

COMMUNITY-BASED RECONCILIATION &
REINTEGRATION IN IRAQ (C2RI):

CONFLICT ANALYSIS 2022



Six Pilot Areas: Al-Qa'im and Habbaniyahh in Anbar; Yethrib and Tuz Khurmato in Salah al-Din; Ayadiyya and Muhalabiya in Ninewa

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GLOSSARY

CBO	Community Based Organization
CCPC	Coexistence and Community Peace Committee
CDC	Communal Dialogue Committee
CEDAW	Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
CSO	Civil Society Organization
C2RI	Community-based Reconciliation & Reintegration in Iraq
DIBs	Disputed Internal Boundaries
EU	European Union
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GBV	Gender Based Violence
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IOM	International Organization for Migration
ISF	Iraqi Security Forces
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
KDP	Kurdistan Democratic Party
LPC	Local Peace Committee
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NIF	Network for Iraqi Facilitators
OIF	Operation Iraqi Freedom
PUK	Patriotic Union of Kurdistan
PMF	Popular Mobilization Forces
PVE	Preventing Violent Extremism
SAD	Salah al-Din Governorate
UN	United Nations
UNAMI	United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNESCWA	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UNOPS	United Nations Office for Project Services
US	United States
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization

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1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Upon request from the Government of Iraq, UNDP Iraq has launched the “Community-based Reconciliation & Reintegration in Iraq” (C2RI) project in 2020 to support the return and reintegration of 4,000 perceived ISIL-affiliated families in Ninewa, Salah al-Din and Al-Anbar Governorates by enhancing the community readiness of and fostering dialogue within the six target communities of Al Qa’im, Habbaniyahh, Muhalabiya, Ayyadiya, Yethrib and Tuz Khurmato to accept the return of these families through tailored MHPSS, livelihoods, PVE and infrastructure rehabilitation programme interventions.

Persons formerly associated with ISIL are at high risk of becoming a permanently stigmatized underclass in Iraq aggravated by unresolved ethnoreligious tensions, a lack of communal trust and weak governance. Displaced women and children, including widows of ISIL combatants face additional challenges such as the threat of sexual exploitation and gender-based violence. Local conflicts, such as access to housing, land, and property as well as insecurity, crime and difficult inter-tribal relations further complicate the situation.

This highly dynamic context in Iraq calls for age, gender, and conflict-sensitive approaches to programming as well as regular reviews and adaptations to remain in sync with the rapidly changing reality in the selected pilot areas. In line with this background, UNDP Social Cohesion has produced this conflict study:

- to analyze the socio-economic, developmental, political, environmental, and security-related factors which serve as

triggers of conflict within the C2RI target locations

- to identify key stakeholders that are key to facilitating positive changes to these triggers of conflict
- to describe potential bottlenecks and risks with regards to the implementation of UNDP-supported interventions in the framework of the C2RI project
- to ultimately present key recommendations that can inform the design of interventions that can foster stability in the targeted areas

Through an inclusive and participatory methodological approach and in close collaboration with 13 field facilitators within the C2RI target areas, the UNDP Social Cohesion team has conducted 30 Focus Group Discussions reaching 394 community members, 90 interviews with key community actors, a targeted online survey reaching additional 413 respondents, one validation workshop session as well as a thorough desk review of secondary sources. This wide-array of qualitative primary data has enabled this study to identify main sectoral conflict drivers/actors and to develop stakeholder-specific policy recommendations to inform the design of key interventions to improve security, enhance community reconciliation, to foster economic growth, to enable the return of IDPs and to ultimately build sustainable peace in the targeted areas.

The overall data has demonstrated that conflict drivers are multi-layered, complex and can vary within the respective target locations. Stakeholders’ dynamics that negatively and positively affect conflict

operate at various levels, both internally within Iraq and externally from neighbouring countries. Thematic conflict drivers that have been identified have however many times been consistent throughout all the target locations.

It has become clear that for the most part, political tensions largely stem from ethnic conflicts of interests and sectarian tensions between the biggest Shia'a & Sunni political blocs, which often also translate into tribal tensions at the local level.

Some respondents have also accused federal and local authorities of following political agendas of their sectarian affiliation. It was highlighted that leading political parties and their tribal allies promote violence and encourage revenge between sectarian groups to serve their political interests.

Related to this, data has shown that particularly rural societies are tribal in nature, in which tribal and religious figureheads hold the most influence and powers. Civil society organizations have often a positive impact serving as mediators, but due to their limited technical experience, authority, and knowledge, they often do not have the capacities to have an evident/long term impact. However, there have been some success stories that could be further developed and duplicated with more advanced methods to adapt them to the current security and political circumstances of the local context.

International community actors have been portrayed to play a mixed role. External interference through regional/international actors is driving conflict through financial and logistical support to political/armed proxies that best serve their own geopolitical interests. Targeted

programmatic approaches of donor countries, humanitarian and development actors however have proven to have a positive role in decreasing tensions and have been received positively by most of the respondents.

The key recommendations for federal government authorities focus on putting in place strategies at the national level which can contribute to developing the justice system and accompanying legal frameworks, enforcing the rule of law, advancing social justice, combatting corruption, and fostering economic development. Furthermore, the federal government plays a key role in fostering partnerships to decrease tensions and develop peace-building mechanisms with international and local stakeholders.

With support from the international community, federal authorities should further focus on implementing social cohesion activities and developing plans on preventing violent extremism and on improving human rights conditions - including women's rights, involving women actively in peace processes, and starting restorative and transitional justice processes, as well as rehabilitation programs that focus on the disarmament and reintegration of former fighters.

Jointly with local public institutions, federal authorities further need to put in place swift and efficient compensation schemes which rank as one of the main obstacles to the return of IDPs. On an economic level, both local and federal authorities need to incentivize investment, create conducive conditions for entrepreneurship and work together with civil society and international partners to build capacities of marginalized groups such as youth and women. Respondents have particularly

highlighted the lack of public support for the agricultural and industrial sector which has served as a breadwinner for many rural communities, particularly in Salah-al-Din, Ninewa and Anbar governorates.

At the local level, corruption and a lack of objective law enforcement have been mentioned as a key driver for deteriorating security conditions within the target locations. Thus, recommendations for local government authorities specifically highlight the need to create a merit-based security system and law enforcement mechanism rather than hiring based on personal relations or sectarian affiliation.

Recommendations for local civil society organizations and academia pointed out in this study focus on strengthening their role as mediators/connectors through which they play a significant part in fostering long-term/sustainable peace planning, restoring communal trust and in supporting the government's transitional justice and reconciliation processes. Relatedly, the international community can play a key role in ensuring effective rule of law by supporting good governance structures and promoting accountability mechanisms and by providing the government with relevant professional technical support based on their needs. Technical support to local/federal authorities is further highly recommended in the areas of anti-corruption, social cohesion/peacebuilding skills and livelihoods/economic growth.

As far as community leaders are concerned, respondents have praised them throughout as one of the most respected actors within the target locations due to their objectivity and due to the nature of societal structures. Thus, related recommendations have amplified the significant role they can play in mediation, developing national dialogue and other peacebuilding activities, while religious leaders can emphasize tolerance and co-existence practices in their programs.

2 PROJECT BACKGROUND

Since 2015, UNDP has been at the forefront of supporting the Government of Iraq in facilitating the return of internally displaced Iraqis by laying the groundwork for rehabilitation in conflict-affected communities and by safeguarding against the resurgence of violence and extremism. Initially, these efforts had been an integral part of UNDP Iraq's Stabilization Pillar before an independent five-year Social Cohesion Programme was launched in 2020. Since its establishment, UNDP's Social Cohesion Programme has successfully facilitated community returns through fostering dialogue and peace agreements, established local peace mechanisms, and closely cooperated with youth and women groups, media, and religious leaders to build peaceful and more cohesive societies throughout Iraq.

Due to its widespread experience on the ground in developing tailored, sustainable, and efficient programmatic responses to address the needs of families with perceived ISIL-affiliation, UNDP launched the "Community-based Reconciliation & Reintegration in Iraq" (C2RI) project in 2020 upon the government's request to support the return and reintegration of 4,000 perceived ISIL-affiliated families in Ninewa, Salah al-Din and Anbar Governorates. In this context, C2RI programming commences with strengthening community readiness to accept the return of these families through increased dialogue, reconciliation, and mediation sessions and by assessing the needs of returnees with a strong focus on women, youth, and vulnerable population groups. After the initial groundwork has been laid, the programme attempts to officialize communal reconciliation efforts

through the development of local peace agreements to facilitate family returns. Afterwards, psychosocial support, PVE programmes, livelihoods and rehabilitation of infrastructure projects are rolled out in parallel targeting both returnees and community members with a minimum of 50% women beneficiaries.

3 INTRODUCTION

The Iraqi Government's and United States-led coalition's fight against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) is only the most recent layer in a long history of violent conflicts that includes former President Saddam Hussein's persecution of Kurds, Shiites and dissidents during the 1980s and 1990s, the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq and overthrow of Hussein's government, the subsequent al-Qaeda-driven insurgency against the U.S. occupation and, most recently, the emergence of ISIL from 2014 – 2017.

In 2015, at the height of its expansion, ISIL controlled 20 Iraqi cities and a population of over 5 million people¹. Contrary to most armed groups, ISIL "governed" its territory and provided the full spectra of essential services, much like provincial and municipal governments would provide under normal circumstances.

Faced with an overwhelming military campaign waged by an array of local and international actors, ISIL lost its last territorial foothold in Iraq in 2017 and Syria in early 2019. In both countries, it has survived by shifting from semi-conventional warfare to hit-and-run insurgency. Estimates are that 10 to 18 thousand fighters still roam Iraqi territory, mostly along the smuggling routes, and pose a continuing security threat to Iraqi citizens, public servants, and security forces. In some areas, ISIL impedes humanitarian access.

The damage caused by the war is immense (estimated to be over US\$ 45 billion for infrastructure only), and internally

displaced around 6 million Iraqis at the time of liberation. The October 2019 IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix data indicates that approximately 75 percent of the internally displaced (4,460,808) have returned. The remaining challenge is finding durable solutions to the protracted displacement of the remaining 1,440,500 IDPs (roughly 80 percent in out-of-camp and 20 percent in-camp settings) as well as the sustainable reintegration of a large part of those who have returned.

According to the Humanitarian Needs Overview, "significant population movements took place in the latter half of 2019 with government-initiated camp closures resulting in significant reductions in in-camp populations, considerable increases in out-of-camp displaced populations and returnees, and movements of people between governorates." Unsuccessful attempts to return are increasingly leading to secondary, out-of-camp displacement. The needs of returnees in areas of origin and out-of-camp IDPs are particularly severe. The rate of return varies considerably between Governorates. Al-Anbar, for example, has a 90 per cent rate of return, with around 151,000 persons still displaced and Salah Al-Din, 79 per cent and around 173,000, respectively. Ninewa has the lowest rate of return, 67 per cent, with around 859,000 persons still displaced.

Persons "formerly associated with ISIL" are at high risk of becoming a permanently stigmatized underclass in the country. Displaced women and children, including widows of ISIL combatants and civilian 'stayers' face additional challenges, including the threat of sexual exploitation

¹ <https://cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/mappingmilitants/profiles/islamic-state>

and violence, with little accountability for perpetrators. The fact that gender-based violence is considered a taboo subject further complicates addressing the problem.

Various reports conclude a trust deficit between communities and security actors continues to exist with differences between urban settings and rural areas. Urban settings experience more fractured social relations and experience a higher sense of insecurity. In rural areas, which are still dependent on more traditional and community-led security mechanisms, there is a greater level of outward contentedness, but also frustration at the lack of governance, which complicates efforts aiming to contribute to social cohesion, including the work of the Community Peace and Dialogue Committees (CDCs).

As consistently described by different research pieces, the situation described above has its roots in unresolved historical and ethno-religious grievances. Local conflicts, such as access to housing, land, and property as well as insecurity, crime and inter-tribal and inter-personal relations further complicate the situation. Micro-conflicts between individuals, communities and the State are extremely important in Iraq, where historically marginalized groups have longstanding grievances that predate the rise of IS by decades. Micro-conflicts are present not only between groups but also at the individual level where some Iraqis have leveraged the conflict dynamics to exact revenge on personal enemies by accusing them – often falsely – of joining or supporting ISIL.

This highly dynamic context in Iraq calls for age, gender, and conflict-sensitive

approaches to programming as well as regular reviews and adaptations to remain in sync with the rapidly changing reality in the selected pilot areas. In line with this, the main objectives of this study lie in analysing the socio-economic, developmental, political, environmental and security-related factors which serve as triggers of conflict within the six target locations, identifying key stakeholders that are key to facilitating positive change to these triggers of conflict, describing potential bottlenecks and risks with regards to the implementation of UNDP-supported interventions; and ultimately presenting key recommendations that can inform the design of interventions that can foster stability in the targeted areas.

4 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

UNDP Iraq utilized a combination of different inclusive and participatory methodological approaches for the purpose of this study, drawing on inputs of local actors from diverse backgrounds and bringing together the theoretical and the practical for data collection.

1. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs): UNDP's Senior Project Officer trained a group of 13 field researchers from the target areas on FGD methods, including design and facilitation. 13 Field Researchers subsequently conducted 5 FGDs for each location (30 overall) with the participation of 394 host community members (325 male, 69 female).
2. Interviews: UNDP's Senior Project Officer trained a group of 13 field researchers from the target areas on interview methods, including designing questions and conducting interviews. Overall, the 13 field researchers conducted 15 interviews for each target location (90 overall/50 male and 40 female) to collect data from key community actors such as IDPs, ISIL affiliated families/individuals, local authorities, low-income households, single female-led households, youth and religious/community leaders.
3. Desk review: A key source of secondary data from trusted and recommended resources and web pages including relevant government institutions. The list of secondary resources can be found in the footnotes of the study.
4. Online Survey: UNDP designed and shared an on-line survey link with over

413 participants reached through the network of the field researchers within the target locations.²

5. Validation Sessions: One validation session was conducted with the FGD facilitators and key informants – including relevant government officials, community leaders, local authorities, and women and youth activists from the target locations, with participation of some members of the general public to ensure agreement on the collected data and to compile inputs and comments in order to finalise the report.

Research activities were prepared for and carried out by the UNDP social cohesion team comprised of the field facilitators and office staff to participate in the process. All members actively participated in preparations as well as regular debriefing and data-processing sessions, in addition to systematized data transfer practices between the office team and the field facilitators, who provided full support during this research phase.

The benefit of generating the primary qualitative data, in addition to using secondary data sources, makes this conflict analysis study unique. The approach used for the data analysis process was designed using inclusive, participatory, and transparent activities.

Additionally, the UNDP team incorporated conflict-sensitivity and gender-mainstreaming practices to contribute to the full process of the research activities and data gathering. Further, this approach delivers evidence-

² The online survey can be accessed [here](#)

based findings and recommendations that emerged from a collective base, rather than from any singular institutional source or perspective.

The social cohesion team's commitment enabled a more integrated perspective on the key issues and dynamics experienced differently by various actors and deepened the understanding of conflict drivers and peace engines.

Although more time and resources were consumed in the research and analysis process, the intention was to produce results that will remain widely credible through a thorough data generation and analysis process, rather than being imposed by any external actor or institution.

5 CONTEXT ANALYSIS

As a first step to identifying conflict drivers, the subsequent section will provide a thorough context analysis aimed at highlighting the socio-economic, political, and security-related background for the respective target locations. This context analysis will serve as a crucial baseline to understand the results of the data gathering phase which will later more profoundly analyze factors that constitute triggers of conflict, map stakeholders that affect tensions in the area and will ultimately identify recommendations to inform the design of UNDP interventions to build sustainable peace and achieve community reconciliation within the target areas.

5.1 NINEWA GOVERNORATE (MUHALABIYA AND AYADIYYA)

Ninewa Governorate is Iraq's third-largest governorate, located in the northwest of Iraq on the border with Syria and adjacent to Dohuk, Erbil, Salah al-Din, and Anbar Governorates. It is the second most populated governorate with the capital Mosul being Iraq's second-largest city. Ninewa Governorate is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious community. Most people identify as Arab Sunni, in addition to a Shia Arab minority however, Ninewa is also home to a significant population of Turkmen, Shabak, Christians, Yazidis, and Kurds. The governorate is divided into nine districts: Sinjar, Telafar, Tilkaif, Shekhan, al-Hamdaniya, Makhmur, Mosul, Hatra, and Ba'aj. The total population of Ninewa Province is 3,041,940, comprising 9.6% of Iraq's total population. Out of these, 50.9% are male, 49.1% are female and 60.1% live in urban areas.

Almost eighteen years have passed since the 2003 invasion of Iraq by the US and coalition forces and the toppling of the dictatorial regime of Saddam Hussein, but Iraq still struggles with an unstable security situation, mainly in the Sunni triangle area. Iraqis joined the Arab revolutionary wave of demonstrations that swept the region in February 2011. Ninewa Governorate was one of the areas that held several peaceful demonstrations. Starting in April 2011, for instance, several anti-government demonstrations were led by protesters from Mosul and nearby cities. The protests mainly focused on the Iraqi military's performance, including political and random detentions, disturbing and degrading checkpoints, centralization in decisions, financial and administrative corruption, in addition, to poverty and demographic change.

Ayadiyya Subdistrict is in northern Ninewa within Tal Afar District and can be seen as one of the poorest and most marginalized parts of the country. This situation was aggravated during the ISIL occupation years which caused mass displacement and disrupted the primarily agrarian economy. Along with much of the Zummar Subdistrict on its northeastern border, Ayadiyya Subdistrict was captured by ISIL at the beginning of August 2014 and partially recaptured by Peshmerga Forces of the Kurdistan Regional Government by the end of October 2014 and in August 2017 the Iraqi Army fully liberated the subdistrict. In the following years, many residents have been able to return to their homes.

