iraqi Americans. This section explores the purpose and structure of the organizations, their function, and fundraising efforts. It discusses the motivations of the founding members. The second part of the paper explores the potential and the limits to diaspora engagement in the institutional environment in Jordan. This section brings to light the obstacles for diaspora organizations, yet how successful partnerships with international and local NGOs have fostered activities.

This paper is not a comprehensive survey of the Iraqi diaspora and their remitting patterns. Additionally, it does not focus on the ‘here’ effects of the organizations in the United States; further study is required to fully understand the impact these organizations have on the Iraqi diaspora and if philanthropic organizations become sites for bridging within the diaspora. Little has been published on the Iraqi American diaspora with relation to remittances. The remitting patterns (both public and private) and motivations of the Iraqi diaspora are also areas for future study.

Of the four organizations considered in this research only one, the Chaldean Federation of America, is non-sectarian. Considering the religious make up of Iraq and the Iraqi diaspora as a whole, it is valuable to examine diaspora philanthropy organized around religious establishments, particularly Islamist charity. Such organizations are not included in this study because I did not encounter any in the course of my research. However, this is not evidence of their absence.

**Methodology**

Both Rally for Iraq and the Chaldean Federation of America’s Adopt-A-Refugee-Family Program were selected as case studies for their mandates and operational status. Of the four organizations which fit the criteria for diasporic philanthropic organization, Rally for Iraq and the Adopt-A-Refugee-Family Program are the most developed in terms of carrying out their mandate.

Research was conducted from December 2009 to September 2010 under a 2009-2010 J. William Fulbright Fellowship. More than 45 interviews were held in Jordan, New York, Detroit, and via telephone to other locations in the United States. Personal and telephone interviews were conducted with members of the Iraqi diaspora, Iraqi refugees and migrants in Amman, international non-government organizations, and participants in diaspora-led initiatives. Contacts were made through snowball sampling and all interviews were semi-structured. An attempt was made to survey donors. However, only two responses from over 500 surveys distributed to Rally for Iraq’s donor base were received. Therefore, this last source of information was not taken into
account in the final analysis.\textsuperscript{(xix)} All key informants were offered the opportunity to read the final version of this paper and make comments.

**Iraqis in Jordan**

It is estimated that up to half a million Iraqis have sought refuge in Jordan since the American-led invasion in 2003, though this number is highly debated between the Government of Jordan (GoJ) and the international community. These exiles joined Iraqis who had previously settled in Jordan and those who, for economic and physical security purposes, circulated between Iraq and Jordan. \textsuperscript{(xx)} As Jordan is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention, Iraqis are not recognized by the Government of Jordan (GoJ) as refugees. Rather, they are considered 'Arab guests' per Jordanian law. Yet, a 1998 Memorandum of Understanding with GoJ allows UNHCR to recognize Iraqis as refugees on a prima facie basis since February 2007. This affords the international community space to provide limited refugee rights such as nonrefoulement and refugee status determination while durable solutions are enacted.

The Iraqi displacement has become a protracted crisis. Safe and dignified return to Iraq is not currently possible and it is not likely to become an option in the near future. \textsuperscript{(xxi)} The GoJ has made it clear that local integration will not be a possibility for Iraqis.\textsuperscript{(xxii)} While third country resettlement is the preferred solution of the UNHCR, the majority of Iraqi refugees will not have access because of the limited number of opportunities relative to the total refugee population.

The GoJ has allowed Iraqis to attend primary and secondary school and to access Jordanian health facilities at the level of an uninsured Jordanian. Aside from the limited few who have the monetary resources to secure residency permits from the GoJ, the majority of Iraqis are not able to work legally in Jordan. Therefore the vast majority must work illegally or rely on remittances or support from the international community to meet basic needs in exile. According to the 2007 FAFO household survey, 41.3 percent of families Iraqi families in Jordan received transfers of income from Iraq and 22.3 percent of families received transfers of income from outside of Jordan or Iraq. Subsequent studies have shown that the Iraqis’ insecure legal status, as well as lack of access to livelihoods has left them increasingly vulnerable within their host community.\textsuperscript{(xxiii)}

With savings and remittances reportedly dwindling and a lack of access to legal livelihoods in Jordan, the majority of Iraqis are left in an increasingly vulnerable position. Furthermore, while young adults and professionals live without access to the formal economy, many of their skills and knowledge atrophy.

