

Conflict Sensitivity Assessment in Ninewa

Action Against Hunger Iraq Mission





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INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

Iraq remains in a volatile security situation, while tensions towards the end of 2022, as Action Against Hunger conducted this study, continue to increase. Ongoing incursions by Turkish and Iranian armed forces destabilize border regions. Internally, armed actors include the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF), a range of Popular Mobilization Forces (PMFs), active remnants of IS, and tribal armed actors. Internal conflict divisions are serious in much of the country, while humanitarian and development needs remain acute.

To help guide humanitarian programming, in this report, Action Against Hunger (AAH) examines conflict factors and mitigation measures in five areas of Ninawa district where AAH has active programming: Mosul, Sinjar, Ba'aj, Hatra and Tel Afar.

The AAH team received on-site training from an external consultant in conflict sensitivity assessment methodologies, modeled two focus group discussions (FGDs) internally, and then conducted seven focus group discussions with community members during December 2022. In total, AAH spoke to 61 people: 31 male and 30 female respondents (including ten male and two female AAH staff from the communities). All community focus groups were gender and location separated, though the Mosul FGD was conducted internally in a mixed setting among AAH staff. Trained AAH staff facilitated all community FGDs in Arabic. Each followed a standard translated FGD instrument piloted internally to model conflict dividers and connectors based on the SAVES method. This approach guides participants to discuss, then prioritize, dividing and connecting factors for: 1) systems and institutions; 2) attitudes and actions; 3) values and interests; 4) experiences; and, 5) symbols.

In the following five area assessments, AAH builds on results from the FGDs along with security assessments and actor mapping exercises carried out by AAH Iraq.

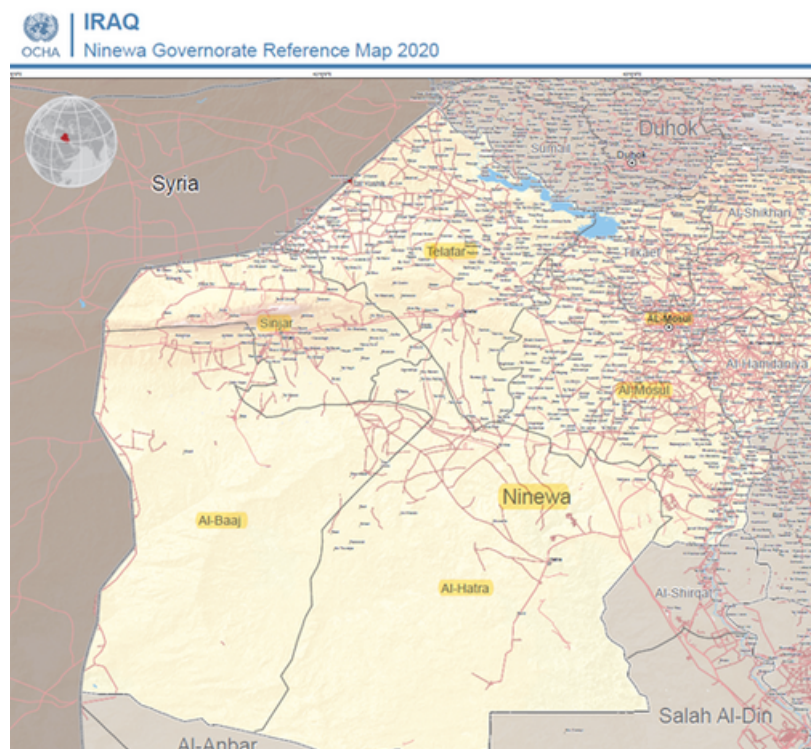


Figure 1 - Map of Selected Assessment Areas (Names Highlighted). UN OCHA (2020).



SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

Across the assessed locations in Ninewa, numerous commonalities stand out, though notable differences between communities must be considered when tailoring programmatic interventions.

Concerns over corruption and nepotism in government are pervasive, resulting in community distrust of many political or governmental actors. Patronage networks and abuses of power by local officials, often benefiting sectarian or ethnic lines, are common. Tribal groups are influential in leveraging these patronage networks and are less connected between different sects.

Still, community members often see public services as a way to bring different groups together – through education, for example – though unequal distribution as reported in places like Baaj can undermine this.