Muhalabiya Subdistrict is in the west of Ninewa within Mosul district, with a population of 14,000 individuals of majority



Muhalabiya, Ninewa, 2021.

Turkmen descent. Their economy is mainly based on agriculture, including wheat and barley. In October 2020, UNDP supported signing a Milestone Covenant to facilitate voluntary returns of IDPs to Muhalabiya³. The Covenant of Honour encouraged more than 1100 families perceived to be affiliated with ISIL to return to their places of origin in the Muhalabiya sub-district. However, there are still several security-related issues that are of greatest concern in Muhalabiya, for instance, according to the perception survey of UNDP in 2021, 62% are “very concerned” about the possibility of ISIL’s resurgence,⁴ the return of people with family ties to ISIL (58%), revenge killings (51%), bribery by state security forces (38%), provincial government corruption (37%), and harassment of women (37%). Muhalabiya had the highest level of concern about ISIL’s resurgence and ISIL-associated IDPs among the four communities.

The security and political situations in Ninewa have been unstable for many years. Particularly the impact of ISIL occupation is still present in the city even though the group is territorially defeated. The ISIL occupation from 2014 – to 2017 has inflicted significant human losses, caused destruction of infrastructure, disruption of services, loss of economic productivity, and heightened social divisions. General security incidents, including kidnapping and murder, have reportedly increased after 2007. In 2010, political disputes started between the Sunni and Shia’a politicians and political blocs in Baghdad on one hand, and the Sunni and the Kurdish political parties on the other hand, over the administrative and political authority of the disputed internal boundaries area (DIBs). This got even worse after 2014 when ISIL controlled the

area and violent conflict started to increase.

Administrative corruption has always been another issue that directly affected security and political disputes between parts of the local government of Ninewa and the federal government in Baghdad. The unstable security situation, lack of trust between the political parties, and an absence of accountability in the Governorate led to increased corruption.

Religious disputes were another challenge often mentioned in Ninewa, including those between Sunni Muslim extremist groups and Shia’a extremist groups on one hand, as well as between Sunni Muslim extremists and other minorities religious groups (Yazidis and Christians) on the other hand. Many incidents were recorded, resulting in the city of Mosul being virtually emptied of Yazidis, while many Christian families fled from Mosul, either to the Kurdistan Region, Ninewa Plains, or emigrated to Europe and some other countries since 2003 and got worsen after the 2014 crisis when ISIL controlled larges part of the country.

Ninewa hosts the second largest population of IDPs post-2006, after Baghdad, the majority of which were living in rented houses within their host communities. This situation got worse after the ISIL crisis of 2014. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the number of returnees ranks around 247,434 individuals as of May 2021, which is the highest number of returnees living in severe conditions.⁵

Due to religious extremism, thousands of Yazidis have emigrated from Iraq, especially after the ISIL terrorist attacks against them in 2014. These attacks emptied

3 [Milestone Covenant Signing](#)

4 Reintegration Perceptions Survey Summary UNDP Iraq, February 21, 2021

5 https://displacement.iom.int/system/tdf/reports/20215185934780_IOM_dtm_return_index_round12_Apr_2021.pdf?file=1&type=node&id=11620

Mosul completely of Yazidis. After the ISIL invasion of Ninewa, a massive number of people fled. In general, they moved from the most violent areas of Mosul, Telafar, Tilkaif, al-Hamdaniya, and Sinjar, to different provinces in the Kurdistan Region, particularly Erbil, Dohuk, and Sulaymaniyah.

The economy is mainly based on agriculture, including wheat, barley, grapes, olives, fig-trees, as well as vegetables. However, agricultural lands currently are in danger of erosion due to the consecutive years of drought that have ravaged the area. The industry is an additional integral part of the local economy, particularly factories for muslin, a type of dress made of silk, in addition to the production of sugar and sulfur. Furthermore, there is a commercial retail sector, small factories, and privately owned shops. Mosul is famous for hosting the most important oilfields in Iraq, the Ain Zala oil refinery. The insecure situation in Ninewa Governorate, as well as the conflicted relationship with the federal government, have been described as one of the main barriers preventing investment in the oil fields.

According to the UN Joint Analysis Unit's research in 2011, 26% of the population in Ninewa lives under the poverty line of \$2.5 per day, which was more than double the national level at that time. However, according to the latest statistics of the Iraqi Ministry of Planning in 2020, the poverty rate in Ninewa has reached 37.7 % percent now.⁶ Moreover, huge disparities are existing between districts, for example, Tal Afar district is ranking in third place of the population living under the poverty line, after Baaj and Hatra districts.⁷

6 <https://kirkuknow.com/en/news/61545>

7 <https://amsi-iq.net/?p=2061>

There is a lack of job openings within the public and the private sector due to the unstable security situation. This is reflected clearly in youth unemployment figures, as university and institute graduates cannot find jobs after graduation. The unemployment rate was 7.3% in 2013.

In Ninewa, **the drought that ravaged** the country since 2007 is another reason that pushed many families into displacement from the southeastern part of Ninewa to Rabiaa, Sinjar, and al-Ba'aj districts. People in those locations are living in very difficult conditions, lacking simple basic needs, and living in slums, receiving no support from the government.

To understand the politicization of ethnic and religious identities that have been a feature of Iraqi politics and society since 2003, it is important to dig deeper into the social settings of Iraqi society since the establishment of the modern Iraqi state. Based on the traditional historical perspective, the social, economic, political, and cultural crosscutting interactions have been developing within and between communities and groups all over the country. Thus, a variety of categorical memberships have been developed based on different factors, such as religion, ethnicity, nationalism, and tribalism, each used as political tools favoring, mobilizing, or positioning one group over another for the political interests of various actors.

The political situation in Ninewa is complicated. There are no grassroots and well-organized Sunni political parties there, especially compared to other groups, such as Shia'a and Kurdish parties. This is because the Sunni groups were controlled by the Baath party and were not allowed to form or establish a separate political movement for decades. So almost all the

Sunni political activists left the country to Europe and some other countries since the middle of the 1980s and left political activities. While Shia's politicians, although also controlled by the Baath party regime, safely continued their activities in Iran⁸

When it comes to women's rights, women in Iraq generally face high levels of gender-based violence, including domestic violence, sexual harassment, honor killing, female genital mutilation, forced and early marriage, and human trafficking. They are excluded from accessing jobs and services, particularly in poor rural areas, heading households experiencing a high level of poverty. When it comes to conflict situations, Iraqi women have always been among the first to feel the impact of violence and conflict.

Iraq is known as a tribal and conservative society, which is primarily affecting the life of women and girls, especially in Ninewa, where women comprise 49.1% of the population. Ninewa is a conservative society, where norms and culture play a significant role in shaping women's and girls' lives. This became even more pronounced after 2003, when the Islamic political parties and movements became stronger in the region, influencing the decisions and perspectives of key decision-makers. For instance, a female parliament member from the National Coalition bloc led several campaigns to advocate for polygamy from 2010 until 2014, justifying her actions based on the high rate of widows.

The level of education has deteriorated among Iraqi women due to the security situation after the US invasion, but the damage is particularly harmful to minority

women.⁹ In relation to education in Ninewa, all schools are gender-segregated and there are very restrictive rules. Furthermore, girls' enrollments at schools are extremely restricted in rural areas.

Moreover, one of the biggest problems in Ninewa is the high percentage of widows due to decades of conflict and instability. Freedom of movement and early marriage are another significant problem in this regard, resulting in a lot of forced marriages due to economic reasons. Lack of women's participation in decision-making, key positions, and the political process are the consequences of norms and culture. It is obvious that there are differences between rural and urban areas regarding the situation for women, with urban women in Mosul having easier access to education than rural families. When it comes to marriage to terrorist group members, such as al-Qaida and ISIL, cases increased after the invasion of ISIL.

The geographical location of Ninewa and its desert nature make it an easy transit point for terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda and ISIL, which moved freely from Syria to Iraq. Mosul city is an important place for many religions. It is one of the old homelands that Arabs lived in with the Assyrians. In the year 1080 BC, the Assyrians made Mosul their capital, and there are still many Assyrian and Chaldean churches. For Muslims, it is the City of Prophets. There are several mosques and shrines in Mosul city, such as the prophet Yunus mosque, the shrine of the prophet Sheet, and the grave of the prophet Jarjis. Thus, this makes it a strategic place for the Sunni people and clerics, and an important area for the surrounding Sunni countries and groups.

8 Interview with activist from Nineveh

9 <http://masaratiraq.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Minorities-in-Iraq.pdf>

Furthermore, it is important to highlight the role of the **international community** and their support for Ninewa. The people of Ninewa rarely received proper support from the international community before 2014. However, after the Government of Iraq declared victory over the Islamic State (ISIL) in December 2017, all attention was brought to the governorate by the international community and UN agencies started to contribute to the process of rehabilitation and stabilization.

5.2 ANBAR GOVERNORATE (AL QA'IM AND HABANIYA)

Al-Anbar is the largest governorate in Iraq by area (it covers 32% of the total area of Iraq). It is in the Western part of Iraq, borders three countries, Syria, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia, and has joint administrative borders with Ninewa, Salah Al-Din, Baghdad, Babil, Kerbala, and Najaf Governorates. Furthermore, the governorate is divided into 11 districts and Al-Ramadi functions as the capital. Ethnically, most citizens are Sunni Muslims (around 90 percent of the population: mostly from the Al-Dulaim Tribe) while the remaining 10 percent are Christian or other minorities.

For almost two decades, Anbar has been through a series of devastating incidents whose effects are still felt today, and whose scars have not been repaired. During the years of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) in 2003, Anbar became a war arena where more than 30,000 residents of Anbar, including civilians and fighters, were killed between 2004 and 2007.¹⁰ Moreover, Anbar became a firm base for Al Qaeda, insurgent actions, and a refuge for their core leadership.

¹⁰ https://www.nccirag.org/images/infobygov/NCCI_Anbar_Governorate_Profile.pdf

Later in 2013, Anbar became one of the most negatively affected governorates by ISIL where more than one million people started fleeing their homes and became internally displaced. Those who did not leave Anbar stayed deliberately and were forced to live under the control of ISIL. Many of them were displaced at a later stage.¹¹ In 2016, the return of IDPs started in Anbar, but the issue of accusation of affiliation remained against those people who were not initially displaced. Also, many communities in Anbar rejected the returnees if a first or second-line relative were involved with ISIL.

According to IOM reports, as of December 2020, the total number of returnees in Anbar Governorate is around 1.5 million people out of 4.83 million nationwide which is the second-largest returnee population compared to other governorates with 31% of all returns in Iraq. Anbar Governorate hosts the third-largest number of returnees living in high severity conditions, with 52,350 individuals.¹² Throughout 2020, Anbar Governorate witnessed a noticeable reduction in the number of returnees living in locations classified as high severity.

Anbar hosts over 36,000 IDPs, with the central districts of displacement being Falluja, Ramadi, and Al-Rutba. The primary governorates of origin are Anbar (72%) and Babylon (26%), and others (2%), including Saladin and Baghdad. Most displaced families live with host families (43%) or in camps (27%). Anbar is designated as the main governorate of return. More than 1.4 million people have returned to Anbar, mainly to districts in Ramadi, Falluja, and Heet.

¹¹ <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/IOM%20Iraq%20Managing%20Return%20to%20Anbar-Community%20Responses%20to%20the%20Return%20of%20IDPs%20with%20Perceived%20Affiliation%5B1%5D.pdf>

¹² http://iraqdtm.iom.int/images/ReturnIndex/20216101823551_iom_dtm_Return_Dynamics_in_Anbar_June2021.pdf

Most returnees were displaced within Anbar (43%) or fled to Baghdad (21%), Erbil (16%), and other locations, including Kirkuk, Sulaymaniyah, Babylon, Salah al-Din, Karbala, Ninewa, and Diyala (20%). Nearly all IDPs and returnees in Anbar are Arab Sunni.¹³

Al Qa'im: A large open desert that became one of the key urban centers in the western Anbar governorate. It is 330 kilometers northwest of Baghdad and advantageously located at the border between Syria and Iraq, opposite the Syrian city of Abu Kamal. The city lies on the shorelines of the Euphrates River and is bounded by fertile agricultural lands. Economic movement concentrations focus on cross-border trade as well as the oil and cement industries¹⁴. Besides the security and safety-related challenges, the area suffers from many other issues, like poor access to basic services (especially electricity) which was the main reason for a lot of IDPs being unable to return.

Habbaniyah: located 90km west of Baghdad, in Anbar Governorate, is one of the most beautiful cities in Iraq that was designed in the 1980s to resemble a French seaside village with flamboyant and colorful houses.¹⁵ For a decade, this city became a source of financial affluence for Iraq for its attractive and suitable touristic environment. Since 2003, the prosperity in this city has decreased and starting from 2014, Habbaniyah had hosted more than 7,000 displaced families in hotel buildings, cabins, recreational facilities, shelters, and tents.¹⁶ After Anbar's liberation, this city

started to be rehabilitated in stages and once again started to welcome visitors.

Al Anbar's Security: The security of Anbar is not yet stable with ISIL activities continuing to be reported particularly in the western desert areas of the governorate. As of March 2020, US forces reportedly continue to hold two military bases in the Anbar governorate near the Iraqi Syrian border.

The Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) are generally responsible for the security of Anbar, however, some parts of the Anbar governorate, mostly along the Syrian and Iraqi border with vast desert areas, remain tough to control. Tribal leaders and Sunni religious leaders are set at a high level of authority in local affairs, and they have conflict over interest, power, and needs.

Iraq's economy is dominated by the oil sector, which provides over 90% of the government revenue and foreign exchange earnings.¹⁷ Anbar is rich in natural resources such as oil, gas, phosphate, silica sand, limestone, dolomite, kaolin clay, bentonite, and iron ores. Additionally, the land is suitable for agriculture and industry. However, the economy and infrastructure have suffered and deteriorated due to all the tension and crisis that took place in the last two decades in the area alongside continuous, year-long, and severe waves of displacement.

13 <https://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/needs-assessment-integrating-mhpss-and-livelihood-support-iraq-anbar-and-basra>

14 <https://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/rapid-overview-areas-return-roar-qa-im-and-surrounding-areas-anbar-governorate-iraq-june>

15 https://diyaruna.com/en_GB/articles/cnmi_di/features/2018/04/26/feature-03

16 <https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2019/11/15/>

[Habbaniyahh-iraq-from-celebrity-haunt-to-safe-haven-among-ruins](#)

17 https://www.iraq-businessnews.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/USAID-Tijara-Investor_Guide_of_Anbar_Eng.pdf

Anbar currently has a poverty rate of 17%.¹⁸ There is a scarcity in livelihood opportunities, noting the fact that obtaining work is especially difficult for IDPs and returnees, and not enough people are working in agriculture.¹⁹ A general lack of livelihood opportunities remains, while basic services, social cohesion, and security are also limited.

The land is suitable to be one of the richest industrial and agricultural areas due to its cultivatable land. It also has water resources represented in big lakes as well as potable water in the river Euphrates, so agriculture has been the main provider of jobs and livelihoods.

Women's Rights: More than two decades of war and instability have severely impacted living conditions for women in Anbar. During the ISIL and Al-Qaeda occupation years, women in Anbar were deprived of almost all rights. There is a constraint on their movements, education, choices, outfit, driving, employment, political participation, obligation to early marriage etc.²⁰ For example, wearing hijabs only became compulsory after Al-Qaeda extended operations in Anbar in 2005-6. Besides the impact of Al-Qaeda and ISIL, traditional norms and tribal culture customs continue to restrict women in certain aspects of their lives today.

Approximately 25% of women in Anbar lost their husbands because of war, and they take full responsibility for their children alone. They often work in fields that were specified traditionally for men, such as brick factories.²¹ The challenges and barriers

have led women to be more stressed, have psychological pressure, and poor emotional well-being which led to poor performance in daily tasks. According to a needs assessment on integrating MHPSS and livelihood support in Iraq conducted by IOM, providing MHPSS will help women to better pursue and engage in work, focus more, and become creative in their field.²²

International Community: Anbar governorate necessitates support from almost all the areas like education, health, industrial, housing, recreational facilities, sewage, solid waste, public facilities, agriculture, housing, social cohesion, etc. UN agencies and other international organizations are putting to rehabilitate Anbar including IDPs, refugees, and host communities.