**Iraqis in America**

The Iraqi diaspora in America is comprised of diverse ethno-religious groups, voluntary and economic migrants, exiles from previous wars and internal politics as well as recently resettled refugees. The 2009 US Census reported that 101,163 Iraqis (identified by race) lived in the United States.\textsuperscript{(xxiv)} The Iraqi diaspora in the United States includes Sunnis, Shi'ites, Kurds, Assyrians, and Chaldeans. Large Iraqi communities have been established in Detroit, Chicago, San Diego, Nashville, and Los Angeles.\textsuperscript{(xxv)} In Detroit, the Iraqi population is majority Catholic \textsuperscript{(xxvi)} and has a large Chaldean presence.
The heterogeneous nature of the Iraqi diaspora is due to patterns of both forced and voluntary migration from Iraq as well as ethnic and religious affiliations. Al-Ali employs the term “layered” to describe this diversity of migrants in the diaspora (xxvii). The diaspora originated in the 1940s when Iraqis arrived in the United States to pursue degrees, eventually settling and bringing over family members. This initial migration spurred further economic and political migration (xxviii). Political changes within Iraq, two wars, and international sanctions pushed Iraqis from their country into the diaspora (xxix).

Some of the Iraqis displaced by the 2003 American-led and its violent aftermath have been resettled to the United States and other third countries. In 2009, the United States accepted 17,000 Iraqi refugees; an increase from 2006 when it accepted only 202. This dramatic increase was the result of the Refugee Crisis Act of 2008 (xxx). The International Rescue Committee found that recently resettled refugees generally have encountered great difficulty finding employment due to the economic downturn. Post-traumatic stress disorder and other medical issues also negatively affect some resettled refugees’ ability to meet their basic needs (xxxi).

Outside of Al-Ali’s work on the Iraqi diaspora, little scholarly research has been conducted on the social relationships between Iraqis and whether or not bridging now occurs between the diverse groups that comprise the Iraqi diaspora.

**Iraqi Diasporic Philanthropic Organizations**

The following diaspora organizations are interviewed for this research project: Rally for Iraq, Chaldean Federation of America: Adopt-A-Refugee-Family Program, Iraqi American Higher Education Foundation, and Iraqi Medical Sciences Association. These organizations have differing mission statements and purposes (please see Figure 1), yet they are all involved in meeting the educational, medical, and financial needs of Iraqis both in Iraq and those in exile in neighboring countries. Through social and fundraising events, email networks and annual conferences, these organizations connect Iraqi diasporans nationally and internationally.

Both the Iraqi Medical Sciences Association (IMSA) and the Iraqi American Higher Education Foundation (IAHEF) are organizations founded by the Iraqi-American diaspora to facilitate professional and social connections among the diaspora as well as peers in Iraq. Additionally, both are engaged in philanthropic activities. IMSA was founded in the late 1990s to: build a network of Iraqi doctors and scientists in the United States; to promote social, academic, and professional ties; to organize humanitarian projects abroad. Annual conferences and quarterly newsletters keep members connected and involved. IAHEF was founded in 2009 by a member of the Iraqi diaspora during his time as a Franklin Fellow with the US Department of State. The organization maintains a database of Iraqi academics and provides an online network for Iraqi and non-Iraqi professors. By connecting peers, the website plans to promote professional exchange, partnerships for research, and collaboration on resources or grants. IAHEF’s founder stated that a key to resurrecting Iraq’s education system is the “effort to harness members of an Iraqi diaspora that includes Muslims, Christians, and Jews,” and he optimistically asserts that, “this will not be hard.” (xxxii)
Iraqi Diasporic Philanthropic Organizations: Case Studies

Rally for Iraq

In response to the 2003 American-led invasion, three second-generation Iraqi Americans came together to create Rally for Iraq. Seeking a way to help from their positions in the United States, they set out to create a grassroots organization to support youth education. This scholarship fund for Iraqi students provides funding to pursue higher education in the United States. The founders believe that a long-term educational initiative will reduce the negative effects on education and human capital resulting from the 2003 invasion. Rally for Iraq has built an endowment large enough to sponsor its first Iraqi student for the 2011 American academic year, and to hire one of the founders as full time staff.