Gender-based discrimination concerns are also widespread, along with gender-based violence. Women experience domestic violence, gender-based barriers to service access, and restrictions on their freedom of movement. They also noted experiencing economic control by male counterparts at home and forced marriage. Tensions between modernity and societal customs have led to other rifts inside families and communities in rural areas.

Tensions across sectarian, tribal, and ethnic lines remain, though cohesion varies at community levels. For example, in Sinjar and Tel Afar, FGD participants feel that Sunni-Shia affiliations have intensified since 2014. Fears of violence based on religious affiliation continue. Cleavages over perceived allegiance to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) also undermine cohesion.

Beneficiary selection criteria used by NGOs are a common concern: while community perceptions are divergent, the potential to exacerbate tensions through distribution effects is clear. Transparent public communication around why any individual or group receives benefits and open dialogue with local leaders is imperative.

Solidarity through adversity is also a common theme: war, displacement, and hardship have created bonds that have built shared rapprochement between people. Tribal reconciliation and common clan traditions also help to bridge divides where the state is absent or unable to assist.

Culinary traditions, sports, religious gatherings, and local festivals can form points of commonality. Common cultural heritage, such as the ancient city of Hatra or the Tel Afar castle, can also provide powerful symbols of unity. NGOs and community-based organizations (CBOs) programs promoting diverse inclusion of groups across ethnic and cultural divides are well received. Similarly, peacebuilding efforts, especially when targeted at inclusive economic and agricultural development, are well received. Women are particularly keen on NGOs' efforts to integrate women into decision-making, educational, and livelihoods assistance.

Based on the above tensions and cohesion factors, AAH envisions a set of Ninewa-wide programmatic recommendations and mitigation measures. These should be used in addition to local-specific guidance, with additional nuance provided throughout the rest of this report.



NINEWA-WIDE PROGRAM SUGGESTIONS

- **Gender-sensitive and specific prevention of violence against women (VAW) programming** is acutely needed across the region. Discrimination in education against women and accommodations for reaching those who leave education prematurely should also be planned for in livelihood activities targeting women.
- **Strong community solidarity principles in many areas**, along with popular perceptions of post-conflict infrastructure reconstruction, can be built on to reduce intergroup tensions if assistance is delivered in a collaborative and inclusive manner across conflict-affected groups.
- **MHPSS and health programs** can contribute to social cohesion and should remain a focus for humanitarian response, seeking to address the lasting impact of conflict-induced trauma.
- **Working with educational systems or schools for livelihood support and training** could support existing connections across groups. Market effects can be leveraged to improve local conditions, but should be calibrated not to benefit one group above another.

NINEWA-WIDE MITIGATION SUGGESTIONS

- **Legitimization risks** are present, given perceptions by the community of certain clans, religious entities, or ethnic groups holding political power. Engagement with local institutions and leaders should remain pragmatic to limit perceptions of discriminatory treatment or undue association.
- **Distribution effect concerns** are widespread. Perceived patterns of exclusion in service provisioning need to be considered. Beneficiary targeting should be informed by sensitivities along religious, ethnic, and political community cleavages. The potential to exacerbate divisions through distribution bias in the communities is high.
- **Perceptions of unequal assistance, including both programmatic assistance and employment by NGOs, must be mitigated.** Vulnerability-based targeting should include transparent beneficiary selection criteria and robust community communication. Broad representation from different communities, along with women, should be sought when determining community needs.
- **Ongoing gender-based violence (GBV) concerns** for women should be factored into needs assessments. DRR planning and needs assessments should ensure separate and full participation of women through, for example, gender-disaggregated discussions and inclusion protocols.
- **GBV mitigation steps, such as planning for MHPSS support reporting**, resources, and provider contacts, should be incorporated into all programming with female beneficiaries. Short-term livelihood assistance should also be gender-sensitive to avoid potentially inflaming underlying GBV trends.



COMMUNITY CONFLICT SENSITIVITY ASSESSMENTS

BAAJ

OVERVIEW

Baaj, a district located in Southwest Ninewa, is home to some 35,000-37,000 people from mainly Sunni Arab backgrounds. Per AAH assessments, following substantial displacement during ISIL occupation from 2014-17, 90-97% of families have reportedly returned to the city. No terrorist incidents have been reported since 2017, while security actors continue clearing the area of UXO and IEDs.