According to the recent Kuwait International Conference for the Reconstruction of Iraq, USD 30 billion was pledged as donations, loans, and investments to support the country's investments in infrastructure, public services, housing, and industries.²³

5.3 SALAH AL-DIN GOVERNORATE (YETHRIB AND TUZ KHURMATO)

Situated just north of Baghdad in North-Central Iraq bordering Al-Anbar, Ninawa, Erbil, Kirkuk, Sulaimaniyah, Diyala and Baghdad governorates, Salah-al-Din has an estimated population of 1,637,232 people according to a 2019 census and is one of the most rural and conflict-affected provinces in all of Iraq. It is divided into nine districts: al-Dour, al-Shirqat, Balad, Baiji, Fares, Samarra, Thethar, Tuz (disputed) and Tikrit. Ethnically, Salah al-Din Governorate

¹⁸ [Al Sabaah Article](#)

¹⁹ <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/MHPSS-LI%20Anbar%20and%20Basra%20Assessment.pdf>

²⁰ <https://icanpeacework.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Al-Anbar-Iraq-Conflict-Analysis-2014.pdf>

²¹ https://diyaruna.com/ar/articles/cnmi_di/features/2017/08/08/feature-01

²² <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/MHPSS-LI%20Anbar%20and%20Basra%20Assessment.pdf>

²³ https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2020/09/ramadi_urban_recovery_and_spatial_development_plan_july_2018.pdf

is predominantly inhabited by Sunni Arabs with its capital Tikrit, former Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's place of birth, being viewed as an important centre of the Sunni power.²⁴ However, the governorate also hosts a Shia Arab minority, as well as Turkmen and Kurdish minority groups. Moreover, Salah-al-Din Governorate is home to several Iraqi tribal confederations, with perhaps the most notable being the Abu Nasir, which was the tribe of former dictator Saddam Hussein and many of his closest associates.²⁵

Salah-al-Din was originally administered under Baghdad Governorate before 1976 but became an independent entity afterwards. In 2011, it declared itself as a semi-autonomous region within Iraq as a self-proclaimed response to the central government's "domination over the provincial council authorities".²⁶ As a largely Sunni governorate, it is intending to declare full autonomy in the future entailing them to a bigger share of government funding. In January 2014, plans were being pushed forward by Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki to make Tuz Khurmato, an administratively disputed district within the Salah-al-Din, into a new governorate. These plans were however not followed-up on by Maliki's successor Haider al-Abadi.²⁷

Tuz Khurmato: Tuz district's capital is a multi-ethnic city on the historic trade route between Baghdad and Kirkuk with pockets of Sunni Kurds, Sunni Arabs,

and Shia Turkmen. Although historically closely tied to Kirkuk, the entire district was administratively separated from the oil-rich Kirkuk governorate in 1976 and incorporated into Salah-al-Din. Up until today, Tuz Khurmato district remains a disputed area in accordance with the Iraqi Constitution. In 2007, the Kirkuk Status Referendum mandated by Article 140 of the Iraqi Constitution was intended to ultimately clarify whether disputed territories of Northern Iraq should join the Kurdistan Region or not, but due to various political and administrative obstacles it never took place with the administrative status remaining unclear.²⁸ Similarly, plans to establish Tuz Khurmato as a new governorate in 2014 did not materialize.

Yathrib: Yathrib is located on the Tigris River right in the middle of the Sunni Triangle, forming the so-called northern Baghdad belt with the nearby cities and towns of Dhululiyah, Balad, Ishawi, Dojama, Tarmiyah and Taji. Throughout the Iraq insurgency from 2014 onwards, the ISF recaptured the town from ISIL with the help of airstrikes from the American-led coalition on the one hand and with support from employed ground forces by Kata'ib Hezbollah on the other hand.

Overall, the **security situation** in Salah-al-Din remains volatile today despite slight improvements made over the past years in a governorate that has been one of the most conflict-affected provinces in all of Iraq since the US-led invasion of 2003. In the summer of 2014, ISIL forces captured parts of Salah-al-Din governorate, but it was also among the first to be liberated as part of the Iraqi forces' led offensive against ISIL in 2015. Salah-al-Din was also one of the first governorates to witness a

24 <https://easo.europa.eu/country-guidance-iraq-2021/salah-al-din>

25 Gospodinov, I., Leiden University, The Sunni Tribes of Iraq: Tribal consolidation, through turbulent years 2003-2009, 2015, <https://openaccess.leidenuniv.nl/bitstream/handle/1887/33836/Thesis%20Ivan%20Diyarov%20Gospodinov.pdf?sequence=2>, p. 18

26 Hammoudi, Laith (27 October 2011) <https://web.archive.org/web/20111210154253/http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2011/10/27/128503/saddams-home-province-declares.html>

27 <https://ekurd.net/mismas/articles/misc2014/1/kurdsiniraq218.htm>

28 <https://www.gppi.net/2017/08/16/iraq-after-isil-tuz>

large-scale return of IDPs. According to the IOM Return Index, as of December 2020, the total number of returnees in Salah-al-Din Governorate stands at 708,744 individuals out of 4,83 million nationwide which constitutes the third-largest returnee population by governorate with 15 percent of all returns in Iraq.²⁹

The ISF have the overall responsibility for the security within the area and nominally exercises control. De-facto however, the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) are controlling much of the governorate. The presence of a few Sunnis tribal groups and of the Peshmerga in the area were also reported, the latter of which however lack strong cooperation with the ISF. These operational seams are sometimes exploited by ISIL sleeper cells which continue to operate underground in rural and deserted areas of Salah al-Din.

In May 2020, it was reported that Salah-al-Din Governorate has consistently ranked lowest or second lowest of the six governorates in terms of ISIL insurgency throughout 2019 and early 2020 but has still seen signs of recovery from armed extremism. An emerging trend of bomb-making and roadside bomb placement capability has been reported, as well as a focus on attacking isolated checkpoints in stand-up fights involving platoon-sized ISIL units. The targeting of ISIL-opposed Sunni preachers and Tribal Mobilization Force officers was also reported to have been on the increase, while the attacks on village leaders and farmers continued. Following the continued and heightened activity of ISIL, the ISF have launched several major coordinated anti-ISIL military operations

29 http://iraqdtm.iom.int/images/ReturnIndex/2021613944605_iom_dtm_Return_Dynamics_in_Salah_al_Din_May2021.pdf

in response, slowing ISIL's activity, but not eliminating it. ISIL remnants frequently carry out asymmetric attacks against the Iraqi people and security forces, however, according to observers, the recent ISIL attacks have shown a shift in ISIL's targets by more frequently and directly taking aim at the ISF and affiliated pro-government forces, thereby weakening their ability to provide protection to civilians.³⁰

Salah al-Din is one of the governorates with particularly high scores of **infrastructure damage** because of conflict, especially in relation to damage to housing, to the agricultural sector, and to the water, sanitation, and hygiene sector. Reconstruction in governorates badly affected by the conflict, including Salah al-Din, was slow throughout 2019. Explosive ordnance contamination is also reported to pose an obstacle to the safe returns of IDPs as well as to the implementation of humanitarian activities in Salah al-Din.

Another key issue contributing to conflict within the governorate is that Salah al-Din is famous for rampant government **corruption**. According to Iraq's central financial watchdog committee, the province ranks first among Iraq's 18 governorates for widespread corruption in local government institutions.³¹ The key oversight mechanism in the province disappeared as politicians streamlined public corruption with their policies allowing them to re-direct public funds to themselves and to the pockets of allies and followers.³²

With over 141,000 people in Salah-al-Din still displaced, generating sustainable

30 <https://easo.europa.eu/country-guidance-iraq-2021/salah-al-din>

31 Thebaghdadpost.com, 'Financial Watchdog Committee: Salahaddin takes the lead among the governorate for corruption', April 16, 2019. Available link [here](#).

32 http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/108541/1/Ali_Saleem_the_king_of_salah_al_din_published.pdf

livelihoods and empowering **economic growth** is key for people to return home safely.³³ Overall figures on unemployment within Salah-al-Din rank slightly below the national average but continue to remain high with respectively 10% percent of both the male and female labor force being unemployed (13% and 12% respectively for female and male unemployment at the national level).³⁴

Historically, the economy of the governorate has been highly dependent on Alas and Ajil oilfields in Tikrit district and Baiji refinery in Baiji district, the latter of which was considered integral to the Iraqi economy as the country's largest oil refinery with its auxiliary industries, such as a fertilizer factory and a power plant.³⁵ Baiji refinery was the scene of considerable levels of conflict and violence after ISIL occupied the governorate in June 2014.

Also oilfield was used by ISIL as a major source of revenue between 2014 and 2017 and has been the continued target of ISIL attacks since the liberation of Salah-al-Din Governorate.³⁶ Iraqi authorities repaired Ajil oilfield in October 2018, after it had been set on fire by ISIL in 2015. The oilfield was reported to have resumed oil production since then.³⁷

Politically, Iraqi authorities in Baghdad have systematically sought to prevent Salah-

al-Din from becoming the centre of Sunni power in Iraq in the post-2003 order with the Sunni community in the governorate having arguably been subjected to particularly acute forms of exclusion due to their real and perceived ties to the Ba'ath regime and later to anti-Baghdad insurgent and extremist groups such as the AQI and ISIL.

However, within this broader picture of marginalization and security pressure, the current governor Ahmed Abdullah al-Jabouri (known as Abu Mazin) has emerged as a key power broker in Salah-al-Din, has proven adept at navigating and cultivating relationships with tribal groups, Iran-aligned Popular Mobilization Forces, and parliamentarians in Baghdad in order to shore up a strong political position in the province. He effectively controls the provincial government through proxies and has successfully warded off challengers to his rule backed by powerful PMF figures.³⁸

In terms of **gender equality and women's rights**, years of dictatorship, international sanctions, and armed conflict have affected Iraq's social fabric and contributed to a deterioration in the lives of Iraqi women, both in general and in Salah-al-Din in particular. Illiteracy and unemployment rates among women 15 years and above rank between 21 – 30 % in Salah al-Din according to the March 2012 IAU Women in Iraq Factsheet.³⁹ The female labour force participation in Salah-al-Din stands at 20% in May 2021, being high in Samarra and Al-Fares, yet low in Tikrit, Tooz and Baiji.⁴⁰ Throughout the same survey, 8–15 % of women between the age of 15–49 years

33 <https://www.iq.undp.org/content/iraq/en/home/stories/2021-stories/06/creating-jobs-opportunities-in-shirgat.html>

34 https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/OBD36464B63B98DC12576000033A01F-Full_Report.pdf

35 Derzsi-Horváth, A. et al., Iraq after ISIL: Baiji, 13 September 2017, GPPi, <https://www.gppi.net/2017/09/13/iraq-after-isil-baiji>

36 Business Insider, ISIS is staging attacks in symbolically important places to send a message: We're back, 24 October 2019 <https://www.businessinsider.de/international/isis-oil-field-and-raqqa-attacks-send-a-message-2019-10/?r=US&IR=T>

37 Reuters, Iraq repairs Ajil oilfield torched by Islamic State: minister, 9 October 2018 <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iraq-oil/iraq-repairs-ajil-oilfield-torched-by-islamic-state-minister-idUSKCN1MJ1Z>

38 http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/108541/1/Ali_Saleem_the_king_of_salah_al_din_published.pdf

39 <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Women%20In%20Iraq%20Fact%20sheet%20-%20English.pdf>

40 https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/OBD36464B63B98DC12576000033A01F-Full_Report.pdf

have stated to have experienced physical domestic violence.

A more recent GBV assessment conducted by INTERSOS presents that in 2019, women and girls in Salah-al-Din Governorate continue to face many restrictions of movement due to gender norms and sexual harassment in public places. Domestic violence thereby constitutes the main type of GBV, reportedly by a husband or male caregiver. Widowed and single mothers continue to be at heightened risk of violence in this regard. Furthermore, forced, and early marriage are deeply rooted practices throughout the area, and rape and sexual violence continue to be under-reported due to the stigma and fear of consequences on the survivor and her family.⁴¹

increased presence of the **international community** and donor interest in the Salah-al-Din Governorate since the end of ISIL occupation. According to Inter-Agency Information and Analysis Unit of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the most amount of humanitarian donor funding contributes to food assistance (mainly through WFP and MIC), education (ESCWA, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF and WHO) as well as health & nutrition (UNDP, UNHCR, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNOPS, WHO, WFP).⁴²

These developments have led to a strongly

⁴¹ <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/iraq/assessment/gender-based-violence-assessment-salah-al-din-governorate-baiji-and-balad>

⁴² https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/OBD_D36464B63B98DC12576000033A01F-Full_Report.pdf

6 RESULTS OF THE ANALYSIS

The context analysis above has provided an understanding of the socio-economic, demographic, and historical background of each of the C2RI pilot locations. Drawing on this context, this subsequent chapter aims to evaluate the findings of the data-gathering phase conducted by 13 UNDP field researchers from March to April 2021 featuring respectively 15 interviews and 5 Focal Group Discussions within each of the six C2RI pilot locations, which are enhanced by the results of the 412 respondents of the online questionnaire.

The first sub-chapter below analyzes socio-economic, developmental, political, environmental, and security-related factors which serve as triggers of conflict in the target locations sub-divided by main sectoral themes identified by respondents throughout the data-gathering phase. The second sub-chapter will then aim to identify stakeholders that are key to facilitating both negative and positive changes with regards to security, return of IDPs, development, and building sustainable peace in the targeted areas. The third sub-chapter will then ultimately describe potential bottlenecks and risks with regards to the implementation of UNDP-supported interventions on security, reconciliation, employment generation, and peacebuilding.

The results of this chapter will provide the foundation for the identification of recommendations that can inform the design of UNDP interventions through the C2RI programme in the targeted areas which will be presented in the concluding sections of this study.

6.1 THEMATIC CONFLICT DRIVERS

The following sub-chapter will provide a more in-depth analysis of conflict drivers in the six surveyed C2RI pilot locations. The results will be presented in ten sectoral clusters based on the most named thematic drivers of conflict that respondents have listed throughout the data-gathering phase. The sectoral sub-divisions further consider different geographic specificities for Ninewa, Anbar, and Salah-al-Din Governorate.

a) Political Dynamics and Ethnic/Sectarian Identity.

As one out of the ten main causes of tension, respondents in all three target governorates have highlighted that political realities and related ethnic/sectarian development have a major effect on local conflict dynamics. The below section showcases in detail how politics affect conflict in the target locations, and how in many cases ethnic/sectarian identities co-relate with politics to amplify societal divisions.

Ninewa: Ayadiyya, and Muhalabiya

Identity is one of the buzzwords worldwide, particularly in Iraq after the 2003 invasion, which is used as an essential element that people use for categorizing, labeling, and describing themselves and others. When it comes to conflict, identity is the main driving factor for individuals and groups in shaping their attitudes and behaviors. Social identity strongly influences conflict, and in extremely severe cases is reflected people's willingness to sacrifice themselves in the name of their ethnicity, religion, clan, or nation.

The political parties in Iraq are usually affiliated with ethnic, sectarian, and religious perspectives. Thus, Ninewa's societal identity can be classified as Iraqi, multiethnic, and multi-religious, with an Arab Muslim Sunni majority, also it is home to a significant population of minority groups, such as Turkmen, Shabak, Christians, Yazidis, and Kurds.

The generated data from the focus group sessions and the interviews reinforced the idea that part of the conflict in Ayadiya and Muhalabiya (Ninewa) is identity conflict, "political, religious and sectarian," and Iraqi society is divided into different groups based on political sectarian orientations and religious doctrine – Arab Sunni, Kurd, Turkmen, and Shia'a. People have opposing orientations and perspectives, resulting in communities that are currently struggling to live together peacefully and accept others without tensions.

It is worth referring to the role of politicians in seemingly accelerating and fueling conflicts and extending the conflict circle for their own personal benefit. In case of Ninewa, it is crucial to highlight the critical role of the Ba'ath Party and their internal and external alliances in Ninewa and on the national and regional level. Many families, tribes, and individuals have positive experiences with the role of Ba'ath party in the Sunni areas in general, due to the constructive role and actions of some of the Ba'ath party leaders in the area, especially relating to the rule of law, during Ba'ath Party era.⁴³

The Arab Sunni community of Ninewa accuses the federal government of following an Iranian government agenda and, conversely, the Shia federal government and their followers accuse the Sunni groups

of following Sunni extremist ideologies. Consequently, the security and political situation continues to be unstable ever since the 2003 invasion of Iraq. There are many reasons for this, particularly the high percentage of the Ninewa community members who are Arab Sunni. They were influenced and privileged by the Ba'ath party regime's policies. Also, some areas of Ninewa Governorate are located within the disputed internal boundaries (DIBs) which is one of the main reasons for conflict between the Federal Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government.⁴⁴ In addition, many Sunnis' Arab clerics, through the Association of Muslim Scholars, provoked and instigated the violence. They pushed the Sunni group to fight against the occupation and the National Army and to boycott the political process in Iraq since 2003. In addition to all the factors mentioned is injustice and discrimination practiced by the Federal Government. These events served as a cause for intensifying sectarian violence throughout Ninewa Province, which ended with the conquest of Ninewa by the Sunni Muslim extremist group ISIL in 2014. Additionally, in many interviews and focus group sessions, respondents referred to the fact that many political parties are backed by foreign parties (affiliated with neighboring countries). Thus, the political tensions are often amplified by the support of foreign countries, thus rapidly developing into sectarian tensions. "The idea that the power was taken from the country's rulers in 2003 by external forces generated a feeling among this group (of course not all) that they should fight all those who came with the occupier. Most of these formed parties were deeply sectarian and were not patriotic, but most of them were supported by foreign countries".⁴⁵

43 المصالحة المجتمعية في نينوى بعد داعش (iraqi-alamal.org)

44 Interview with a male from Muhalabiya

45 Muhalabiya mixed group focus group



A family perceived to be affiliated with ISIL (due the act of their son, who they no longer associate with) from Anbar Governorate.

The political parties are trying to divide society under sectarian, racial, and ethnic labels to obtain spoils, gains, and votes in the elections. They convince people that the Sunnis must play a greater role in leading Iraq and the same for Shiite leaders. Leaders from both sects are focusing on mobilizing their constituencies and social incubator rather than bridging the gap between the sects.

The Iraqi political elite failed to develop an inclusive system of government. This has strengthened internal and sectarian divisions across national borders. The political process in Iraq after 2003 has generally focused more on creating sectarian representatives than overcoming sectarian divisions. “Political tensions began during the time of the previous regime (Saddam Hussein). He practiced insults and torture against the Shiite, Kurdish, and even Sunni components. Thus, upon the fall of the regime, a group of politicians who took power responded to these insults and tortured the Sunni component to take revenge”.⁴⁶

The flawed election processes also had been highlighted as a trigger for tension. In many interviews and focus group sessions, it has been indicated that elections lead to division and tension among people because candidates engage in provocative and divisive behavior. For example, the candidates appoint those who elected him only based on favoritism and kinship.