Since the start, the three founders of Rally for Iraq have continued to take leading roles in fundraising and programming. They are supported by a four-person board of directors comprised of prominent Iraqi American professionals and academics. The team came together in 2007 and received non-profit status in the same year. Lacking a central office, members connected through the web or conference calls and meetings in Boston, New York, and Washington, D.C. Until recently, all team members volunteered their time in addition to their full time employment or studies.

Rally for Iraq’s goal is to offer between 5 and 20 scholarships a year. To apply for these scholarships, Iraqi students must be currently enrolled in a graduate degree program within the United States. Criteria are based on academic achievement and need. Rally for Iraq publicizes the application process on their website. Through connections with university professors in Iraq and neighboring countries, they have begun to get the word out to Iraqi students about their scholarship opportunities.

Fundraising for the endowment has been a central activity for the founders. The effort began in 2007 by selling Iraqi themed vintage tee-shirts and hosting an Iraqi film festival. The founders also promoted Rally for Iraq at events such as the Arab American Festival and the Iraqi Medical Sciences Association convention. Through personal contacts, a newly created website, and social media such as Facebook, they built a network of supporters and donors. At the start, the founders reached out to their family and friends. Over time, their network grew and they have sought funding from corporations and foundations. Their donor base is still a “hodgepodge” with the majority being one time donations.

While they do not request information about or track the background of their donors, their general sense is that Arab Americans and Iraqi Americans make up only a minority of contributions and the majority come from non-Arab or non-Iraqi Americans. The organization’s hope is that, after granting the first scholarship, their legitimacy will be established and they will receive more donations.

Fundraising events provide an invaluable opportunity to promote Rally for Iraq and to bring donors together. Events have been held in New York and Chicago. The first such event was a dinner in New York’s West Village neighborhood, where Iraqi friends of the founders donated the venue and food. At an evening gathering in summer 2010, also in New York, members of the Iraq donor
community were joined by recently resettled Iraqi refugees. This event provided space to “build community between the two groups,” which one of the founders called, “unexpected and lovely.”

Rally for Iraq has also partnered with Iraqi artists as a fundraising mechanism and a way to increase visibility. In the summer of 2010, the organization collaborated with Iraqi artist Wafaa Bilal. The Rally for Iraq website recounts:

Together, RFI and Bilal aim to raise $105,000 in charitable donations dedicated to the Rally for Iraq Scholarship Endowment. The fundraiser will consist of Bilal tattooing 105,000 dots on his back to commemorate 105,000 Iraqi and American lives lost during the war. Bilal is asking donors to match each tattoo with a one-dollar contribution to Rally for Iraq. This art-inspired fundraising effort will be exhibited live on the web at WafaaBilal.com and RallyforIraq.org as well as at the studios of the Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts for 24 hours. Names of Iraqi civilians who have lost their lives will be read for the duration of this commemorative exhibit. (xxxiii)

This event was covered by The New York Times (xxxiv) and the publicity enabled Rally for Iraq to promote their work and bring attention to on-going issues in Iraq to a much wider audience.

The founders expressed multiple motivations for their work, including pride in their Iraqi heritage and desire to aid in the reconstruction of Iraq. During an event at Boston College, one of the founders related her feeling helpless and powerless as an Iraqi American in the wake of 9/11 and the 2003 invasion. She remarked “my family are not strangers to war, however, I am.” For her, establishing Rally for Iraq met her need to “find a way to do something” from “here” to “help people there.” She sought to counter inaccuracies presented about Arab Americans and Muslim Americans present in American discourse following 9/11. (xxxv) It was important for her to find a way to reasonably respond to the crisis from her position in the United States and to leverage her knowledge of American culture and the education system for philanthropic aims. Another of the founders spoke about wanting to make an impact from his position in the United States. His gratitude for his own education and professional success was a driving force behind his philanthropic work because he wanted to make it possible for other Iraqis to have similar opportunities.