TENSIONS

According to focus group participants in Baaj, corruption and nepotism in governmental institutions currently fuel communal divisions. Notably, the provision of certain services (such as water) is perceived to benefit solely to specific neighborhoods, while service provision is denied in other areas. Similarly, nepotism and abuses of power by local authorities and government officials are a source of concern for community members.. NGOs may add to tensions when perceived to provide services to only one group, at the expense of others.

Men also noted that clan violence and tribal discrimination still occur despite overall positive intergroup relations. Additionally, unequal damage to community members' property from the ISIL occupation may cause tensions even five years on from the crisis.

Significant gender-based discrimination is present, as both male and female respondents noted. Women spoke about experiencing gender-based violence while being kept from education and decision-making processes. Men remarked that women are forbidden from attending various social events – banquets and feasts – owing to tribal norms.

COHESION

Community members generally see intertribal relations as a source of community resilience. The occupation by ISIL also generated a sense of shared social bonds: people who still live in Baaj have supported each other through significant collective trauma. Tolerance across tribes is high, while personal connections among tribal leaders help to control individual members and resolve conflicts. There are multiple tribes in the area, most of which seem to have good relations with each other. Similarly, religious, and symbolic unity demonstrated through shared Sunni practices, traditional dress, generosity during feasting periods, and cultural norms help hold the community together. Youth hobbies, namely football and classic games, also are cohesion factors.

FGD participants felt that tribal armed groups (Tribal Mobilization Forces, or TMF) are primarily responsible for security in the area, compared to than formal security forces. However, female participants felt that tribal rules and regulations discriminated against them: they are more likely to place trust in official Iraqi security forces and less in tribal units for their safety. This perception could be impacted by the support TMFs enjoy from the PMF Commission or by tensions noted between preeminent tribal TMFs.



Public services are seen as a point of equality: respondents perceive schools as a strong connector for males, gathering people from different backgrounds in one place. This is not universal: women AAH spoke with noted they do not have equal access to education.

Women surveyed view NGOs generally positively, gathering people across ethnic lines into programs. Additionally, the legal system, courts, and security services are typically seen as free of discrimination and provide equal treatment to all.

GENDER

Women feel strongly marginalized by cultural and tribal norms, forcing them to drop out of school, marry early, and stay out of decision-making processes. Female participants to the assessment also noted regular violence against women and children, and prohibitions against their freedom of movement.

PROGRAM IMPLICATIONS

- Gender sensitivity in all programming is acutely needed in Baaj: discriminations against women remain a substantial conflict factor.
- Addressing education discriminations against women and providing accommodations to reach women having left the school system prematurely should be planned for in livelihood activities targeting women.

SUGGESTED MITIGATION MEASURES

- GBV mitigation measures, such as planning for MHPSS support reporting, resources, and providers contacts, should be incorporated into all programming with female beneficiaries.
- Perceived patterns of exclusion in the provision of services by local and governorate authorities should be carefully assessed prior to direct collaboration with directorate authorities: approvals should be vetted for impact on activities carefully.
- Long-term, meaningful engagement with tribal leaders before and during programming will be particularly necessary in Baaj, given the de-conflicting role they play in gathering community members across groups.

SINJAR

OVERVIEW

Sinjar district, located northwest in the Ninawa Governorate, is mainly home to the Yazidi community and their numerous tribes, along with Sunni and Shia Arabs. Per AAH assessments, it is primarily an agricultural area, though public sector salaries, non-state armed group employment, and smuggling also provide income. Given large-scale fighting and abuses by ISIL during 2014, tribal disputes between Yazidis and Arabs remain a primary conflict risk due to the perceived affiliation of some tribes and individuals with ISIL.



Additionally, Sinjar District has areas considered disputed territories claimed by the Kurdish Region of Iraq and the Government of Iraq. Yazidi PMF and Sinjar Protection Units share responsibility for maintaining security in Sinjar town, while ISF, including the police and the Iraqi army, are the most influential official actors in the area. Ongoing Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) operations continue in Sinuni Sub-District. The current security situation in Sinjar areas, as well as in Sinuni, is stable and accessible despite continued sporadic tensions along the border and between Yazidis and Arabs communities. Still, the overall possibility of conflict is a consistent feature of the area due to the multiplicity of armed actors. Miscommunication between those actors may lead to clashes.