Al Anbar: Al-Qai'm and Habbaniyahh

According to the opinion of participants from Anbar through the generated data from the focus group discussions and the interviews, political tension is the main reason/root of the instability, insecurity,

economic decline within the governorate. Political tension has a direct effect on the economy and safety in this region. Anbar suffers from political tension, specifically local political tension which is sectarian in nature due to local councils supported by external parties. When it comes to politics, tribalism is closely linked because the tribes are affecting the politics and have their candidates in political parties. They are accused by respondents that their involvements only serve their own personal benefit/ interest and are not for the sake of people, it is rather to implement the external agendas by other countries.

Politicians on the other hand are accused to be corrupted and greedy and having false figurative representation, deceptive, and hypocrite for exploiting the public's votes and giving false promises to people only during elections on media campaigns, “politicians engage in fraud, hypocrisy, stealing money, plundering wealth, and stealing citizens' money.”⁴⁷ Besides the unhealthy competition among politicians to win the election, there is an ongoing conflict, misunderstanding, and tension among all the parties which sometimes results in murder and other acts of revenge. All these mentioned developments led to mistrust and disappointment between politicians and citizens until the point that elections and parties are considered to not solve major challenges within the governorate.

Furthermore, election periods have particularly been highlighted to fuel people's anger and irritate them due to the increased false propaganda. Candidates are accused to be deceptive and manipulative. “Candidates ignore the citizens, exploit their votes for very little sums, and give them false promises, especially the poor class.”⁴⁸ It is

⁴⁶ Interview with a male from Muhalabiya

⁴⁷ Interview with a male participant in Habbaniyahh

⁴⁸ Interview with a female participant in Al Qaim

not only the exploitation itself that angers people but also the feeling they have that their votes can be bought.

Salah Al-Din: Tuz Khurmato and Yethrib

The aggregated data from the 30 interviews and 10 FGDs backed up by the information received through the online survey reiterate that political dynamics and aligned ethnic/sectarian tensions serve as one of the key drivers of conflict within Salah Al-Din Governorate.

In this context, “political parties are the main actors that stir tensions in the country or province. They break down societies, make people subservient to their politics to achieve their personal interests, and exercise their influence through the quota system”.⁴⁹ Political affiliation thereby in almost all cases corresponds to ethnic lines: PUK and KDP on the Kurdish side, as well as related parties on the Sunni and Shiite side. It was highlighted that local tensions in Salah Al-Din Governorate often commence between political parties, “then move to the street and cause tensions between different ethnicities.”⁵⁰ Sectarian diversity (Sunni and Shiite), political affiliation, and nationalism (Arab, Kurdish, and Turkmen) thereby go hand in hand as each group would like to exercise control over the governorate and exert power.

This is particularly visible in the period leading up to the elections. Respondents pointed out that every ethnic group “clings to the party they support, then political confrontations begin, and communities start to accuse each other of marginalization and practicing quota systems. Competing parties and agenda thus increase internal tension in the region.”⁵¹

It is important to note that however each region or even sub-strict have their own peculiarities with most of the respondents within the Salah Al-Din sample highlighting that the effects, actors, and severity of political and sectarian tensions vary greatly.

For Yethrib, the majority of respondents identified sectarian disputes between Sunni and Shiite tribes as the main source of political conflict with “entities working on disintegrating parts of society to cause sedition between the different Sunni and Shiite areas.”⁵² The emergence and occupation of ISIL have further contributed to deep sectarian rifts within between the two sects, with many Shiite communities blaming Sunni neighbors for bringing ISIL to the region, whereas Sunni respondents have highlighted that certain Shiite political parties strategically spread such allegations to manifest their grip on power.

Responses from Tuz Khurmato highlight that the unclear administrative status of the city/district aggravates sectarian conflicts in the multi-ethnic town with political disputes between the KRG in Erbil and the Government of Iraq in Baghdad amplifying tensions over time. Even more so than for other areas in Salah Al-Din Governorate, political actors “take advantage of the sectarian and national diversity of Tuz Khurmato to create tensions that affect security, the economy as well as the societal co-existence”⁵³ between Arab, Shia Turkmen, and Kurdish population groups within the city. Clashes between the Popular Mobilization Forces and the Kurds in the Tuz District remain common.

49 Interview with a male participant in Tuz Khurmato

50 Interview with a male participant in Tuz Khurmato

51 Interview with a male participant in Tuz Khurmato

52 Interview with a male participant in Yethrib

53 Interview with a female participant in Tuz Khurmato

b) Economic Instability, Unemployment

Research has further confirmed that economic instability including a lack of access to job opportunities and fluctuating currency values contribute to poverty and thus rising tensions. The following sections will present a more detailed picture of how these factors co-relate and influence one another within the respective target locations.

Ninewa: Ayadiyya, and Muhalabiya

Respondents pointed out that economic factors play a major role in increasing tensions within Ninewa Governorate. Most issues mentioned in that regard referred to unemployment, currency inflation, food security, access to social welfare, lack of macroeconomic instability, and increasing competition over national resources. Also based on the collected data, it seems there is a dispute over agricultural lands in some areas such as Muhalabiya. Muhalabiya accounts as a rural area; the residents depend on agriculture and livestock, but they were suffering from injustice and their source of income was destroyed during the conflict of 2014. The security forces used to ban Muhalabiya farmers from marketing their products (mainly crops and livestock) outside the area, especially in the Rabiaa area. Thus, the difficult living situation of many families in Muhalabiya pushed them to join armed factions to have a secure income and to be able to survive. “The problem of agricultural lands is driven by the greed of some shepherds. They want to use the lands of others to feed their livestock (sheep and cows).”⁵⁴ Participants in the focus group sessions and the interviews further referred to a lack of integrity in the monitoring and fighting of

54 Interview with a male participant in Muhalabiya

corruption within government institutions, thus the consequences of corruption (both managerially and financially) clearly reflected on the economic decline and unemployment and poverty in the area. thus, extreme poverty among most families seems to play a key role in provoking tensions in the region. It was also mentioned in some focus groups that state authorities are neglecting the food ration cards, which directly increased the burden on families who can't purchase food from the market to meet their basic needs. Unemployment and the lack of job opportunities among young people are also some of the underlying causes of these tensions. There was an emphasis on the urgent need for solving the problem of poverty, especially for families returning from displacement.

Al Anbar: Al-Qai'm and Habbaniyahh

Anbar has been experiencing an economic decline with price fluctuation of commodities and dollar exchange rates affecting people's living conditions. People with very low or no income cannot afford to buy their daily necessities/meet their basic needs which have rendered them dependent on their income from day-to-day jobs like selling tissues and small items on the roads for a very low wage. Participants in the interviews and focused groups mentioned armed groups, political parties, tribes, and government authorities. The armed groups have a huge role in devastating the economy in Anbar; they monopolize commercial goods and sell them at high prices, blackmail businessmen, ask for incentives to allow trade, businesses, and projects, control the borders and exploit natural resources for personal interests.

Moreover, political parties and tribes secure job opportunities for their relatives based on nepotism which has led to a decrease

in employee performance because the focus is not on qualification, experience, and certification. “Job opportunities for young people are scarce, which leads to creating an environment of tension and generates a psychological factor that causes the mental health of young people to deteriorate or drives them towards extremist organizations.”⁵⁵ Also, due to the ongoing tension among political parties themselves and tribes themselves, projects have stopped and most of its funds are going to certain individuals.

The federal government, local authorities, and price inspection committees further have no control over markets, which encouraged businessmen to raise prices and monopolize basic materials and commodities. In turn, local government authorities impose taxes on business owners. For example, there were cases where the owners of commercial and medical stores were forced to raise their prices prompting them to close their stores and leave the area.⁵⁶

Farmers are also negatively affected financially. More than half of Anbar’s population are depending on agriculture, but now they lack equipment, water, and electricity, and their crops were not sufficient to help them support their livelihoods. Consequently, many farmers have left the field and started looking for other opportunities to make a living although their expertise lies in agriculture⁵⁷ According to the interviewees, Anbar has a lot of potentials to be able to grow economically but due to the negligence of authorities, those opportunities are not used.⁵⁸ This can be seen again in the

agricultural sectors where most irrigation and agricultural projects have stopped.

The economic shortcomings highlighted above, all of which have been severely amplified by the Covid-19 pandemic, have wider societal implications. Respondents pointed out that the lack of employment opportunities hinder returns since many families prefer to stay in more prosperous governorates. This also affects citizens psychologically and undermines the trust in local governance. One respondent from Tuz Khurmato highlighted that, “young people can be seen everywhere in the streets, and if they had jobs, you would not see them like this. The emptiness they live affects their psyche and behavior, so they create problems”⁵⁹ and “some commit illegal acts.”⁶⁰

The declining levels of education since 2003 have further created a vicious cycle within Salah-Al-Din Governorate, “with low levels of education leading to an increase in unemployment which in turn creates further chaos within the region and this again contributes to an increase of political parties/armed groups recruiting uneducated, young people for ideological purposes without their prior awareness and understanding.”⁶¹

Many respondents blame the central government in Baghdad as well as local authorities for the lack of job opportunities, particularly in the private sector due to a failure of amending the investment law, their inability to create a suitable environment for investment, and their lack of support for the agricultural sector. The latter point has particularly been made clear by interviewees in Yethrib, where agriculture and farming traditionally provided a large number of job

55 Interview with a female participant in Al-Qaim

56 Interview with a female participant in Al-Qaim

57 Data Validation Session for Anbar

58 Interview with a male participant in Al-Qaim

59 Interview with a male participant in Tuz Khurmato

60 Interview with a male participant in Tuz Khurmato

61 Interview with a female participant in Tuz Khurmato

opportunities. It was highlighted that “the agricultural economy is very weak due to the absence of any subsidies to the sector in Yethrib.”⁶² Furthermore, “farmers are affected and deprived of their simplest rights such as bringing in chemicals and fertilizers.”⁶³ With agriculture having once been the breadwinner for the local population, it was highlighted that “restoring agriculture would be the first step towards recovery.”⁶⁴ The Focal Group Discussions amongst returnees reached a related conclusion that what is needed to eliminate economically driven conflict within Salah Al-Din Governorate would be to provide “real economic support for the regions agricultural and livestock projects as the two sectors are the pillars of the region’s economy.”⁶⁵

c) Security, Rule of Law, Transitional Justice & Law Enforcement

Another consistently mentioned theme in the interviews and FGDs in the target locations was the positive and negative impact of local security, rule of law, and law enforcement on conflict dynamics, upon which more details will be presented in the subsequent section.

Ninewa: Ayadiyah, and Muhalabiya

According to most of the data collected, there were no efforts to build a state of citizenship, so citizens resorted to their sectarian identities to ensure their rights and security. The "Sunni community" lost its confidence in the state, the reasons were the practices and steps taken by the ruling Shiaa parties after 2003 towards the Sunni citizens, as they experienced human rights abuses from security forces/ armed groups and an absence of an independent

judiciary. As a result, the Ninewa population had a feeling of injustice and marginalization, and a lack of patriotism practiced by the federal governorate.

Many innocent people from Ninewa consequently lost their lives, many families were displaced, and many houses were destroyed. Many have been forcibly displaced, leaving family members and friends often uncertain of their fate. The majority of the participants in the focus group sessions and the interviews further agreed that there are several unsolved security related issues in Ninewa, which includes the presence of non-state military actors, poorly controlled borders, lack of trust between the security services and the citizens, and consequently a huge security gap which had been filled by extremist armed groups. These extremist groups have particularly entered unprotected villages as an entry gate to control Ninewa.

Another issue that was highlighted by the respondents was that security services are not accurate in distinguishing true from false reports so they may punish and arrest innocent people. The data referred also to the issue of a lack of understanding between citizens and the local government authorities. Therefore, the majority of the collected data emphasizes that building up the relationship between the security services and citizens would be a crucial factor for building trust. Security forces must treat people well, be kind and enhance the culture of forgiveness without being offensive. They should stop punishing all people for the mistakes of individuals.

“Any person, who was unjustly arrested and suffered from various kinds of insults and torture, immediately joined ISIL when it appeared. He wanted to take revenge on those who wronged him. All this is due to

62 Interview with a male participant in Yathrib

63 Interview with a male participant in Yathrib

64 Interview with a male participant in Yathrib

65 Focal Group Discussion with Returnees and Refugees in Yethrib

the inhumane practices of some security services members.”⁶⁶

However, it seems that the people are more satisfied recently with the new security forces after the liberation of Mosul. As they work now more seriously on achieving peace and collaborating with the community leaders mainly through the newly established local peace committees.

Al Anbar: Al-Qai'm and Habbaniyahh

Anbar has been portrayed as unstable and insecure according to many interview and FGD participants due to the presence of various armed groups associated with foreign parties that implement orders from outside Iraq. These armed groups often occupy the private homes of the citizens and have turned them into headquarters and weapons caches. Throughout the ISIL occupation years, most of the property of citizens was taken by force. While all these mentioned incidents took place, local authorities did not have the power to enforce the law. It was further mentioned that law enforcement officials are corrupted, with cases being highlighted where criminals paid high amounts of money to get out of prison.⁶⁷

Consequently, many armed groups have exploited the lack of law enforcement which renders people frustrated, unsafe, and caused many to lose trust in government authorities. The lack of trust in security forces has been named as one of the reasons why many IDPs are unable to return to Anbar. The governorate witnessed the influx of armed groups when the region was liberated from ISIL with the uncontrolled spread of weapons. Also,

they have informally exploited the border and organized their commercial work by entering and smuggling goods. They further smuggle livestock and introduce commercial goods and vegetables, causing harm to farmers, most of whom quit their farms due to the entry of cheaper goods into Iraq benefiting from the low exchange rates of the Syrian currency.⁶⁸

The lack of security caused fear, disappointment, and hopelessness within the surveyed communities. Anbar citizens are afraid of the armed groups due to their committed attacks and confiscation of homes. “Most homeowners cannot speak or declare because they are afraid of treachery, kidnapping, or murder.”⁶⁹ The number of armed groups is continuously increasing, “When entering the market, you see more than one force in the market. And when the slightest disagreement occurs between people, more than one force intervenes, and things worsen.”⁷⁰ Citizens feel powerless against these groups, and they feel they cannot defend themselves from the armed groups. They do not trust the security forces to protect them. Some consider immigration, suicide, or revenge. “The migrant can live free of any emotional stress and achieve self-sufficiency for him and his family.”⁷¹

Salah Al-Din: Tuz Khurmato and Yethrib

Interviews and FGDs within Salah Al-Din Governorate confirm that the general security and stability within the region started to greatly deteriorate after the American invasion of Iraq in 2003. “The region witnessed explosions, explosive devices, kidnappings, and assassinations which continued until ISIL came in. Then the

66 Focus Group Discussion with ISIL affiliated families

67 Interview with a male participant in Al-Qaim

68 Interview with a male participant in Al-Qaim

69 Interview with a female participant in Al-Qa'im

70 Interview with a male participant in Al-Qa'im

71 Interview with a male participant in Habbaniyahh

sectarian strife broke out, and after 2014, anyone suspected as an ISIL member or supporter would be killed”.⁷² According to many respondents a lack of government interest in the region and the lack of local law enforcement have led to the emergence of “mafias, gangs, and outlaws who gain power and money in abundance as a result of financial and administrative corruption.”⁷³

Regional security structures continue to be weak to this day, even though some respondents mention that at least for Tuz Khurmato the security situation has improved through the deployment of “Rapid Response Forces”⁷⁴ and generally increased integrity of law since clashes/lawlessness climaxed on 16 October 2017.

However, for the most part, security actors are perceived to have a big role in fueling sectarianism for not imposing the law fairly “in holding criminals accountably from all parties and components.”⁷⁵

One of the most pressing conflict drivers in both pilot locations in Salah Al-Din Governorate highlighted has been the authorities’ “failure to compensate inhabitants who were affected by terrorist operations of armed groups, which included the burning of homes, orchards, and agricultural lands.”⁷⁶ Throughout one of the FDGs, it was further noted that those who were able to be compensated “some of them had to pay a bribe to authorities to complete the transaction.”⁷⁷

A local security-related conflict driver highlighted specifically for Yethrib has been the matter of security checkpoints and entry

permits “that surround Yethrib district and separate its residents from the neighboring districts”⁷⁸ and “create animosity and hatred within the Yethribi citizens”⁷⁹, because “the security forces treat them as ISIL supporters since an entry badge is requested for them only.”⁸⁰

In sum, it became clear that many respondents wish for a strengthened but fair and impartial law enforcement mechanism and for the efficient compensation of victims of terrorism and conflict as the most pressing solutions to improving security-related tensions within the Salah Al-Din Governorate.

d) Social Exclusion, Structural Violence and Social Justice

It became obvious through the results from the first three sub-sections of this analysis that many themes that drive conflict are interrelated and affect one another. Even though some patterns can be identified/streamlined for all the target locations, the previous sections have also shown that conflict drivers can vary geographically.

This is also the case for the next identified theme “Social Exclusion, Structural Violence and Social Justice/Social Cohesion” which is often closely linked to sectarian identity, the security situation in the area as well as economic developments.

Ninewa: Ayadiyya and Muhalabiya

The lack of dialogue among different ethnic and religious groups in Iraq has been identified as a main driver of tensions. This non-dialogue culture is the result of decades of dictatorial rule in Iraq.

72 Interview with a male participant in Tuz Khurmato
73 Interview with a male participant in Tuz Khurmato
74 Interview with a male participant in Tuz Khurmato
75 Interview with a male participant in Tuz Khurmato
76 Interview with a male participant in Tuz Khurmato
77 FGD with youth participants in Tuz Khurmato

78 Interview with a male participant in Yethrib
79 Interview with a male participant in Yethrib
80 Interview with a male participant in Yethrib

Consequently, relations among different ethnic and religious groups in the society were destroyed. In this regard, the collected data highlighted a growing demand for local participation in peace talks and the processes to increase a feeling of ownership and partnership at both the communal level as well as in government authorities.