Chaldean Federation of America: Adopt-A-Refugee-Family Program

The Chaldean Federation of America’s Adopt-A-Refugee-Family Program (AARF) was established in 2007 to assist Iraqi refugee families displaced by the 2003 invasion and sectarian fighting. Founded in Michigan, the program supports those in exile in Jordan, Syria, and Turkey. Since its inception, the program has been successful in raising funds and transferring these directly to those in need abroad. In Jordan, the distribution of funds is carried out through a partnership with the Jesuit House in Amman. Even though the program was founded under the Chaldean Federation’s ‘programs and services’, AARF receives donations from, and provides assistance to, both Chaldeans and non-Chaldeans.

An Iraqi-Chaldean businessman located in the Detroit area founded AARF in reaction to the events unfolding in Iraq post-2003 and the continued flight of Chaldeans from Iraq. In coordination with the Chaldean Federation of America, he traveled to Jordan and Syria in 2007 to assess the situation
of refugees and to recruit partner organizations. During this trip he established contact with the Jesuit House in Amman. The program’s founder is AARF’s chairman. Additionally, the organization is supported by a committee of 15 members. All AARF staff members volunteer their time.

AARF provides cash assistance to Iraqis in exile in order to “re-establish their security and livelihood.” To date, the program has successfully sent over 1.4 million USD to Iraqi refugees in Jordan and Syria. Funds are collected in the United States with all overhead costs covered by the Chaldean Federation. For donations to Jordan, funds are pooled and transferred to the Jesuits in Boston who transfer the amount to the Jesuits in Amman, who oversee local distribution of funds.

The relationship with the Jesuit House in Jebel Hussein, Amman plays a central role in executing AARF’s mission. One of the Jesuit fathers, who was born and trained in Iraq before fleeing to Jordan, works directly with the founder of AARF. At the start of the program the father assembled a list of families in need. Initially, these were families that he came in contact with at services or through home visits offered by the Jesuit House. Over time, word spread; referred by Church members, others arrived at the Jesuit House to request assistance. At first, the families were majority Chaldean or Iraqi Christian. As the displacement continues and refugees have learned of the assistance, non-Christian Iraqis now seek and are granted assistance. However, the father makes it clear that AARF’s first priority is to help Iraqi Christian families.

Each month the AARF in Jordan provides approximately 172 families with 100 to 125 USD. The cash is used for living expenses, food and non-food items, medication, or hospital fees. AARF does not require the families to track or account for their usage of the funds. A small pool of cash for emergencies is maintained by the founder, which the father can request in special instances. The father reports that AARF funds fill the gaps in INGO or GoJ activities. He reports that it helps refugees “to keep going.”

The father retains a static list of families who receive monthly allowances. All recipients of AARF funds must be registered with UNHCR. When a family is resettled or deemed to no longer require assistance, they are taken off the list and another family takes their place. The father and two Jesuit nuns monitor the families through home visits and informal information networks. He says that occasionally there are disputes over who is given a place on the list and that in some instances, members of disputed families will call from the United States to make a case for their relatives. When requested, the father sends letters or pictures of recipient families to donors in the United States.

AARF relies on the father’s judgment to decide which families are most in need. The deciding factors are his overall sense of the community needs and how the families spend their allowances. He explains that his first principle is: “Anyone who comes is like the poor beggar. Some cases have enough, some need more; we try our best to determine this.” However, “whatever their case – if they come, they need.”

AARF has established an informal partnership with Jesuit Refugee Services (JRS) through the Jesuit House. Many who receive cash assistance from AARF also benefit from services of the JRS. Among other forms of assistance, JRS offers community activities including an after school program for children, the “Family Visits Program,” and monthly get-togethers for the elderly. Most
beneficiaries are Christians from Amman, Hashmi Al-Shmali, Jebel Hussein and Marka. However, non-Christians also are welcomed and frequently attend events as well as financial assistance. AARF’s informal partnership with JRS allows the Jesuit House to meet refugees’ community, monetary, and other needs. The father also refers families with health problems to CARITAS for treatment.