TENSIONS

Sinjar is fraught with tensions between the Yazidi community and Sunni Arabs. In general, prior AAH assessments have noted a good relationship between Yazidi and Kurdish Shia; but tense associations with Sunni tribes accused of IS affiliation. Similarly, Sunni tribal members fear retaliation from armed groups and Yazidis alike. Sunni relationships with Shia groups could also be influenced by spillover from sectarian tensions between the two in Tal Afar. In keeping with this, focus group participants feel that religious affiliations have become dividers in the region since 2014. Cultural norms and traditions have become more divisive, while allegiances to armed groups are perceived by those AAH polled to increase tensions between communities.

Additionally, the political conflict between KRI and GOI over disputed territories appears to have a destabilizing effect. It impacts the perception that government does not provide meaningful solutions for ongoing issues in the area. Women AAH spoke with singled out significant gaps in social protection services, due to perceived discrimination and nepotism.

Women also experience domestic violence, gender-based barriers to service access, and restrictions on their freedom of movement.

COHESION

Relationships between Yazidi forces and with PMF and ISF are fairly robust: they rely on them, and there has been religious leaders' support for these security actors. Local staff feel CBO peacebuilding and demining initiatives have contributed to social cohesion, while NGO livelihood efforts targeted at youth are also helping rebuild bonds. Economic and agricultural development, in particular, appear to help perceptions of social cohesion. Women from Sinjar have a generally positive perception of NGO support, especially insofar as it helps to connect people from different backgrounds.



Respondents also flagged education as a connector: schools appear not to discriminate, while economic interests drive shared desires to improve the community.

As in other regions of this study impacted by ISIL during 2014, respondents believe that the crisis helped to strengthen social bonds between those who lived in the same location and supported each other in times of need.

GENDER

As raised above, the women AAH spoke with reflected their experiences of domestic violence, gender-based barriers to service access, and restrictions on their freedom of movement. Male respondents did not perceive these barriers, though they raised concerns over child soldiers and gender-based problems for ISIL-affiliated families in the area.

PROGRAM IMPLICATIONS

- Beneficiary targeting should be informed by sensitivities between Yazidi, Sunni Arab, and Shia cleavages. The potential to exacerbate divisions through distribution bias in the community is high.
- Working with educational systems or schools for livelihood support and training could support existing connections built across groups in the school system. Market effects can be leveraged to improve local conditions but should be calibrated not to benefit one group above another.

SUGGESTED MITIGATION MEASURES

- Vulnerability-based targeting should be transparent and well-communicated to avoid perceptions of ethnic or religious-based bias. Broad representation from different communities, and women, should be sought when determining community needs.
- Territorial and location-based access concerns to WASH rehabilitation should be considered, given the concentration of Sunni groups in south Sinjar, compared with Yazidi communities elsewhere in the area.
- Ongoing gender-based violence (GBV) concerns for women should be factored into MHPSS support and needs assessments. Short-term livelihood assistance should also be gender-sensitive to avoid inflaming underlying GBV trends.

HATRA

OVERVIEW

Hatra is a medium-sized town in Southwest Ninewa, located in the self-titled Hatra district. Some 25,000 individuals live in the area, concentrated in Hatra town due to internal displacement from Southern and Western villages. Per AAH assessments, the area was occupied by ISIL from 2014 until 2017, and remained largely depopulated until the closure of IDP camps forced the return of residents. Most inhabitants are Sunni Arabs belonging to three main tribal groups: Al-Bohamad (90%), Al-Obeidi, and Shammar. Infrastructure is limited and post-conflict rehabilitation remains ongoing. Shelter, NFI, electricity, WASH, and healthcare needs are acute. Few external actors operate in the area, while political parties are not particularly active. The Mayor acts as the main coordinator between communities, humanitarian and armed actors.



From AAH assessments, local decision-making often flows through local leaders who represent the interests of the population on the local level. PMFs and INSS are the most influential security actors, followed by the Iraqi army and local police. PMFs are responsible for the external security of the city. Threats from ISIL remain outside of the town.

TENSIONS

Focus group discussions in Hatra were productive but highlighted a lack of agreement among respondents on several issues. Respondents noted that after the liberation and elimination of ISIL, the community was divided in two: one part of the community was with the government, and the other was associated with ISIL. Those linked with the government stayed in Hatra, and the others are perceived to have left. However, female respondents note that children from ISIL families, presumably remaining in the community, are not taken care of and cannot easily be provided for by other community members.