According to the opinions of participants in several interviews, youth and women must actively participate in the process jointly with moderate community leaders, intellectuals, writers, and local NGOs, in addition to trusted international organizations.

Addressing hate speech was another frequently raised point and raising awareness about strengthening peace is strongly recommended. Ninewa's society is completely fragmented due to sectarian discrimination. These factors can be changed if sectarian ideology and reconciliation are addressed through seminars and community awareness to combat its danger. Some reports (from the data collected) refer to the importance of peace education to warn society about the consequences of extremism and terrorism as a tool for preventing violent extremism. **Reconciliation and transitional justice topics were raised** through the collected data, participants referred that peace education was sparsely developed in Ninewa Governorate.

For instance, it has been highlighted that there is an urgent need for activating the compensation file which plays an important role in alleviating the suffering of affected families⁸¹. Furthermore, laws must promote reconciliation by rapidly deciding pending cases in the courts. Failure to compensate

81 Compensation claims have also been highlighted as one of the strategic priorities of the Ninewa Peace and Reconciliation Working Group for 2022

those affected by military operations leads to more tensions among different groups.

“A woman lost her son during the liberation of Ninewa, even though he was innocent. She still suffers the bitterness of his loss. She said: “Grudge and tensions will not fade away as long as we have injustice and undisciplined security forces.” Everyone realized that there is no way to peace except through forgiveness, forgetting the past, and starting over.”⁸²

Al Anbar: Al-Qai'm and Habbaniyahh

Structural violence appeared because of poverty, unemployment, instability, insecurity, tension, killing, poor governance, and war. There is also an increase in domestic violence, “men are violent now; they beat their wives because they are unable to provide for their family or to build a home for them. This has led to an increase in divorce rates in society.”⁸³

There is **injustice and lack of law enforcement** in Anbar with some criminals escaping with their felony and laws are not implied on them due to **favoritism and nepotism**. In general, a lack of the culture of respecting and implementing law exists in law committees and parliament. Another point that was raised by some participants was the failure to apply the rules of transitional justice as stipulated in international covenants.⁸⁴

There is also **discrimination** among people and even geographical areas; there are areas where they have served better than the other places like West and East of Anbar in providing job opportunities and projects.

82 Focus Group Discussion with Community Leaders in Muhalabiya

83 Interview with a male participant in Habbaniyahh

84 Data Validation Session for Anbar

Officials in East Anbar accuse some communities in West Anbar to be affiliated with certain religious political parties.

Participants also complained about the cases of torture, “the security authorities are still using severe torture methods for making people confess that are banned nowadays in the world even using blackmailing is common.”⁸⁵

Salah Al-Din: Tuz Khurmato and Yethrib

The FGDs and interviews conducted in Salah Al-Din have underlined that there is a significant “moral and psychological damage,” especially amongst the direct victims of conflict and displaced, which further resulted in “generated hatred between various factions”⁸⁶ affected by tensions. An accumulation of factors described in the previous three sections such as the lack of compensation, unemployment as well as tribal conflicts further lead to weakened social ties and exclusion between different co-existing community structures.

While it was acknowledged that “the government is not the only one to blame” many respondents reiterated that “the authorities/national government failed to play a tangible role to promote acceptance of the other”⁸⁷ resulting in declining trust within the community. Examples that have been mentioned by some of the respondents were restricted access to employment by authorities for certain tribal population groups in Tuz Khurmato.

It was highlighted that in the medium and long term, Salah Al-Din Governorate

in general and the two pilot locations specifically “need an actual reconciliation between the parties that violated laws or have driven conflict, which will require great and sincere efforts.”⁸⁸ Communities must “work on addressing disputes and restoring fraternity within the neighboring areas to enhance socialization.”⁸⁹

There have been efforts and operations to build community peace including tribal reconciliation, in addition to some individual efforts by local individuals to rehabilitate houses and mosques. Furthermore, sports has been mentioned by many participants as common activities to bridge sectarian tensions and social exclusion with the two C2RI pilot locations. Football matches and the Peace Marathon Festival in Yethrib have “gained a great public turnout and have had a very positive impact”⁹⁰ on cross-communal communication.

e) Governance and Corruption

Good governance and corruption were consistently brought forward as another influence on local conflict dynamics. In the following sections, we will examine the results in more detail for each target location.

Ninewa: Ayadiyya and Muhalabiya

Poor governance, administration, and financial corruption were mentioned by the majority of participants in the interviews and focus group sessions as one of the main reasons for tension and conflict in Ninewa. Participants referred to a lack of integrity in the monitoring and fighting of corruption within government institutions, “Bad management and crisis

85 Data Validation Session for Anbar

86 Interview with a male participant in Tuz Khurmato

87 Focal Group Discussion with Community Leaders in Tuz Khurmato

88 Interview with a female participant in Tuz Khurmato

89 Interview with a female participant in Yethrib

90 Interview with a male participant in Yethrib

are the consequences of the recruitment of unqualified government officials in key positions due to their affiliations.”⁹¹

Most participants in the focus groups and interviews agreed that managerial and financial corruption is the main reason for decaying infrastructure and a lack of public services. Corruption was also cited as one of the reasons that the private sector has not been able to develop. Expanded corruption at security checkpoints has further often been referred to in the collected data which directly correlates to the unstable security situation in Ninewa Governorate. Some reports accused the security officials of taking bribes from citizens, and this exacerbated their suffering, especially within the current economic conditions in the region. Lack of access to natural resources is another reason added to above as a key factor that drives tensions in the region.

Rule of law is another essential concern for many in Ninewa’s society. Activating and promoting the rule of law by strengthening the executive power can be a solution for the current problems of Ninewa, according to the opinions of many research participants. The mismanagement of the state by the parties and the neglect of its natural and human resources has generated corruption never witnessed by Iraq or any country in the region. According to the collected data, the main parties to these tensions are the political parties and the armed factions, who think that the law does not apply to them, and whose authority is even stronger than that of the state. “The main driver of these tensions are political parties that took control after 2003 and their inability to create a governing system that accommodates all

sects and nepotism, they are the reason for not applying the law. If there was a law applicable to all, we would not have reached this miserable situation.”⁹²

A lot of data further outlined the lack of basic services in Ninewa as a result of corruption. There are a lot of families, especially returnees, whose homes are destroyed and need to be rebuilt but very little has been fixed. There are many villages with no electricity which don’t have access to the public generators because the families can’t afford the monthly contributions. “Some villages still can’t afford to buy drinking water. If some international organizations did not provide some villages, but not all, with potable water, people would drink non-potable water. If the state provides them with livelihoods and basic services, they will maintain its security and stability to ensure the sustainability of these services.”⁹³

When it comes to rule of law and structural violence the issues of discrimination, marginalization, inequality, injustice, and human rights violation were among the topics raised in the collected datasets. The security forces have taken a bad approach with the people who are seen as enemies of the regime.

Al Anbar: Al-Qai’m and Habbaniyah

The government has failed to provide citizens with proper public services which enable them to meet their basic needs. Water, electricity, roads, infrastructure, healthcare, education, environment, rehabilitation, security, jobs, agriculture, economy, and peace are among the main topics participants asked government authorities to take care of. Some of these resources/services are available within

⁹¹ The wide majority of interviewed respondents pointed out the lack of qualifications of officials in key positions as the main obstacle to combatting corruption.

⁹² interview with a female participant from Muhalabiya

⁹³ Mixed Focus Group Discussion in Muhalabiya

certain areas but these are often subject to a bribe or reserved for tribes closely affiliated with people in power. Governmental authorities also have low influence and authority over armed groups and have not been able to move the disarmament of these actors forward. There is also lack of coordination among security forces especially in managing the desert areas in Western Anbar, rendering citizens fearful of a potential re-entry of ISIL or other armed actors. Other topics such as the return of IDPs, terrorism, and trade of narcotics have further been proven to be highly important for the public, but the government has not been active to develop useful responses in addressing some of these issues.⁹⁴

Participants in the interviews and focus group discussions claimed that citizens in daily transactions in the local departments and government institutions face discrimination and marginalization.⁹⁵ In public institutions, citizens are consequently treated according to their influence/social class. All these led to a lack of trust by citizens in public institutions, often to the point where they are perceived to be unable to meet basic services for citizens.

Belonging and corruption: Processing citizens' transactions in public institutions/departments based on personal relations and bribes has become a common practice that made many community members severely unsatisfied. "Anyone who belongs to any political party and assumes political positions will receive many privileges for himself, his family, and those who belong to him."⁹⁶ The reason for this is the misconduct by heads of services and political party departments who play the largest role in these actions.

94 Interview with a male participant in Al-Qaim

95 Interview with a male participant in Al-Qaim

96 Interview with a male participant in Al Qa'im

Salah Al-Din: Tuz Khurmato and Yethrib

One of the most prominent problems in the sub-district described by the sample interviewees for both pilot locations is bad governance including "the lack of centralization in the administration, the lack of coordination with the security authorities in it, the lack of services and the weak infrastructure, particularly the schools that have been destroyed."⁹⁷

The electricity supply hours are short in both pilot communities, with the voltage being significantly reduced in the summer because of the large number of cooling devices, which leads to financial damages for many citizens. Water in the district capitals is not available continuously and is "almost non-existent in the surrounding areas."⁹⁸ The number of schools has been pointed out as not sufficient, and some of them are not suitable for teaching because of their lack of necessities, such as student seats and blackboards. Furthermore, there are neither enough health centers in the area nor medicine and emergencies cannot be treated "because of lack of operating rooms in Tuz Hospital."⁹⁹ The situation in the health center of Yethrib sub-center has been described as equally poor with "some families having been forced to travel to Baghdad to get treatment."¹⁰⁰ Conditions all of which create a state of insecurity and serve as an accelerator for tensions within Salah Al-Din Governorate.

As an additional point highlighted throughout the data collection phase, governance is based on quotas rather than on merit and competencies, and personal interests

97 Focus Group Discussion with ISIL-affiliated families in Tuz Khurmato

98 Interview with a female participant in Tuz Khurmato

99 Interview with a female participant in Tuz Khurmato

100 Interview with a female participant in Yethrib

are given priority over the public interest, resulting in mismanagement, marginalization, and discrimination between social groups.

Related to this, “corruption is widespread throughout the government departments from the highest positions to the lowest ranks. No transaction is completed without bribery or connection with the main causes of corruption being financial, everyone wants to control the natural resources in the region.”¹⁰¹ It was highlighted that this also hampers investment and development of the governorate since many employers “cannot continue to work in the area unless they pay sums of money to certain parties or actors.”¹⁰² Some respondents felt that the neglect of Salah al-Din Governorate as a whole also resulted from a low interest from the central government in Baghdad.

Interviewees have called for impartial and sincere government authorities that do not resolve problems based on quota systems or financial favors, “provide security and services within their community, ensure the equal representation of all components in the security forces”¹⁰³ and engage all sects within the community.

f) Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment

Gender equality and women’s empowerment, or rather the lack thereof, has been showcased as one of the main obstacles to decreasing tensions within the target communities throughout our data-gathering phase. More details on geographical differences will be presented in the section below.

Ninewa: Ayadiyya and Muhalabiya

Women’s rights were an important topic in several interviews and focus group

sessions, with a particular focus on the problems of widows, divorce, early age marriage, polygamy, forced and illegal marriage, unequal job opportunities, and women’s limited involvement in the political process, which subsequently leads to the marginalization of women’s roles in the community. In the opinion of most respondents from the conducted interviews, the main reason for the limited involvement of women in the political process was the serious risks female electoral candidates are facing in Ninewa.

According to the data collected, men play an important role in increasing or easing tensions, they are the main driver, but women have a very weak role. The role played by women to build peace is very weak because of the norms and traditions that have limited their role in all aspects, however, things are changing and the role of women to participate in the process of building sustainable peace is slowly but steadily improving. The role of women in building peace is limited to what women have done to prevent their relatives from interfering in these tensions.

It is also important to refer to the issue of child marriage which leads to divorce in many cases and causes family disputes. The percentage of widows and orphans in Iraq is very high due to war. The issue of sexual harassment as a reason for female school dropouts was also raised in some interviews. Digital extortion was also highlighted in several interviews. “Women have a very weak role; they are the victims of tensions. Some women lost their husbands, brothers, or fathers because they joined terrorist armed factions, or were killed. Thus, women suffered a lot of woes and sorrows.”¹⁰⁴

101 Interview with a male participant in Yethrib

102 Interview with a male participant in Yethrib

103 Interview with a male participant in Tuz Khurmato

104 Focus Group Discussion with community leaders in Muhalabiya

“Women played their part in building peace, but on a small scale in their homes. Every mother calls her husband, brothers, and children to peace, to forgive the abuser, and to avoid tensions.”¹⁰⁵

Al Anbar: Al-Qai'm and Habbaniyahh

The female role in society is somewhat limited due to tradition, family restriction, norms, and false opinions. Many participants consider women to be strong, able to bring positive changes to the community and participate in peacebuilding processes in Anbar. Other issues that were raised in this regard were struggles with child marriage, violence, lack of literacy courses, and lack of support to orphans and widows, particularly those who live below the poverty line. On another note, there have been some religious figures and other respondents who have expressed that women should only stay home to raise kids, “Women have a weak role in society, the powers are in the hands of men because of tribal norms and beliefs of Islam. The Quran says: {Men are the protectors and maintainers of women}. The role of women in achieving peace is limited, it is limited to the role of motherhood only. However, the mother can support peace by raising her children properly. Women have little role to play other than that.”¹⁰⁶

Furthermore, many of the participants stated that it is not religion itself but rather false interpretations thereof that make women suffer. And the religion of Islam asks for respecting women and equality, but the problem is a wrong interpretation of some people to the religion. “Also, men do not abide by the prophet's commandments, ‘I advise you to be good to women’, women

are now being held by men like maids because they have no rights. So, there is no role for women in achieving peace because they are oppressed.”¹⁰⁷

As for the role of women, women are marginalized in decision-making process due to tribal customs and the domination of men. Female participants, in general, felt sad about this situation, “Women here suffer from emotional stress because they are denied their role in society.”¹⁰⁸ Female participants in Anbar have highlighted that women want to be considered and heard, they are ready to participate in peacebuilding process, empower each other, and contribute to a cohesive community.

Salah Al-Din: Tuz Khurmato and Yethrib

Similar to the outcomes in the other two surveyed governorates, our data for Salah-al-Din Governorate shows that the role of women is marginalized due to tribal customs which hamper women's access to education and employment. As many respondents highlighted, the role of women in society “is to take care of their children and to manage their homes only, with some rare exceptions”¹⁰⁹, which keeps them from working outside their homes, engaging with the community, and being able to play a significant role in local peace processes. In the Focal Group Discussions, it was further reported that many women “suffer from the issue of sexual harassment due to a lack of public awareness”¹¹⁰ and a culture of patriarchic prevalence, especially among young people. Due to this phenomenon, many families prevented their daughters from going to school.

105 Focus Group Discussion with youth representatives in Muhalabiya

106 Interview with a male participant in Habbaniyahh

107 Interview with a female participant in Habbaniyahh

108 Interview with a female participant in Habbaniyahh

109 Interview with a male participant in Tuz Khurmato

110 Focal Group Discussion with returnees in Yethrib

Currently, women are mostly perceived to play a role in peace by building educated and intellectual generations through childcare and education at schools. Acknowledging that “women must be understood and given greater roles in society to enable them to participate in communal activities”¹¹¹, some respondents highlighted that “if given an opportunity, women would be able to play a role”¹¹² in decreasing conflict and tension.

g) Climate Change & Environment

While not consistently mentioned throughout all interviews, climate change and environmental hazards have further been recognized as a tension accelerator within the target locations within some interviews and through the data validation workshop. The following sub-section will present the findings in more detail.

Ninewa: Ayadiyya and Muhalabiya

Climate change is one of the major challenges Iraq needed to face since a severe drought gripped Iraq in 2007 and 2008. It caused disastrous environmental and economic impacts, particularly on the agricultural sector. This issue was raised in the validation session repeatedly, including the role of climate change in forcing tribes and families to displace from the rural to urban areas of Ninewa.

Unfortunately, there is no specific focus on developing studies to assess the likely impact of climate change on Iraq, including its effect on demographic changes, which were identified as one of the reasons for conflict in Ninewa through the validation session.

Because of increasing and stronger droughts, displaced families were forced to leave their homes and businesses behind

and relocate to other areas with often little to no source of income. No regular humanitarian aid or support was provided to those displaced families, or programs to resettle them. This made youth and men easy targets for recruitment by armed militias, as they desperately needed another source of income¹¹³.

Furthermore, the negative impact of climate change on Iraq is further magnified by human interventions, including the building of several dams and diversion schemes on the Tigris and Euphrates rivers during the last three decades. Therefore, the country’s capacity must be developed to adapt to these changes.

The issue of mines was also highlighted by participants in the validation session and many areas still contain explosive mines which place a danger on people’s lives and on the environment.

Al Anbar; Al-Qai’m and Habbaniyahh

Participants claimed that the topic of environment is neglected, and it requires more attention, action, and awareness.¹¹⁴ Although the municipality’s equipment and machinery are all modern and came as aid from organizations and international community support, the waste, rubble, war remnants, destroyed cars during the war operations are still present all over Anbar. Participants highlighted that if Anbar would concentrate on promoting the agriculture sector and water recycling, it would not only benefit nature and environment but would also provide citizens clean water, which is lacking.