Funding for AARF financial assistances comes from donors in the United States. The founder began appealing for donations in 2007, starting with his personal contacts: his business network; clients; friends; the church; the Chaldean community; and the wider, local community. His ability to raise funds rested, on the strength of his relationships and his standing in the community. People knew that he had a solid reputation and that they could trust him with money. In the last two-and-a-half years, he has worked to maintain this reputation within the community.

The majority of funds for AARF are given in small amounts by private individuals. Some of these are donated on a monthly or periodical basis. On average there are 2,000 donations received per month. This amounts to roughly 40,500 USD a month in total. However, as a result of the recent global financial crisis, average funding levels have decreased. AARF hosts community fundraising events, such as shows for children. Local businesses in Michigan have also partnered with AARF to offer special deals or discounts with proceeds donated. The founder remarks that there is a high level of community support for AARF from local schools, businesses, and families. While AARF does not track donor background, it estimates that 70 percent of funding comes from Chaldeans and 30 percent from the larger community.

AARF is committed to 100 percent of donations being transferred directly to the adopted refugee family and to transparent transfers. These two points came up repeatedly in the course of interviews with staff and are very visible in AARF promotional materials and website content. This focus on transparency and direct allocation of funds appears to be a kind of second mission statement of AARF.

In fact, the relationship between the founder and the father is extremely strong and mutually respectful. The father says of the founder: “He raises a lot of money and distributes all of it. None of it is squandered. I have a lot of respect for him. He is trustworthy with money, which is rare. In these parts of the world a lot of money is squandered or goes missing. He is very careful.”

Spiritual and humanitarian commitments compel the founder and Jesuit father to carry out this work. The founder cites spiritual motivations as the predominant reason for beginning AARF. As well, after the 2003 invasion, he was moved by the experiences and persecution of Iraqi Christians. He asserts that Christians “paid a heavy price for the invasion.” In learning of their “dire need” he came up with the idea for AARF. The father also cites religious motivations: “Whatever we cannot do, God will complement. We do our best and leave the rest in His hands, in God and His work.” Interestingly, he says that he is able to carry out this work in the community in Amman because he is perceived as neutral. He believes this is partially due to his mixed background: his father is of Latin origin, his mother Armenian, and maternal grandfather Chaldean. This has given him a “balanced way of thinking” and taught him to “never pick sides.”
Themes and Trends

Strong and respected leadership plays a large role in the success of these organizations. In all cases, leadership relies on prominent community standing to draw donations and membership over periods of time. Accountability for funds and activities is important within the current climate of heightened scrutiny on the leaders and organizations by donors and the outside community. In response, the leaders appear to emphasize their distinguishing characteristics such as education, standing in the community, or professional achievements.

This comes across in conversation and also in written materials. In the case of AARF, the founder is featured in a Chaldean church publication as a community leader and humanitarian. In an opinion piece for The New York Times, the president of the Iraqi-American Higher Education Fund sites his recent work with the US Department of State and his Franklin Fellowship. Additionally, leaders and board members are well-connected to Iraqis in the United States and Iraq as well as neighboring countries. These connections appear essential to fundraising but also to implementation of programs. Therefore, leadership with distinguished community standing and extensive personal connections are essential elements for organizations to achieve their objectives.

Another common theme raised was the difficulty of initial fundraising. Some interviewees mentioned a perceived trend that their donors, members of the Iraqi community both in Jordan and the United States, approach donating to organizations with an abundance of caution. However, the more successful or established the program, it is perceived by some, the less reticent Iraqis are to donate. It is worthy to note that of the two case study organizations, both have thus far received a substantial amount of private donations from outside the Iraqi diaspora. Additionally, interviewees related difficulties in fundraising due to the global economic crisis.