Respondents also noted political divisions in Hatra, which seem to be linked to clans: those with more power inside institutions wield it inside Hatra. Bullying among children from different tribes is common. Tensions between modernity and societal customs have led to other rifts inside families and communities, especially over the imbibing of alcohol. Community members perceived drinking as a new practice in Hatra, along with wearing non-traditional clothing.

Both male and female respondents commented on a perceived lack of transparency among NGO beneficiary selection criteria. At the same time, some see the selection of employees in organizations as unfair and based on relationships. Respondents worry that providers focus on mainly on the groups they belong to, jeopardizing impartiality. For example, respondents believe that some people who benefit from NGO assistance are from outside the Hatra district: they live in temporary housing and leave after the end of the NGO project.

COHESION

Respondents see public services in Hatra, especially medical providers, as accessible to all. State services are well received, without any notes of discrimination of provision. Police, at least for male respondents, are also seen as transparent and non-discriminatory. Reconstruction and restoration of infrastructure, such as water networks, have united the community by providing services equitably. Respondents see education as critical to society and their community.

Residents actualize social solidarity in Hatra by helping to support each other if they find people with specific needs. Being displaced has also significantly impacted shared rapprochement between people, as has participation in awareness sessions with displaced people. Tribal reconciliation and common clan traditions help to bridge divides where the state is absent or unable to assist.

Employment opportunities are also generally perceived as fair, including for women, who feel that they can lead their activities within the respect of traditional community attitudes. Women also felt that the experiences and skills acquired during their displacement from Hatra, such as sewing or salon tending, benefit social cohesion.



In Hatra, the presence of the ancient city is a powerful unifying symbol among all inhabitants. Festivals, such as the Al-Mirbad (Spring) Festival, previously held every year, brought people from all over Iraq to enjoy artistic and cultural activities. The Al-Akoub House, from the family of the former governor of Nineveh, is also seen as a positive symbol as the family used to help people from Hatra district. The house of Nayef Al-Haroush is also considered one of the notable social symbols in the region.

GENDER

Women noted significant gender-based discrimination, including verbal assaults from men in the community, economic control by male counterparts at home, and forced marriage. According to AAH's respondents, only men decide who they marry, while the husband is imposed on women. Female respondents also noted coercive "al-hayar," a custom according to which the girl is kept for her cousin when she is young and is not allowed to marry anyone else. Men also voiced their discomfort with women's freedoms, such as going out alone at night. However, they expressed their satisfaction to see women allowed to drive again after the ISIL occupation.

PROGRAM IMPLICATIONS

- Strong community solidarity principles and popular perceptions of post-conflict infrastructure reconstruction can be built on to reduce tensions, if assistance is delivered in a collaborative manner.
- Distribution effect concerns should be front and center for any programming in Hatra.
- Legitimization risks are present, as certain clans are believed to hold most political power in Hatra.

SUGGESTED MITIGATION MEASURES

- Communities worry over perceived unequal assistance and NGO employment, especially when targeting non-resident communities. This risk must be mitigated through transparent beneficiary targeting and robust community communication.
- Careful attention should be paid to how engagement with local political leaders is balanced with engagement across the four main tribes of the city (Albo Hamad, Al-Luhaib, Al Dulaim, and Shammar).
- Gender-based discrimination remains a serious concern: DRR planning and needs assessments should ensure separate and full participation of women through, for example, gender-disaggregated discussions and inclusion protocol.



TEL AFAR

OVERVIEW

According to AAH assessments, Tal Afar District and the town of Tal Afar host many individuals from various ethnic backgrounds, including Turkmen, Arabs, Shabaks, and Kurds. Tal Afar District is made up of four sub-districts: Ayadhiya, Zummar, Rabia, and Tal Afar District Centre. Approximately 80 percent of the population is reported to be under eighteen years old. Inevitably, the recent conflict has had a detrimental impact on local agriculture, the primary source of employment in the district, due to forced displacement and land contamination by remains of improvised explosive devices (IED). The district suffered significant conflict activity during the period of IS control. The security situation changed in August 2017, when ISIL was dislodged from Tal Afar District following an ISF/PMF advance. Approximately 10 percent of the population was displaced, with slow returns in the following years. Parts of Tal Afar District, including Rabia, Zummar Sub-Districts and Kisik Kupri Area, remain disputed territories between KRI and GoI, upon which both claim authority. Tal Afar Town used to be a Sunni-majority town, but the religious breakdown is now more balanced. The challenges facing Tal Afar District can be characterized by political disagreements, continued IED contamination (in areas around Tal Afar Town), the overall security situation in the district, tribal tensions, and limited public services in the post-conflict environment.