Salah Al-Din; Tuz Khurmato and Yethrib

111 Interview with a male participant in Yethrib

112 Interview with a male participant in Tuz Khurmato

113 [Drought forces Iraqi farmers to leave their land](https://france24.com/en/iraq/drought-forces-iraqi-farmers-to-leave-their-land/) (france24.com), Drought forces Iraqi farmers to leave their land | Online Version (daily-sun.com)

114 Validation Workshop Session for Anbar

Throughout the previous sections, it has become clear that the economy of Salah-al-Din strongly depends on agriculture, with Yethrib considered the breadbasket of Iraq. This was also brought up once more within at the Validation Workshop, where respondents highlighted that “the government is ignorant when it comes to farming and farmers, not providing any support for them.” This in turn also can improve the environment if sustainable agriculture techniques are being supported by federal and local government authorities.

Within the validation workshop, it was further highlighted that environmental pollution is commonplace, with some people “throwing waste and garbage into the Dijlla river” and “trees and orchards being burned and bull-dozed.”¹¹⁵ Overall, environmental regards and climate change have not been consistently highlighted as a reason for conflict but combined with other themes it has become clear throughout the data analysis phase that it can play a factor. This will become particularly relevant in the future, with climate change potentially affecting conditions for agriculture as an important source of income in the target locations in Salah-al-Din.

h) Armed Groups & Extremism

Terrorism, armed violence, and radical extremism have been almost consistently prevalent in Iraq since the 1980s and still rank as one of, if not as the conflict drivers in the surveyed pilot locations. While more details on actors in conflict themselves will be provided in Chapter 8.2., the following sub-section will elaborate further on the general co-relation between terrorism and local conflict dynamics.

Ninewa: Ayadiyya and Muhalabiya

Extremist ideas have been on the increase throughout recent years and attracted many people that wanted to fight sectarian forces. Ignorance and a lack of awareness also acted as a reason for young people to join extremist groups. Some parents have tried to educate their children and urge them not to join any armed groups, sometimes with and sometimes without success. Many people who joined terrorist groups were convinced that what they are doing is what their religion has recommended. Little did they know that true Islam is based on love, tolerance, and forgiveness.

Establishing activities and programs to combat extremist ideologies has been highlighted as an urgent need by many participants in the focus groups and interviews in Ninewa. Also, they advised that religious leaders should play a big role in preventing violent extremism and that imams must spread moderate religious discourses that reject violence and extremism and call for tolerance and forgiveness instead. “The reconciliation and recovery in the context of the region mean peaceful coexistence among all and this can be achieved through educating people that they are all partners in building Iraq as a country with an inclusive national identity rather than sects, nationalities, etc.”¹¹⁶

Ideological tensions were another consequence of the lack of awareness of the importance of tolerance and forgiveness culture. Extremist ideologies are thereby often spread through mosques as some of the sample data from Ninewa has highlighted. “There are educated people who joined the organization for unknown reasons. A resident of Muhalabiya, a dentist, joined ISIL! This doctor had previously

115 Validation Workshop Session for Salah-al-Din

116 Focus Group Discussion with women in Ayadiya

obtained a patent for anesthetic during surgical operations. But when ISIL came, he joined them and became an important player in their organization. The Imams were urging some young people to rebel against the government by spreading extremist ideology in Muhalabiya. As a result, dozens of people joined ISIL, and before ISIL, Al-Qaeda".¹¹⁷

Al Anbar: Al-Qai'm and Habbaniyah

Armed groups were present in Anbar even before the entry of ISIL and started kidnapping and terrorizing citizens under the pretext of their affiliation with the previous organizations. These behaviors led to the discontent of other tribes. According to participants, these tribes were also the main reason for ISIL entering the area due to their aggressive policy towards some tribes. Some individuals joined ISIL with a desire for revenge, which led to a gap among the tribes' sheiks, although all the sheiks and local elders enlisted their sons with the security forces to defeat ISIL and developed the tribe charter. "Some individuals join militias to earn some money to support their families or to take revenge."¹¹⁸

The issue of revenge is very critical and has caused many problems in Anbar, with many family members facing retaliation if one of their relatives is perceived to be affiliated with ISIL. "It is family tensions that come in the first phase, other families have alienated us because one of my sons joined ISIL; we lost their trust. There were hostile acts and threats to us by some families who lost their homes and furniture. They came to us and said that we stole their furniture and demolished their homes, and we have

117 Focus Group Discussion with youth representatives in Muhalabiya

118 Focus Group Discussion in Al Qaim

nothing to do with this! We are still paying for my son's mistakes."¹¹⁹

These armed groups negatively affect all aspects of society. They threaten people's stability and take the public's benefits and natural resources for their own interest.

Salah Al-Din: Tuz Khurmato and Yethrib

Terrorism, extremism, and armed actors have been highlighted as one of the main conflict drivers within the Salah Al-Din pilot locations.

Most prominently, "the emergence of ISIL in 2014 resulting through a failure to address extremist ideologies nationwide since 2003"¹²⁰ sowed hatred among the community and has acted as "the main cause of tensions between neighboring communities"¹²¹ in Tuz Khurmato and Yethrib. It was however highlighted that since 2014, "awareness about ISIL increased, trust in the community was strengthened and consequently ISIL became an outcast operating out of sleeper cells outside the city who violate security from time to time."¹²²

Nevertheless, it was highlighted that militias still existent throughout the country, that "commit unexplained assassinations and kidnappings"¹²³ and "create hostility among the local population, generating sectarian tensions and hatred."¹²⁴

Due to the lack of education and programs that promote peaceful co-existence, young people are often a soft target for extremist organizations. As highlighted within

119 Interview with a male participant in Habbaniyah

120 Interview with a female participant in Tuz Khurmato

121 Focus Group Discussion with ISIL-affiliated families in Tuz Khurmato

122 Focus Group Discussion with ISIL-affiliated families in Tuz Khurmato

123 Interview with a male participant in Tuz Khurmato

124 Interview with a male participant in Yethrib



Painting as a community peace initiative implemented in Mosul, Ninewa.

previous sections, the lack of economic opportunity and the hopelessness of many young people further serve as fertile ground for radicalization. In addition to enhancing the promotion of peace education programs, respondents noted that for regional peace truly to manifest “armed militias need to be evacuated from the region.”¹²⁵ Arms should only be confined to the hands of the state, who should be responsible to enforce laws within the governorate and end the abuses committed by extremist actors.

i) Community Peace and Dialogue Committees (CDCs) and Community Leaders

The subsequent section will highlight how local peace initiatives, as well as communal figures, influence tensions within the target communities positively and negatively.

¹²⁵ Interview with a male participant in Yethrib

Ninewa: Ayadiyya and Muhalabiya

UNDP supported the Committee for Dialogue and Societal Peace (CDSP) of the Government of Iraq in establishing several Community Peace and Dialogue Committees (CDCs) throughout Anbar, Salah-al-Din, and Ninewa governorates. These committees are well-placed to help monitor and implement existing local agreements and problem-solving activities where present and, in areas absent of local agreements, lead efforts to facilitate dialogue and negotiation efforts to build consensus on solutions to issues that undermine trust and create tensions in their communities.

The data collected refer to the efforts by CDCs in the ongoing peace processes in Ninewa. They have served as a link between different conflicted groups, promoting peace, supporting the process of returning ISIL families, preventing tensions, and supporting

the national reconciliation process. In addition, tribal elders have also played a major role in alleviating the tensions among people by holding sessions to solve the problems left by ISIL within the community.

According to the data collected from the local committees represented by the Peace Committee in Muhalabiya, powerful tribal elders in the region are the most accepted and respected actors to achieve sustainable peace in the area in collaboration with the district local authorities and Muhalabiya CDC.

There are peace processes and efforts underway, represented by local peace committees in the targeted areas. These committees held several conferences with tribal elders to enable relations between security forces and the civilians in collaboration with different security actors, imams, and community leaders. These conferences helped the targeted beneficiaries to resolve many previously existing tensions and supported families to return to their home of origin¹²⁶. According to the opinion of many participants, tribal elders are the most influential and accepted actors in society to be involved in the reconciliation process and support the achievement of sustainable peace in the area. Those elders are distinguished by their openness, forgiveness, and generosity. Some tribal elders and notables from the area lost their sons, but they forgave the ISIL families, supported their return, and even supported the ISIL families financially when needed. It seems that tribal elders have a huge role in building peace and sustainability in Ninewa due to the tribal nature of the region. “The Muhalabiya Peace Committee has returned about 1,200 ISIL families to their areas, and

a conference was organized in this regard under the name of ‘The Conference of Peace in Muhalabiya.’ The return of these families has greatly supported peace efforts in the area.”¹²⁷

Al Anbar: Al-Qai’m and Habbaniyahh

It has been highlighted throughout the data collection phase that there are tribal elders in Anbar who do not belong to any sect, party, or external affiliation. Those elders are known for their loyalty to their homeland, region, and tribe members. People listen to them and benefit from their effort to make positive changes in society. However, there are also elders who are no longer respected within the community because they have been supported by external actors, or they are affiliated with certain political parties. “Most of the tribal elders who are led by parties and false Imams who claim Islam, they are full of lies and hypocrisy and belong to external agendas.”¹²⁸

The CDCs in Anbar are very active although it has been recommended to promote their work to government institutions so that they can be connected to existing civil society organizations. Many respondents have expressed their satisfaction with their work, but participants have highlighted that they should expand to cover a wider range of communities to benefit more people in the area by choosing effective and influential people who have positive effect on public.¹²⁹

Salah Al-Din: Tuz Khurmato and Yethrib

Due to the particularly tribal societal structures within Salah Al-Din Governorate, our sample highlighted that “community elders, tribal chiefs and religious leaders

¹²⁶ [UNDP supports the reintegration of families with perceived affiliation to ISIL at Local Peace Conference in Al-Ayadhiya, Tal Afar](#)

¹²⁷ Focus Group Discussion with women in Muhalabiya

¹²⁸ Interview with a male participant in Habbaniyahh

¹²⁹ Validation Workshop Session for Anbar

are among the most accepted actors”¹³⁰ to provide support to resolving individual quarrels and communal tensions. Imams and religious leaders have been at the forefront in stopping ethnic alignment and trying to calm sectarian disputes and tensions within the two pilot locations, whereas local civil society organizations, as well as international organizations, are accepted within the communities “as neutral bodies that can enter the region and raise awareness and conduct programs to facilitate community reconciliation.”¹³¹

CDCs have furthermore been recognized by many respondents as bodies that are contributing towards making peacebuilding efforts by “carrying out several activities, including awareness building and development courses, exhibitions, organizing poetry and art festivals and reviving national as well as patriotic events”¹³². They have further played a role in contributing to the financial compensation of returnees and IDPs. The success of the CDCs and community efforts (at least for Tuz Khurmato) nevertheless has been described by some as “somewhat limited due to the great suffering and destruction that befell the region,”¹³³ whereas the impact of communal efforts within Yethrib were highlighted as more favorable.

j) International Community

External actors and the involvement of the international community has been brought forward throughout the data collection phase as one crucial thematic area which influences tensions and conflicts within the target locations.

Ninewa: Ayadiyya and Muhalabiya

Actors in Ninewa which influence local conflict dynamics can be divided into two categories. On one hand there are international NGOs, the UN, and countries, who largely contribute positively towards local peace processes. On the other hand, some neighboring countries have been highlighted to play a largely negative role in driving violent conflict by providing financial and logistical support to armed groups, including Al Qaeda and the ISIL (Daesh).

According to the collected data, participants referring to the classification of the neighboring countries which can be sorted into Sunni supporting countries on the one hand, which among others include the two influential forces of Qatar and Saudi Arabia. On the other hand, Iran has been mentioned as the biggest supporter of the Shia’s government of Baghdad and influences the government’s agenda and policies actively. Furthermore, Turkey has been mentioned due to its intervention and interest in Sinjar.

The role played by the UN agencies contributes to some extent to address the above-mentioned conflict-related challenges, but the international community certainly cannot replace the government and its capabilities. So, the role of the government is the most important one in this regard. The government has taken a few steps together with UN agencies to resolve tensions in the targeted areas. According to the collected data, they assured that the actors and institutions who have the capacity and interest to promote peace and cooperation, strengthen socialites and social cohesion are supported to do so.

¹³⁰ Interview with a male participant in Tuz Khurmato

¹³¹ Interview with a male participant in Tuz Khurmato

¹³² Interview with a male participant in Tuz Khurmato

¹³³ Interview with a female participant in Yethrib

Al Anbar: Al-Qai'm and Habbaniyah

International organizations have a major role to play in creating positive changes in Anbar. Throughout the data collection phase, people have shown respect towards their efforts, and participants have requested the international community to continue their support to Anbar, “These efforts played a successful role, and we hope that they will be repeated more often.”¹³⁴

Furthermore, international organizations have been recognized to conduct many projects in Anbar, “citizens have hope only in some humanitarian organizations, international human right organization.”¹³⁵ The projects have included activities such as sports, vocational training courses, exhibition, art, reading, educational session, grants, distributing food baskets, sewing courses, opening football stadiums, seminars, dialogue session, awareness sessions, cleaning, facilitating the return of IDPs, livelihood, and infrastructure projects. However, some participants think that even the involvement of international organizations will not succeed in resolving local conflicts due to the internal nature of tensions which are often hard to be resolved by external actors.

The spread of Covid-19 further affected peace initiatives in Anbar because most of the activities were stopped; many events, workshops, and trainings were postponed that were very crucial to Anbar.

While citizens appreciate and encourage the work of NGOs, there are many people who are not satisfied with their performance and believe that corruption is not only a governmental problem but has also reached the NGOs.

¹³⁴ Interview with a male participant in Al Qa'im
¹³⁵ Interview with a female participant in Al Qa'im

As for neighboring countries, participants believe that they want to control the area by supporting armed groups. External interference is thus seen as a large conflict driver and respondents have expressed hope that the neighboring countries will stop interfering in Anbar.

Salah Al-Din: Tuz Khurmato and Yethrib

Similarly, as for the other surveyed pilot locations, meddling from international actors and external interference have been described as an accelerator for stirring tensions within Salah Al-Din Governorate. Respondents have highlighted that particularly “neighboring countries with sectarian and political agendas have had a role in driving conflict” by arming/funding proxy organizations with the same sectarian/ethnic background.

This in turn has been fueling sectarian tensions previously described, with Turkey, Azerbaijan, and Iran providing support to “Shiite Turkmen ethnicity ideology within Tuz Khurmato”¹³⁶ and the “Gulf States supporting extremist religious and outlaw armed groups with a Sunni Arab background.”¹³⁷ Regional countries exploit the ethnic diversity within Salah Al-Din by attempting to support the respective groups which are closest in favor of their own political and sectarian interests. “Vicious foreign interventions seek to achieve interests by creating strife between the competition to weaken the region and then control it to gain their economic and political goals.”¹³⁸

Within Yethrib, external intervention has not been pointed out as openly by respondents

¹³⁶ Interview with a male participant in Tuz Khurmato

¹³⁷ Interview with a male participant in Tuz Khurmato

¹³⁸ Focus Group Discussion with ISIL-affiliated Families in Tuz Khurmato

as by the interviewees in Tuz Khurmato even though it has been acknowledged that “there is an external agenda and a foreign (regional) intelligence system that works behind the coulisses to create such conflicts in these areas, and the poor and innocent people are the victims.”¹³⁹

On a positive note, international organizations and external donors have provided assistance and core funding for rehabilitation, reconstruction as well as reconciliation activities.

6.2 KEY ACTORS

The following section will attempt to shed light on the relations among all the relevant conflict actors in the targeted locations.

According to data analysis, it has become clear that the Federal Government is an important actor who has the main levers of power which can either help to build peace or drive conflict. Concerning their relations on the international level, they have a strong connection with the Iranian Government due to their Shia background and consequently an unstable relationship with Sunni regional powers such as Saudi Arabia and Turkey.

It is important to point out that the Federal Government, through the cabinet formed by Mustafa Al-Kadhimi, tried to eliminate relations with some of the Sunni political parties and groups within the local authority structures of Ninewa, Anbar, and Salah-al-Din. Our consolidated data for all target locations confirmed that the respondents are not against the federal government of Baghdad, but rather only against the policies of the former Prime Minister cabinet. They support the idea of maintaining a united

Iraq on the condition of respecting human rights principles/values and human security.

The relationship between the government and the UN political mission in Iraq is stable without conflict or significant tension. The UN political mission in Iraq has publicly reiterated its support to short and even mid-range governmental visions and strategies. The nature of the UN mission cannot impose decisions on the Iraqi government. Instead, it offers advice, support, and assistance to the government by advancing the political dialogue and national reconciliation efforts. Through interviews and focus group discussions, significant results have been reported, supporting national reconciliation and sustainable peace in Iraq. Moreover, the UN in Iraq works as a connector between top-level and middle-level actors through its programmes with the support of the NGOs and community leaders.

Local NGOs have been highlighted for their significant role in bridge-building activities include interesting interventions, such as conducting peace and coexistence conferences, seminars, promoting the role of media and peace journalism, and advocating for amending the articles that provoke structural violence in the Iraqi constitution.

Furthermore, data has referred to the strong coordination by UNDP and UNDP’s perceived intention to include community leaders and local NGOs in the decision-making and consultation processes with the local authority of Ninewa, Anbar, and Salah al-Din which led to several successful events in supporting the displaced people to return home.