Throughout the research process, it was frequently noted that awareness of the existence and work of Iraqi diasporic organizations in Jordan was not common; in some cases Iraqi diasporic organizations in the United States did not know of one another. Overall, it appears that these organizations have, thus far, a relatively low profile. This may be because most of these groups have been founded relatively recently and are still in the initial phases of formation or implementation. However, this could also indicate a secondary challenge to these organizations. The sharing of information, best practices, and outside funding opportunities is crucial among organizations pursuing common goals. A heightened awareness of one another and greater representation in the wider international NGO community is beneficial.

Iraqi Diasporic Philanthropic Organizations and the Institutional Environment in Jordan

At this moment in the Iraqi refugee crisis, what role can diaspora organizations play in the Jordanian institutional environment and what benefits could partnerships bring to both diaspora organizations and international NGOs? As stated above, the refugee crisis has become protracted with these populations becoming increasingly vulnerable. Concurrently, international aid money is waning. In this context, established Iraqi diasporic organizations could take on a more prominent
role in aid provision through partnerships. As de Haas notes, partnering with a mobilized diaspora can be mutually beneficial to both the diasporic organizations and to development actors. In fact, in the case of Jordan, UNHCR made the recommendation for partnerships with international NGOs as the best way forward for diaspora organizations. This next section will further examine the Jordanian context and explore some of the barriers for entry facing diasporic organizations, discuss successful past partnerships and the mutual benefits, as well as draw conclusions about future potential.

Since 2006, when the majority of Iraqis arrived in Jordan, international aid has targeted the gaps where GoJ cannot provide assistance. UNHCR is mandated with the responsible for the registration and reception of refugees as well as providing cash assistance to those in need. UNHCR also coordinates efforts with international and local NGOs as well as Jordanian community-based organizations. Programs for Iraqi refugees and vulnerable members of the host community provide much needed assistance in the areas of health and psychosocial care, formal and informal education, vocational training, community support events, legal aid, cash and non-cash items, and support programs to counter negative coping mechanisms targeting women and children. To these ends, there are many NGOs established in Jordan with the knowledge and capacity to assist Iraqis which could serve as valuable partners to diaspora organizations. However, international donor support is waning and programs are being reduced. In this climate, diaspora organizations can provide valuable funds and technical expertise. Partnerships with NGOs could facilitate the entry of diaspora organizations into the institutional environment. Assisting Iraqis in Jordan, while simultaneously meeting the needs of all stakeholders has proven difficult for many NGOs. Sassoon notes that NGOs must work towards a “delicate balancing act between helping refugees, satisfying the national government’s rules and regulations and dealing with the local popular reaction.” Furthermore, burden sharing with the host community and government has taken a central role in assistance to Iraqis in Jordan. Because the majority of Iraqis settled in the capital city of Amman, they have been highly visible to their hosts and require equivalent services.

At the onset of the refugee crisis, Iraqis were commonly perceived by the host community as a burden on the infrastructure and natural resources of Jordan prompting the GoJ to call upon the international community to share the responsibility of meeting their needs. Financial assistance has been provided directly to Jordanian ministries for capacity building and improved service delivery. Additionally, organizations which assist Iraqi refugees are required to also support vulnerable members of the host community. The Jordan Ministry of Social Development requires that, of assistance provided to Iraqi refugees, at least 20 percent must be made available to service vulnerable Jordanians. In fact, many implementing partners set a quota of 25 to 50 percent for such assistance to vulnerable hosts. For small or new diaspora organizations, supporting vulnerable communities in addition to refugees is a barrier. Thus partnership with a regional or international partner which is registered and experienced in navigating the institutional environment is beneficial to diasporic organizations.

UNHCR Jordan recognizes this and recommends partnerships between diaspora organizations and established NGOs as a way forward. In the past, UNHCR Jordan has not had a Memorandum of Understanding or partnered directly with any Iraqi diaspora group. Instead, they recommend that
access to work in Jordan is best achieved through partnerships with those already in place. Two such partnerships were examined in the course of this research; both proved mutually beneficial for the diaspora organization as well as the NGO.