ISF, local police, and INSS are active, while PMFs operate in the district. Tensions between pro-government armed actors have escalated into physical altercations, including in Tal Afar District on numerous occasions. Additionally, as of August 2022, PMF withdrawals from Tal Afar District and their replacement with ISF units have been flagged by AAH assessments as a potential security vacuum that IS or other armed actors may take advantage of. The Shammar Tribe is the leading Sunni tribal actor specific to Rabia Sub-District. At the same time, other non-armed tribes also dwell in the district and regularly engage in disputes over land ownership.

TENSIONS

FGD participants highlighted Sunni-Shia divisions in the district as particularly challenging: cleavages resulting from sectarian war and collective revenge remain significant concerns. Sunni community members feel discriminated against and fear they cannot raise public views without being perceived as ISIL supporters. Fears of violence based on religious affiliation continue, while older men and religious leaders do not accept marriages between Sunni and Shia members. Men were reluctant to comment on PMF and security forces, but women AAH spoke with believe that law enforcement aligns with people and clans who are more connected politically.

Tribal affiliations also play a role in fueling perceived governmental discrimination in terms of employment practice, while the patronage-based practice of "wasta" to acquire work and navigate bureaucracy is widespread. Respondents see patronage and corruption as alive and well. Respondents also felt that tribal capacities for conflict resolution are overstated.



Some community members felt that Shia have an outsized representation in managerial positions and security forces locally. Meanwhile, the norms of the community may restrict cultural commonalities: there is little acceptance of new ideas and other communities' cultures. Female FGD participants mentioned displaced families to KRI, South-Central Iraq, and Turkey could not observe any of their cultural learnings in Tal Afar when they returned.

Women are also actively discriminated against: social and tribal norms prevent them from labor market access, driving cars, attending public events, or advocating for fellow women.

COHESION

In general, community members see government service provisioning as equal. Benefits apart from jobs are fairly given across all groups, though service quality (health, education, water, electricity and so on) is lacking. NGOs are perceived positively, especially when they engage with the mayor's office to ensure a balance of services across areas and denominations. Humanitarian activities, such as WASH, MHPSS, and demining, are viewed positively. Most community members welcome reconciliation and intercommunity initiatives. However, some participants noted concerns over cash assistance and felt there could be an unfair selection of beneficiaries at work. Female respondents also voiced concerns over local NGOs operating with less transparency.

Sports, family outings during spring, and religious gatherings are generally seen as points of commonality in the community. The shared Turkmen accent forms another point of commonality. Respondents also see the sanctuary of Khudher Alyas, Tal Afar castle, and local agriculture (bulgur and onions) as symbols to be proud of.

GENDER

FGD female participants elaborated on their experiences of gender-based discrimination. Women are not accepted by men in the workplace, whether with NGOs or in governmental employment. They also are forbidden from driving or from attending events and public locations, leaving home only to gather inside private settings or in the occasional NGO workshop if they are fortunate. In general, women AAH spoke with feel no one supports them substantially in Tal Afar.

PROGRAM IMPLICATIONS

- Reconciliation programming appears well received, suggesting that the appetite to bridge sectarian divides could be used as a basis for future peacebuilding or social cohesion programs.
- Widespread concerns over tribal patronage, including inside local NGOs, provide a legitimization risk for programming, as individuals within local institutions may attempt to confer legitimacy through directing NGO assistance.
- Distribution effects and community concerns over cash assistance should be reviewed and any assistance or programming provided in a highly transparent matter to avoid inflaming sectarian divides in Tal Afar.



SUGGESTED MITIGATION MEASURES

- Organizations should be cautious in their engagement with local institutions and leaders to avoid the perception of biased treatment or undue association.
- DRR planning should be equally inclusive and aware of sharp sectarian divides in the area. Programming should seek to engage members from all groups possible in common activities whenever possible.
- Ongoing discrimination against women should be mitigated in DRR programming by ensuring the gender-segregated inclusion (if appropriate) of women into planning development and by building the capacity of local institutions to listen to female constituents.