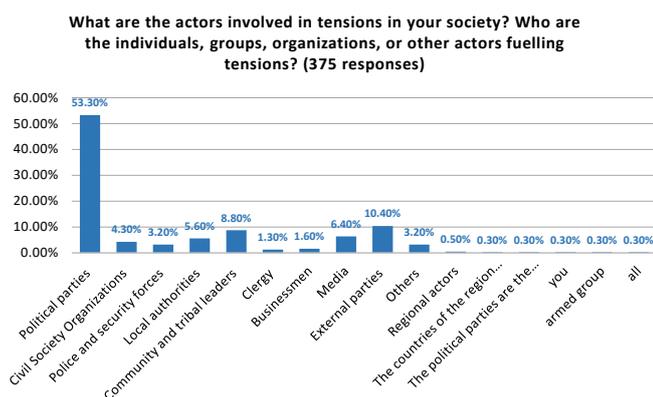
The media are also designated, middle-level actors. Again, the role of media varied from before ISIL advanced and after ISIL

¹³⁹ Interview with a male participant in Yethrib

took over Ninewa in June 2014 and the remaining Sunni areas. Prior to ISIL, the media was seemingly less constructive, as they only focused on the negative side of problems, especially local media from the targeted locations. Furthermore, the independence of media was one of the main concerns of the Ninewa, Anbar, and Salah al-Din communities. The lack of security was another reason that media was not active, and after ISIL controlled the targeted communities, media outlets essentially no longer existed, except for social media, until liberation.

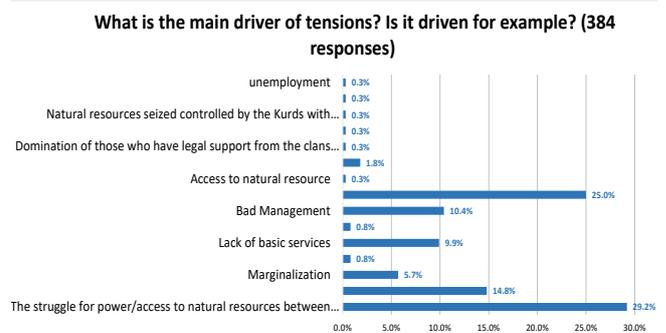
Grassroots leaders should continue their peace initiatives to connect conflicted parties with the support of the international community in collaboration with local authorities to support the displaced to return home.

Local Peace Committees, in collaboration with community leaders, have initiated significant peace initiatives in Ninewa, Anbar, and Salah al-Din. These are worth highlighting, especially to examine best practices and lessons learned for other communities. For instance, a peace conference initiated by the Local Peace Committee in Muhalabiya in April 2021 helped about 1,200 families perceived to be affiliated with ISIL to return to their areas of origin. This initiative achieved significant success by bringing parties in dispute together after the ISIL crisis of 2014 and supporting the return of IDPs.



Another important and successful initiative was the Local Peace Conference in Habbaniyah, Anbar Governorate with support from UNDP, where a peace agreement was signed that allowed the return of 524 displaced families perceived as affiliated with ISIL to their places of origin.¹⁴⁰

Based on the collected data, the majority refer to the role of neighboring countries and Qatarin paying significant roles in driving conflict. The neighboring Syrian civil war also strongly affects the security situation in Iraq, especially on the bordering governorates, and there is clear evidence that terrorist groups move freely across the Iraqi-Syria borders. They use Syria as a base for operations before venturing into Anbar, Ninewa, Salah-al-Din, and escalating conflict in Iraq. Turkey has played a significant role in shaping the security, economic, and political situation, particularly in Ninewa, focusing on Mosul city. It has had a significant effect on the political and economic decisions of local authorities.



At the grassroots level, initiatives to rebuild local relations exist, especially among youth, and with restricted roles for women, through seminars and cultural events, and participation of grassroots leaders. However, such initiatives cannot be extended easily to connect all three levels of

140 [UNDP supports community reintegration of families with perceived affiliation to ISIL at Local Peace Conference in Habbaniyah](#)



Local Peace Committees supported by UNDP assisted over 100,000 people with food and hygiene support, as well as public space sterilization, during the spread of COVID-19 in 2020.

actors due to weak trust. It is also important to highlight the role of some tribal leaders, clerics, and intellectuals in implementing and managing conflict resolution initiatives between the tribal leaders and the local authorities, including the provincial council, after the liberation with the support of the UNDP. These activities were conducted in cooperation with community leaders and CDCs and had a clear impact on decreasing terrorist activities. For instance, hundreds of peace initiatives were implemented in collaboration with youth and women peace groups with the support of UNDP Iraq's Social Cohesion Programme.

Local NGOs were very active, and they were among the first groups who called for immediate action to bring all the parties together for dialogue. They became part of some established alliances, such as the Network for Iraqi Facilitators (NIF) and the Alliance of Iraqi Minorities.

6.3 CONFLICT FRAMEWORK

The main conflict drivers mentioned consistently throughout the research conducted included corruption, injustice, and discrimination. This is due to regular failures in the system of rules and rights in Iraq, which makes ethnic and religious minorities lose any sense of belonging to their Iraqi homeland.

The balance of power among the political parties, blocs, religious groups, and community leaders must also be emphasized. All actors have their own justification for driving conflict. In general, the actors exert effort to maintain their advantages and to preserve their moral and political positions. However, they practice and frame their policies in ways to argue that it is for the good of society. Consequently, many grassroots groups have lost trust with parties at different levels.

Governance issues, such as over-centralized power, dictatorships, and severe military responses further fueled the conflict in the targeted areas. Here, the focus is on several related issues that have been highlighted through the data collection process such as corruption, unemployment among youth and women, lack of basic services, poor education opportunities mainly in the rural areas, poverty, injustice in wealth distribution, discrimination and oppression against ethnic and religious minorities, random detention, women's rights violations, and limited freedom of expression.

Rule of law has been highlighted as another essential concern for many in Anbar, Salah-al-Din and Ninewa. Enforcing rule of law by strengthening local law enforcement mechanisms can be a solution for the current problems in the targeted areas. The main advice to the government was to consider the issues of structural violence, including the structural violence embedded in and advanced by relevant Iraqi regulations and laws, including the constitution and the criminal code.

Conflicts of power have further been highlighted as one of the main conflict drivers. Some participants argued that Iraq, in general, is a tribal society and the only way to solve problems is through tribal elders and clerics and if this doesn't work then the court is the second option.

The traditions, customs, and cultural issues affecting the system also contribute to structural violence, especially considering women's rights. In the case of armed conflict, this can be exacerbated and extend to problems of divorce, early marriage, forced marriage, including terrorist group members, unequal job opportunities, and limited involvement in the political process, which subsequently leads to marginalized women's roles within the community.

7 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The results analysis of 90 interviews, 30 Focal Group Discussions, 412 responses to the online survey, and comprehensive desk research have highlighted causes of conflict, key actors, conflict dynamics, and opportunities for peace interventions in the six C2RI target locations. Based on the main findings of the results of the analysis, the following policy recommendations can be identified to inform the design of key interventions through the main actors to improve security, enhance community reconciliation, foster economic growth, enable the return of IDPs and ultimately build sustainable peace in the targeted areas.

Federal Government of Iraq

Our recommendations for the Federal Government of Iraq focus on how the government can strengthen national regulations/legislation aimed at combatting human rights violations, enhancing rule of law, eliminating corruption, increasing demographic equality, and fostering economic growth as means to build social justice/decrease tensions within the target locations at the local level:

1. Creation of legislation to combat corruption & increase accountability. The Federal Government should continue to promote anti-corruption legislation and mechanisms that strengthen good governance and accountability.
2. Develop a clear 'end-violence' scenario. The Federal Government should meaningfully engage all relevant parties of conflict to develop a clear end-violence scenario including but not limited to: extremist groups, tribal and religious leaders, protesters, security actors, civil society, and local authorities. This should happen in close coordination with UN agencies and the international community.
3. Promote economic development in cooperation with private sector actors to create job opportunities for youth and women. Programs can be organized in cooperation with relevant local NGOs, labour unions, and international donors, including relevant UN agencies and the World Bank. Additionally, these actors can provide support to build the capacities of youth and women to engage in the labour market.
4. Increase border security. The Federal Government should enhance border security in response to the lack of security in the target communities resulting from cross-border traffic from extremist groups such as ISIL. Security actors/border officials need to be hired based on merit rather than sectarian affiliation/personal relationships.
5. Establish rehabilitation programs for victims of trauma and violence with a focus on women, children, and youth. These programs should be implemented in close cooperation with specialized international and local institutions and could be linked to already existing mechanisms focussing on social cohesion and preventing violent extremism.
6. Foster partnerships with local peace-building mechanisms and civil society actors. The government should partner with relevant local NGOs, youth and women platforms, and community

leaders to increase reciprocal trust and increase security for community leaders/activists, local NGOs, and human rights defenders throughout times of conflict.

7. Continue enhanced coordination/support with the international community. The Iraqi government should continue the trend to engage closely with international partners both for technical support where they are needed as well as for building political dialogue/amicable relations contributing to de-escalating tensions and fostering national reconciliation processes.
8. Disarm militias/extremist groups. The government and relevant political parties need to advocate for the disarmament of local/regional militias. Thus incentives for disarmament need to be created, dialogues to reform the security sector need to continue and coordination amongst local/regional/national security actors needs to be strengthened.
9. Develop strategies to decrease the gender equality gap. Governmental actors need to continue pathways to enhance economic, social, and political equality of Iraqi women in accordance with the National Strategy to Combat Violence against Women in support of Security Council Resolution 1325 as well as with the recommendations of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
10. Strengthen climate change/environmental policies. The Iraqi government needs to seek the advice and technical support of relevant UN agencies to reduce the impact of climate change and to address the lack of policies, capacities, and legal frameworks for the

use of natural resources.

11. Incentivize investment opportunities/reward entrepreneurship through national-level policies. Develop national strategies that foster economic growth and incentivize investment in rural, conflict-ridden areas. Legislation could include the activation of investment law and the provision of small loans to marginalized groups such as youth/women entrepreneurs.
12. Put forward policies/measures to strengthen the domestic agriculture sector. The Federal Government should provide subsidies to the domestic agricultural sector and strengthen the role of local farmers who are now deprived of the simplest rights such as bringing in fertilizers/chemicals.
13. Compensate victims of conflict swiftly and efficiently. Jointly with local government authorities, ensure that compensation claims are processed swiftly and efficiently to empower reintegration/return of conflict-affected families/individuals.

Local Authorities

The subsequent recommendations feature policy recommendations for local government authorities which, as our research has shown, have a vital role in decreasing tensions within the target communities.

1. Build capacities of local government officials to improve communication, dialogue, mediation, and conflict transformation/management skills in provincial and local councils.
2. Develop accountability mechanisms & a merit-based hiring policy. Local public institutions need to create accountability policies within their own ranks to combat rampant corruption /nepotism as a basis to re-establish communal trust with citizens. Relatedly, local government officials need to be hired based on merit across all ethnicities to bridge strong ethnic/sectarian divisions.
3. Compensate victims of conflict swiftly and efficiently. Jointly with federal government authorities, ensure that compensation claims are processed swiftly and efficiently to empower reintegration/return of conflict-affected families/individuals.
4. Strengthen rule of law & accountability in law enforcement. Local government authorities need to strengthen the rule of law by combatting corruption within security actors and replace them with merit-based hires that will hold criminals accountable in a just and objective manner. In cooperation with the federal government and the international community, local authorities can further provide funding to accountability trainings for security actors.
5. Advocate for national and local reconciliation processes. Jointly with civil society actors and academia, local authorities should actively promote local reconciliation processes and strengthen relationships with all relevant local peace actors to jointly develop an end-to-violence scenario.
6. Promote economic development in cooperation with private sector actors to create job opportunities for youth and women. Programs can be organized in cooperation with relevant local NGOs, labour unions and international donors, including relevant UN agencies and the World Bank. Additionally, these actors can provide support to build capacities of youth and women to engage in the labour market.
7. Incentivize investment opportunities/reward entrepreneurship through national-level policies. Jointly with the federal government, develop strategies that foster economic growth and incentivize investment. Legislation could include the activation of the investment law and the provision of small loans to marginalized groups such as youth/women entrepreneurs.
8. Put forward policies/measures to strengthen agriculture. In cooperation with the federal government, local authorities need to develop strategies to strengthen the role of agriculture/increase the rights of local farmers. This can improve easing access to fertilizers and chemicals, creating spaces for investment opportunities/markets or/and providing subsidies to local farmers.

Civil Society

The following recommendations target how local academia and civil society actors can amplify their role as a connector/middle-actor between national and local stakeholders to decrease tensions and strengthen reconciliation processes in the target locations:

1. Support research and studies on local conflict dynamics and prevention which can advise local and federal authorities on best practices for peace interventions and programs.
2. Advocate for national and local reconciliation processes. Civil society actors and academia should actively promote national and local reconciliation processes and should further provide direct support/liaise with local/federal authorities in developing a clear end violence scenario. Throughout this process, civil society can contribute to ensuring the meaningful and safe participation of all parties in an inclusive reconciliation mechanism.
3. Build and strengthen relationships with tribal and religious leaders by fostering cooperation with all relevant local peace actors and engaging them in relevant peace interventions, activities, and programs. This can be supported by sharing conflict analysis outcomes with them that highlight the importance of stopping conflict/tensions and working towards peace.
4. Build community capacities and culture of peace education/dialogue/reconciliation. Civil society needs to increasingly get engaged in enhancing dialogue culture and building capacities among conflict actors/community members in peace education and reconciliation.
5. Build capacities of the local media, especially in subjects related to peace journalism. This will serve to strengthen independent media outlets as representatives of the community and enable them to address community concerns, needs, and challenges objectively.
6. Empower youth, women and other marginalized social groups to bridge socio-economic and political inequalities. Economically, this can be done through the establishment of youth/women committees and worker unions which address their needs, foster leadership skills, encourage their socio-economic empowerment and engage them in political processes.
7. Collaborate with the government in raising awareness concerning the impact of climate change and promote sustainable practices in the use of natural resources.
8. Strengthen mediation between local, national and international stakeholders. Civil society actors bear an existential role as a neutral and well-respected mediator between drivers of conflict, key decision-makers and civilians within the target communities which need to take up an even stronger liaison role to develop locally tailored reconciliation processes.

United Nations & the International Community

The following recommendations reflect the role of the international community and the United Nations in resolving conflict within the target locations by highlighting specific thematic areas of engagement based on needs and gaps identified throughout this conflict analysis.

1. Promote the rule of law. The international community should work together with the government and civil society organizations to ensure effective rule of law in the target locations as well as comprehensive reporting procedures and accountability mechanisms. Programs should be designed with the involvement of local NGOs to ensure regained community trust.
2. Monitor conflict developments and liaise with international actors fuelling conflict. UN agencies and other international actors should continue their ongoing commitment and support to national/local authorities to actively monitor and report any human rights violations/conflict developments. This should be done whilst also integrating longer-term development aspects into the existing humanitarian programs, to ensure sustainability and constructive social change. The international community should further stay committed in promoting diplomatic ways to ensure future stability and prosperity for Iraq while condemning direct/indirect external attempts to creating instability.
3. Support good governance structures as well as anti-corruption/accountability mechanisms. Relevant UN agencies need to support the Government of Iraq in developing anti-corruption, transparency and accountability mechanisms that meet the exceptional circumstances of corruption and conflict in Iraq.
4. Strengthen local employment structures and assist incentives targeting economic growth. UN agencies should continue their support to governmental authorities/local communities in creating an enabling environment for private sector growth and in developing strategies to decrease poverty and to address livelihood and unemployment-related challenges.
5. Invest in communal social cohesion and strengthen measures to prevent violent extremism. The international community should continue to invest in peacebuilding/social-cohesion activities within target communities including but not limited to: building communal trust, strengthening ties between community members, security actors and public institutions, promoting reconciliation and reducing conflict-related stigma as well as preventing violent extremism/radicalization.
6. Capacity building for governmental authorities, civil society actors and community members. The United Nations and international community should continue to enhance institutional capacities of governmental entities, civil society and individual community actors on conflict sensitivity approaches, conflict prevention measures, dialogue, and reconciliation culture and on the promotion of peace education.

Community Figures/Religious and Tribal Leaders/Activists

One of the main findings of this conflict analysis has been that community figures such as religious and tribal leaders rank among the most-well respected actors among citizens and public institutions alike within all the target locations. Thus, their suitability for leading in decreasing tensions is reflected within the subsequent recommendations.

1. Promote individual responsibilities. Moderate tribal and religious leaders should increase their efforts to develop a sense of citizenship and patriotism within the target communities' communal structures, through their statements and speeches at relevant events.
2. Create an inclusive dialogue culture. As mediators, moderate tribal and religious leaders should invite conflict parties, the government/local authorities, the international community, local NGOs, and extremist groups /individuals to work towards reconciliation within the target areas.
3. Dissolve militias. In close cooperation with local and federal authorities, tribal figures can play a key role in dissolving militias.
4. Advocate for peace in religious leaders' statements and speeches, especially during Friday prayers to avoid misunderstanding and misinterpretation by other religious groups. This is particularly relevant to diffuse sectarian/ethnic tensions which have shown to be a main driver of conflict.

8 CONCLUSION

This study has presented the reader with a well-rounded picture of current conflict dynamics and related actors within the six C2RI target locations in Ninewa, Anbar and Salah-al-Din governorates. Through a comprehensive methodological approach, we have collected a wide array of primary data which has enabled us to identify main sectoral themes/actors and to develop stakeholder-specific policy recommendations to inform the design of key interventions to improve security, enhance community reconciliation, to foster economic growth, to enable the return of IDPs and to ultimately build sustainable peace in the targeted areas.

The overall data has demonstrated that conflict drivers are multi-layered, complex and can vary within the respective target locations. Stakeholder dynamics that negatively and positively affect conflict operate at various levels, both internally within Iraq and externally from neighbouring countries. Thematic conflict drivers that have been identified have been consistent throughout all of the target locations.

It has become clear that for the most part, political tensions largely stem from ethnic conflicts of interests and sectarian tensions between the biggest Shia'a & Sunni political blocs, which often also translate into tribal tensions at the local level.