The Adopt-A-Refugee-Family program has been successful in partnering with the Jesuit Refugee Services and Jesuit House. The partnership facilitates the dispersal of funds from the United States into the community with a guarantee of orderliness and transparency because it is subject to a well-established, built-in monitoring and evaluation mechanism. Jesuit Refugee Services and the Jesuit House, who reported reluctance at being perceived as sites of monetary assistance, have been able to provide a separate entity to meet this need of refugees. This partnership allows both parties to meet their respective objectives.

In the summer of 2009, the Medical Partnership Project for Refugees in Syria and Jordan facilitated health exchange programs for doctors in the United States. The program was instituted by a professor at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. and a second generation Iraqi American who was, at the time, a Fulbright Fellow in Syria. The team recruited doctors from the Iraqi Medical Science Association and from other connections both within and outside of the Iraqi American diaspora. Eighteen doctors and nurses traveled to Syria as well as 15 to Jordan to provide workshops and lectures for local medical professionals and to host clinics for refugees.

The Project partnered with local and international NGOs in Jordan. These included Jordan Health Aid Society, Noor Al-Hussein Foundation, International Medical Corps, UNHCR, and CARE International. These organizations helped arrange and provide logistical support for capacity building training with Jordanian and Iraqi staff. NGOs also provided contacts within the refugee population, and supplied translators or facilitators for the duration of the program. Some also provided office space or other equipment.

The partnerships allowed doctors the access to local practitioners which they required through introductions and guidance. Some participants in the Syria program commented that without the partnerships, they would not have been able to carry out their work. Others who did not speak Arabic or who were not of Iraqi descent described their Iraqi counterparts at NGOs and those participating in the program as essential to navigating cultural and linguistic barriers.

While partnership can be mutually beneficial, issues were raised by some NGOs interviewed in Jordan concerning their barriers or limitations. Some were concerned in general about the origin of the funds raised by diaspora organizations. It was explained that some NGOs in Jordan felt under scrutiny to account for their sources of funding. Therefore, they would need a high level of guarantee as to the reputation of the source and intention of funds before they could be accepted. Additionally, some NGOs are mandated to not discriminate between beneficiaries based on race or religion. It was raised that if the diaspora organization had specifically targeted beneficiaries based on competing criteria, this could be problematic. Finally, and particularly for the smaller NGOs, their limited funding or staff size could make it difficult to sponsor or partner with diaspora organizations. If unfunded, the additional time, office space, or staff required could make partnerships unrealistic.

Other issues have come to the fore when assessing potential partnerships. De Haas discusses two points which could be extremely significant in this context. He recommends that double agendas
must be avoided. (xlvii) Shown above, diaspora organizations are under tremendous scrutiny from their donors and the wider community. The leadership of these organizations must take extra care to maintain their standing and reputation. Partner development actors must be aware of this and upfront in expectations and agendas. High levels of trust will most likely be important. As de Hass remarks also notes, capacity building or support for diaspora networks by development actors must strike the “delicate balance between strengthening and patronizing diaspora organizations.” (xlviii) Iraqi diaspora organizations have taken impressive steps and must be recognized for this if future partnerships are to occur.

Partnerships with the Iraqi diaspora in Jordan, if approached correctly and if mutually beneficial, could be an opportunity for sustained support in the context of diminishing funding and protracted urban crisis. Thus far, the diaspora organizations presented in this research have assisted refugees and NGOs with funding, professional knowledge as well as educational and medical support. This diaspora philanthropy is a unique, albeit minimal, form of burden sharing from the diaspora to the Jordanian government and community. If these diaspora organizations can continue to raise funds and grow, they could become important stakeholders given their funding sources, networks and connections, and vested interest.

Conclusion

In response to the 2003 American-led invasion of Iraq and the ensuing sectarian conflict, some members of the Iraqi American diaspora have mobilized and establishing organizations to offer assistance. These organizations provide aid to those in exile in neighboring countries and to those remaining in Iraq. To date, these organizations have provided education, financial, and medical aid. Beyond assisting those abroad, the organizations utilize online networking and fundraising activities as sites for collective activity and action amongst the US diaspora. However, more research on this component of networking is required in order to better understand its impact.