MOSUL

OVERVIEW

Located in Northwest Iraq, in Ninewa governorate, Mosul is Iraq's second most populous city after Baghdad. An estimated 3.6 million live in the city, comprised of majority Sunni Arabs, Shia Arabs, Kurds, Assyrians, Chaldeans, Turkmen, Yazidis, Shabak, and other minorities. Sectarian conflicts have gravely undermined Mosul, most recently during ISIL occupation lasting from 2014 until July 2017. Fighting badly damaged the city's infrastructure. UXO, IED clearing, and sleeper cells remain security threats, with IED attacks outside Mosul continuing as recently as late 2022. Over a million people were internally displaced, though IOM-DTM estimates over 1 million individuals have returned. Humanitarian needs remain five years on, with healthcare infrastructure, mental health options, education facilities, and livelihood opportunities for youth lacking*. While the IOM-DTM has assessed the needs in Markaz Mosul, which includes the city of Mosul, as being lower than in other sub-districts of the area, other social cohesion tensions remain present. Climate change-related exacerbating factors have been flagged both by FGD and existing research**. Both climate-related displacement from surrounding areas (Baaj and Altal) to Mosul, along with the increased risk of drought in Mosul, are sources of concern.

TENSIONS

AAH staff from Mosul raised an array of socio-political tensions, primarily the perception that politicization and tribal-based patronage networks restrict access to what scant economic opportunities exist. The economic situation in Mosul is controlled by elite gatekeepers, limiting access to those who are well-connected. Natural resources are, in turn, controlled by select tribal groups who accrue more benefits to themselves: agriculture, gas/oil, water rights, animal husbandry, and land access are not exempt.

Tribal groups are influential in leveraging these patronage networks and are less connected between different sects. Socially, Mosul is perceived as highly stratified, with access to jobs, education levels, and political affiliations dictating social access. Tribal affiliations form a basis for snap judgments and social divides, along with one's neighborhood location (east or west Mosul) and perceived wealth.

*<https://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/5-years-mosul-retaking-young-people-face-education-employment-crisis>

** https://iraqdtm.iom.int/files/Climate/202112215837860_ET_ClimateDisplacement_Ninewa_Dec_2021_Public.pdf



While the security situation is steadily improving, new unofficial armed groups and PMFs pose a risk to the newfound community support for the official ISF. Revenge concerns dating back to the ISIL occupation remain, while respondents perceive ongoing discrimination in legal proceedings. Lastly, respondents are concerned that accelerated climate change will detrimentally impact the economic situation in the future and exacerbate displacement trends. Water and land-dependent livelihoods may become endangered, while public WASH services become further threatened in the future.

COHESION

On balance, Mosul's humanitarian and development situation has improved over the last five years. Political parties are perceived to go beyond ethnic and tribal boundaries to advocate for community needs, at least to a certain extent. The rule of law is improving, which helps to foster social cohesion across tribal divides. Community awareness of legal and political processes is also increasing yearly, helping bolster institutional efforts.

At the same time, despite a perceived lack of sufficient central government support for economic development, most community members feel a shared interest in developing the city. The growth of the private sector provides much-needed jobs, especially for younger residents. Accordingly, NGO support for food security and livelihoods is well received. Agricultural development – and improved water access and conservation – are also needed. Similarly, NGO support for protection, MHPSS, and social services remains in need. This help contributes to cohesion amid a continued scarcity of government-led service provision.

GENDER

Gender-based violence and underage or early marriage remain significant concerns for women in Mosul. Additional concerns were not fully advanced in the mixed-gender AAH focus group discussion and should be examined through future community consultations with women.

PROGRAM IMPLICATIONS

- MHPSS and health programs can contribute to social cohesion and should remain a focus for humanitarian response seeking to address the lasting impact of trauma experienced by the residents of Mosul.
- Water and climate-based tensions fuel demand for climate-sensitive responses, while also requiring humanitarians to pay additional attention to potential elite capture of new or improved resources in line with current control patterns.



SUGGESTED MITIGATION MEASURES

- As elsewhere in Ninewa, tribal and political patronage networks pose a distribution effect risk in Mosul. Developing activities that link community members through shared activities to increase social cohesion and minimize perceptions of unequal treatment should be prioritized.
- While not fully addressed for Mosul in this study, gender-based violence and associated concerns should remain a core form of violence to be discussed in social and MHPSS programming.
- Local identity politics at both an urban and sectarian level should be considered throughout beneficiary selection and geographic-targeting criteria for programming.

ACTION AGAINST HUNGER - IRAQ

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