Some respondents have also accused federal and local authorities of following political agendas of their sectarian affiliation. It was highlighted that leading political parties and their tribal allies promote violence and encourage revenge between sectarian groups to serve their political interests.

Related to this, particularly rural societies are tribal in nature, in which tribal and religious figureheads hold the most influence and powers. Civil society organizations have often had a positive impact serving as mediators, but due to their limited experience, authority, and knowledge, they often do not have the capacities to have a real impact. However, there have been some success stories that could be further developed and duplicated with more advanced methods to adapt them to the current security and political circumstances of the crisis.

International community actors have been portrayed to play a mixed role. External interference through regional/international actors is driving conflict through financial and logistical support to political/armed proxies that best serve their own geopolitical interests. Interventions of donor countries, humanitarian and development actors have proven to have a positive role in decreasing tensions and have been received positively by most of the respondents.

The key recommendations for federal government authorities focus on putting in place strategies at the national level which contribute to developing the justice system and accompanying legal frameworks, enforcing the rule of law, advancing social justice, combatting corruption, and fostering economic development. Furthermore, the federal government plays a key role in fostering partnerships to decrease tensions and develop peace-building mechanisms with international and local stakeholders.

With support from the international community, federal authorities should further focus on implementing social cohesion activities and developing plans on preventing violent

extremism and on improving human rights conditions - including women's rights, involve women actively in the peace processes, and start restorative and transitional justice processes, as well as rehabilitation programs that focus on the disarmament and reintegration of former fighters.

Jointly with local public institutions, federal authorities further need to put in place swift and efficient compensation schemes which rank as one of the main obstacles to the return of IDPs. On an economic level, both local and federal authorities need to incentivize investment, create conducive conditions for entrepreneurship and work together with civil society and international partners to build capacities of vulnerable groups such as youth and women. Respondents have particularly highlighted the lack of public support for the agricultural sector which has served as a breadwinner for most rural communities, particularly in Salah-al-Din and Anbar governorates.

At the local level, corruption and a lack of objective law enforcement have been mentioned as key drivers for deteriorating security conditions within the target locations. Thus, recommendations for local government authorities specifically highlight the need to create merit-based security actors and law enforcement mechanisms rather than hiring based on personal relations or sectarian affiliation.

Recommendations for local civil society and academia focus on strengthening their role as a mediator/connector through which they play a significant part in fostering long-term peace planning, restoring communal trust, and supporting the government's transitional justice and reconciliation processes. Relatedly, the international community can play a key role in ensuring effective rule of law by supporting good governance structures and

promoting accountability mechanisms, and by providing the government with relevant professional technical support based on their needs. Technical support to local/federal authorities is further highly recommended in the areas of anti-corruption, social cohesion/peacebuilding and livelihoods/economic growth. Furthermore, international actors should support anti-corruption, transparency, and accountability mechanisms to address the reality of Iraq as a country in conflict and suffering from widespread corruption. International organizations and donors can further use their leverage to liaise to avoid external interference and to promote diplomatic means as conflict resolution to ensure future stability and prosperity for Iraq as a whole.

As far as community leaders are concerned, respondents have praised them throughout as one of the most respected actors within the target locations due to their objectivity and the nature of societal structures. Thus, related recommendations have amplified the significant role they can play in mediation, creating dialogue and other peacebuilding activities, while religious leaders can emphasize tolerance and co-existence practices in their programs.

To conclude, it remains important to note that the recommendations designed for this study are assumptions about how the suggested interventions and efforts for building peace will affect and have an impact in the context provided. Thus, the recommendations in this report can be best viewed as policy guidelines for decision-makers/conflict stakeholders which can guide them towards decreasing tensions in the target locations at that particular moment in time, and frequent follow-up studies to this conflict analysis may be highly conducive to address the ever-changing realities on the ground.

9 ANNEXES

9.1 DISCUSSION GUIDES FOR INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS, ONLINE SURVEY AND FOCUS GROUPS DISCUSSIONS

Questions for Interviews and Focus Group Discussions

1. What is the nature of tension itself? What aspects of the tensions are local, what national and what are sub-regional? Is it contained within your district only or are there cross-border issues? What are the major effects of the conflict described above? What will be the major consequence of the tension in the short-, medium, and long-term?
2. What appears to be the main drivers of tension? Is it fueled by, inequality, marginalization, identity issues, lack of basic services, poor governance, corruption, or access to natural resources, for example? Are there key events or trends which impact upon the intensity of the conflict e.g. such as elections, weather patterns, unemployment, fluctuations in food prices, etc.?
3. Who appears to be the main actors in the tension? Who are the key individuals, groups, organizations or other actors? Who is most affected by the tension? What roles do men and women play? Which actors / institutions have the capacity and/or the interest to strengthen peace? What would be the most accepted and respected actors to intervene for peaceful outcomes at the community level? What role do women play in pursuing peace?
4. Are there any peace processes or peacebuilding endeavors underway/ What (common) activities in your district could act as a connector between different communities/ groups and strengthen peace and prevent violence? If so, where? To what extent have these efforts been successful?
5. Which issues if left unaddressed could lead to violent tension? and What immediate issues could trigger violence and what policies, or groups are attempting to address these issues?
6. What are the long-term structural causes of tension/ the underlying causes of tension? How do these factors change over the course of time?
7. What does reconciliation and recovery mean in your district's context and what should be done as a priority step?

Questions used throughout Online Survey

*Age?

- 18 – 25 yrs
- 25 – 32 yrs
- 32 - 39 yrs
- 39 – 50 yrs
- 50 – 60 yrs
- 60 and above

*Gender?

- Male
- Female
- Other/Prefer not to tell

*Job

- I do not work
- Civil government employee
- Security sector recruitment
- Private sector employee
- Student
- Housewife/man
- Other

* Location of Residency

- Al-Muhalabiya,
- Al-Ayadithia,
- Al-Habanniya
- Al Qa'im,
- Tuz-Khurmatu
- Yathrib
- Other (mention it)

*What are the types of conflicts available in your community? (Choose 3 crucial conflicts from below).

- Tribal
- Economical
- Political
- Social/Class-related
- Ideological
- Sectarian
- Ethnical
- Others (mention it)

*What are the key steps to be taken to achieve reconciliation and peace in your community? (Choose 3 steps you think they are most important to achieve the reconciliation in your community)

- Legislate laws to promote peace and reconciliation in the community.
- Provide job opportunities and reduce unemployment
- Raise societal peace awareness and the culture of acceptance.
- Increase awareness about women's rights.
- Increase awareness about the extremism that leads to violence.
- Protect minorities from exclusion and marginalization.
- Improve political governance on country level
- Increase cultural and historical awareness
- Improvement of access to basic services including the health and education sector.
- Prevent the proliferation of weapons.

- Prevent the spread of drugs
- Eliminate financial and administrative corruption.
- Work on the prevention of environmental pollution.
- Strengthening the rule of law.
- Others (mention it)

*Who appear to be the main actors in the conflict? Who are the key individuals, groups, organizations, or other actors that are fueling the conflict?

- Political parties (mention it)
- Civil Society Organizations/CBOs (mention it)
- Police and security forces (mention it)
- Local authorities (mention it)
- Community and tribe leaders (mention it)
- Religious leaders (mention it)
- Businessmen
- Media
- External actors (mention it)
- Others (mention it)

*Which actors /institutions have the capacity and/or the interest to strengthen peace? What would be the most accepted and respected actors to intervene for peaceful outcomes at the community level?

- Political parties (mention it)
- Civil Society Organizations/ CBOs (mention it)
- Police and security forces (mention it)
- Local authorities (mention it)
- Community and tribe leaders (mention it)
- Religious leaders (mention it)
- Businessmen

- Media
- External actors (mention it)
- Others (mention it)

*Have there been peace efforts successful in resolving the conflict?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe
- I do not know

*What appear to be the main drivers of conflict? Is it fueled by, for example?

- Fight over power/ access to natural resources between actors
- Inequality
- Marginalization
- Identity issues
- Lack of basic services
- GBV and SGBV
- Poor governance
- Corruption
- Access to natural resources, for example?
- Other? (Mention it)

*Who is most affected by the conflict?

- Children
- Minorities
- Unemployed people
- People in Rural areas
- IDPs
- Poor Households
- Women and girls
- Adult men
- Returnees from war
- People with special needs
- Others (mention it)

*Are there any peace processes or peacebuilding endeavors underway?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe
- I do not know

*To what extent these peace initiatives were successful?

- Not successful
- Medium
- Successful
- I do not know

*Is there an active role of women in conflict resolution?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe
- I do not know

*Which issues if left unaddressed could lead to violent conflict?

- Tribal conflicts
- Housing, Livelihoods and Properties
- Unemployment
- Environmental pollution
- GBV
- The spread of drugs
- The circulation of weapons/firearms
- Corruption
- Political issues
- Economic issues
- Regional issues
- Security issues
- Other (mention it)

Focus Group Discussions

Location	FGD#	Background/occupation/position	Age Range	Gender	Participant#
Al Anbar-Al Qaim	1	Mixed-Youth	25-56	Male	10
	2	Mixed	18-34	Mixed	10
	3	Mixed-Female	22-44	Female	10
	4	Mixed	21-50	mixed	9
	5	Mixed	18+	mixed	10
Al Anbar-Habbaniyah	1	Mixed-Youth	26-35	Male	10
	2	Activists	23-43	Male	10
	3	Mixed-Women	20-54	Female	12
	4	Displaced and Returnees	24-47	Male	10
	5	Community leaders	29-62	Male	10
Ninewa-Ayyadia	1	Community leaders	28-45	Male	15
	2	Displaced and Returnees	18+	Mixed	13
	3	Mixed	18+	Male	15
	4	women	20-50	Female	15
	5	youth	20-45	Male	15
Ninewa-Muhalabiyah	1	women	20-60	Female	15
	2	Community leaders	40-55	Male	11
	3	Displaced and ISIL families	28-40	Male	11
	4	youth	27-35	Male	15
	5	mixed	22-45	Mixed	14
Salah-al-Din-Tuz Khurmatu	1	Mixed activists	23-64	Mixed	13
	2	Returnees and ISIL Affiliated	23-65	Mixed	13
	3	Youth	18-25	Mixed	17
	4	Mixed	25-66	Mixed	12
	5	Female	22-51	Female	12
Salah-al-Din-Yethrib	1	Youth	18-28	Male	16
	2	Community leaders	35-72	Male	17
	3	Refugees and returnees	21-34	Male	15
	4	Women	17-30	Women	15
	5	Mixed	21-60	Male	17
Total	30 FGD				389

9.2 LIST OF INTERVIEWS AND FDGS CONDUCTED FOR THE CONFLICT ANALYSIS

Location	Interview#	position	Gender	Selection criteria/ reason
Al Anbar- Al Qaim	1	Activist	Female	Direct contact with the various social groups
	2	Teacher	Female	Among the people who have been subjected to injustice because some entities seized a property belonging to them.
	3	Staff member on a contract in the Department of Health	Male	Awareness and knowledge on health sector and health services in general.
	4	Teacher	Female	Human rights civil activist
	5	Widow	Female	Lost her husband while the terrorist organizations occupied the area.
	6	Illiterate	Female	Illiterate
	7	Illiterate	Female	Familiar with the issues of her society
	8	Sheikh	Male	Knowledge on political, economic, and service related matter in the area
	9	Teacher	Female	Profound knowledge on education sector
	10	Housewife	Female	A former activist who is aware of the living and political reality of the region.
	11	A graduate wage earner who works as a volunteer in Al-Qa'im.	Male	Works in the field of volunteering and is in direct contact with the families of the returnees and the community.
	12	Civil servant in the social welfare department	Male	In contact with the community
	13	Graduated from the faculty of Sharia and the owner of a perfume shop in the market	Male	Familiar with the problems of graduates and business owners
	14	Intermediate graduate and has a shop for selling building materials	Male	Familiar with the issues in his community
	15	Wage earner	Male	Depends on daily wages and doesn't have steady income
	1	Office manager at one of the Habbaniyah district political parties	Male	Has awareness of the issues that take place in the area
	2	Civil engineer	Female	Has cultural awareness and knowledge about the area
	3	Unemployed	Male	Returnee
	4	Employee	Male	Has high education diploma and strong social connection with people in the area
	5	He was hugely affected because of his son's involvement in ISIL group	Male	One of his sons joined ISIL group

	6	<i>Tribe elder</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>A well-known person in the area</i>
	7	<i>Former journalist</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Has knowledge about the terror cases and radicalisms</i>
	8	<i>Teacher</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Government employee</i>
	9	<i>Volunteer/teacher</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>A volunteer teacher in a public school</i>
	10	<i>Imam</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Has awareness and knowledge about the issues in the area</i>
	11	<i>School principal</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Has awareness and knowledge about the issues in the area</i>
	12	<i>High school graduate</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Displaced</i>
	13	<i>Housewife</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Returnee</i>
	14	<i>Unemployed</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Displaced</i>
	15	<i>Unemployed</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Displaced</i>
<i>Ninewa-Ayadiyya</i>	1	<i>Senior student at university</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Has awareness and knowledge about the region as a youth</i>
	2	<i>Graduated from nursing school and works in Tel Afar Hospital</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Has awareness and knowledge about the region as a youth</i>
	3	<i>Teacher</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Has awareness and knowledge about the region as a youth</i>
	4	<i>Housewife</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Has awareness and knowledge about the region as a youth</i>
	5	<i>Studied nursing but did not graduate</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Has awareness and knowledge about the region as a youth</i>
	6	<i>Housewife</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Knowledgeable about society and its problems</i>
	7	<i>Housewife</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>She lost her house during ISIL</i>
	8	<i>Diploma holder but unemployed</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Encountered and Suffered severely from the last tensions</i>
	9	<i>Housewife</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Encountered and Suffered severely from the last tensions of ISIL</i>
	10	<i>Retired</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Has awareness and knowledge about the area</i>
	11	<i>Professor</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Encountered and Suffered severely from the last tensions of ISIL</i>
	12	<i>Teacher</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Has awareness and knowledge about the region</i>
	13	<i>Deputy principal</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Witnessed many incidents in the area</i>
	14	<i>Employee</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Witnessed many incidents in the area</i>
	15	<i>Teacher</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Has awareness and knowledge about the area</i>
<i>Ninewa-Muhalabiya</i>	1	<i>Housewife</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Has knowledge and information about the ISIL related incidents</i>
	2	<i>Housewife</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Suffered severely from ISIL incidents and lost close people in her family</i>
	3	<i>Housewife</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>One of her family member joined ISIL</i>
	4	<i>Housewife</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Has awareness and knowledge about the area and witnessed many incidents</i>
	5	<i>Graduate</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Has awareness and knowledge about the area and witnessed many incidents</i>

	6	Employee	Male	Has awareness and knowledge about the area and witnessed many incidents
	7	Graduate	Male	Has awareness and knowledge about the area and witnessed many incidents
	8	Graduate	Male	Displaced
	9	Employee	Male	He couldn't continue his study because of ISIL
	10	Medical assistant	Male	Displaced
	11	Graduate	Male	Has awareness and knowledge about the area and witnessed many incidents
	12	Housewife	Female	Her area was a spread point of ISIL and has awareness and knowledge about the challenges in Muhalabiyah
	13	Housewife	Female	Has close relative from the family joining ISIL and encountered issues because of it
	14	Wage earner	Male	Has awareness and knowledge about the area and witnessed many incidents
	15	Wage earner	Male	Has awareness and knowledge about the area and witnessed many incidents
Salah-al-Din-Tuz Khurmatu	1	Engineer	Male	Has awareness and knowledge about the area and witnessed many incidents
	2	Illiterate	Female	Has awareness about the issues of her area
	3	Sheikh	Female	A well-known person in the area
	4	Diploma holder	Male	Has awareness about the issues of her area
	5	Sheikh	Male	He is a well-known person, has involved in reconciling many people and group, and has knowledge about the area
	6	Retired	Male	Affected by ISIL incidents, suffers from low income and his life is affected by any price fluctuation in market
	7	Employee	Male	Involved in voluntary groups
	8	Lawyer	Male	Has profound knowledge about the issues in the area
	9	Wage earner	Male	Has knowledge about the challenges, issues, and the problems that wage earners are facing in the area
	10	Lawyer	Male	Has strong connection with people and knows about the challenges in the area
	11	Student	Male	Has awareness and knowledge about the issues of youth in his area
	12	Vet	Female	Has profound knowledge about the issues and challenges of agriculture and livestock of her area
	13	Master's degree/academic	Male	Has knowledge and information about economy and agriculture
	14	Wage earner	Male	Knows about the issues and challenges of wage earners
	15	Activist and school principal	Male	Has knowledge about education sector

Salah-al-Din-Yethrib	1	Lecturer	Female	Involvement in voluntary work
	2	Employee /holds bachelor's degree	Female	A mother of three kids, employee in a government institution, hold bachelor's degree
	3	Sheikh/ holds PHD degree	Male	Member in reconciliation and returning displaced people committee
	4	Works at private sector	Male	Knowledge and experience in private sector
	5	Activist	Male	Civil activist and involved in voluntary groups
	6	Wage earner/ university graduate	Male	He is a university graduate and wage earner; he has knowledge about issues and challenges of wage earners
	7	Mukhtar	Male	Involved in popular mobilization forces
	8	Activist/ hold bachelor's degree	Male	Involvement in civil activities
	9	Activist/ hold bachelor's degree	Male	Involvement in civil activities
	10	Sheikh	Male	A well-known person in the area
	11	Local council member	Male	Sheikh
	12	Lecturer	Male	Voluntary lecturer
	13	Teacher	Female	Has knowledge and information about the issues of education and female in the area
	14	Sheikh	Male	A well-known and influencer in his area and participated in solving many tensions among people
	15	School principal	Male	Has information on education sector, students, and the situation in general in the area
Total	90			



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