Since their inception, both Rally for Iraq and the Adopt-A-Refugee-Family Program have successfully raised funds to support refugees in Iraq and elsewhere. Events and campaigns have sought donations from Iraqis and non-Iraqis in the United States. Both rely on the respected position of their leadership as well as the personal connections of their founders and board members to successfully fundraise and carry out their work abroad. Furthermore, and pertaining to all the organizations interviewed in this study, their relatively low profile are a secondary challenge in efforts to fundraise or partner with international NGOs.

In the context of assistance provision to Iraqis in Jordan, diaspora organizations have begun to successfully partner with international and local NGOs. These partnerships have been invaluable to both parties in mobilizing funds as well as supporting programs and activities. Partnerships could be valuable for other diaspora organizations who are interested in operating in Jordan. UNHCR recommends this as the best way forward and indeed evidence in this paper supports the importance of partnerships. However, the evidence also points to the burgeoning capacity in the Iraqi American diaspora, as well as some groups’ targeted beneficiaries. If partnerships can be mutually beneficial and respectful of each organization’s mandate and abilities, then this mechanism is highly valuable. Diaspora philanthropy can take on a more central role in assistance provision to Iraqis as their exile remains protracted and their vulnerabilities increase.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mission Statement</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Area of Operation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Iraqi Medical Sciences Association</strong></td>
<td>1997/1998</td>
<td>Promote educational endeavors and carry out fundraising for charitable and humanitarian programs.</td>
<td>USA (past work in Jordan &amp; Syria)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Iraqi American Higher Education Foundation</strong></td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Establish online database to allow for Iraqi and American faculty and professionals to network, share funding information, and build peer relationships.</td>
<td>USA, Iraq, Jordan, Syria &amp; Turkey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chaldean Federation of America: Adopt A Refugee Family Program</strong></td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Distribute monthly cash assistance to refugee families and provide emergency funding for special cases.</td>
<td>Middle East</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rally for Iraq Organization</strong></td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Fund Iraqi refugees to study in US colleges.</td>
<td>USA, Iraq, host countries of Iraqi refugees</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table: Iraqi Diasporic Philanthropic Organizations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Founding Date</th>
<th>Founding Members</th>
<th>Membership Size</th>
<th>Area of Operation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Iraq Medical Sciences Association</td>
<td>1997/1998</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>400 to 500</td>
<td>USA (past work in Jordan &amp; Syria)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraqi American Higher Education Foundation</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>USA, Iraq, Jordan, Syria &amp; Turkey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chaldean Federation of America: Adopt A Refugee Family Program</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>1 Founding Member, 15 Person Board, 2 Staff in Jordan</td>
<td>230 Professors</td>
<td>Middle East</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Activities**

- Support relationships among the Iraqi healthcare community in the US.
- Carry out and fundraise for charitable and humanitarian programs.
- Promote educational endeavors.
- Establish online database to allow for Iraqi and American faculty and professionals to network, share funding information, and build peer relationships.
- Distribute monthly cash assistance to refugee families and provide emergency funding for special cases.
- Fund Iraqi refugees to study in US colleges.
Works Cited


Chaldean Federation of America, 2008. 2008 Program Update. [leaflet].


End Notes


xi. Ibid.


xv. Ibid. 848

xvi. Ibid. 849

I would like to thank those who gave their time to this project, especially the founders of the Adopt-A-Refugee Family Program and Rally for Iraq. As well, I am grateful for the time, support, and advice of Lidwien Kaptiejs, Geraldine Chatelard, Jamal Al Jabiri, Yves-Kim Créac’h, and the Fulbright Commission in Jordan. A special thanks to all who read draft versions of this paper.


xxx.


xxxiii. (Adeeb, 2010)

xxxiv. The above comments were taken from Boston College’s program “Growing Up Iraqi in the United States.”

xxxv. There is no Chaldean Church in Amman. Once a week, a Chaldean service is given in a
meeting room of the Jesuit House. The Jesuits have been in Amman since the 1980s.


xli. Ibid., 55


xlvii. Ibid., iii, 92.