



Mosaic
Middle East

Beyond 2020 Nineveh SEED Conference

Erbil, 15-16 August 2020

Executive Summary

As Iraq enters a new recovery phase in 2020, the country now faces the challenges of addressing the short and long-term outcomes of conflict and mass population displacement. The consequences have had a tangible impact on the livelihoods in Iraq for both displaced and non-displaced populations. The situation of minority groups such as Christians and Yazidis who have been persecuted by Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIL) is very tragic as they were two times persecuted; first by the ISIL invasion of their land, and second by the lack of security and stability in their region after the ISIL defeated. Conflict-affected people, and especially, the minority groups, face numerous challenges in accessing employment, including limited economic opportunities, security, discrimination, lack of cash, legal restrictions and a lack of government support in their region.

The content of this report presents the results of the two day conference (15-16 August, 2020) with 20 people of different ethno-religious backgrounds from the Nineveh Plain and Sinjar. The workshop was held in Erbil the capital city of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. The majority of the participants were NGO workers from Christian, Yazidi and Shabak communities. In addition, the conference benefitted from the viewpoints of 6 local business owners from the region. The report presents key findings from the discussions with the main conclusions drawn from each discussion topic.

Introduction

The ISIL invasion of the Nineveh Plain and Sinjar (August 2014) was a political, social and economic turning point for non-Muslim minorities and marked a significant acceleration of their decline in Iraq. Sadly, this is a fate which has already befallen the Sabaeen, Mandaeans and Jews. The number of Christians and Yazidis has also decreased substantially in Iraq. As a consequence, Christian life may well disappear entirely from the territories which are held by the Government of Iraq (GOI) unless circumstances improve, offering the Christians better prospects. The same applies for Yazidis. The ISIL attack forced minority groups of the region to leave everything behind and find shelter in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and many families left the country to stay safe and live with dignity. The refugees were hosted in camp and non-camp settings within the Kurdistan Region. Now, after the nearly 7-year displacement many families have returned back to their place of origin. But their land is lacking security, basic services, and livelihood opportunities. Despite all of the challenges, there are several local NGOs and several committed business owners who are actively working in the region. Mosaic Middle East (MME) undertook a series of focus group discussions (FGDs) with people living in the region to learn about their local knowledge, guiding principles, geographical target, beneficiaries, and practical challenges which face the residents of the region and their small and middle size businesses.

Objectives

Focus group discussions (FGD) were undertaken to consult local practitioners of the Nineveh Plain and Sinjar on:

1. Challenges and opportunities facing returnees in the region;
2. How the local NGOs select their beneficiaries;
3. Which geographical and thematic areas Mosaic Middle East programmes can target in the future; and
4. How the grassroots interventions can be sustained and developed.

Methodology

During the two days Mosaic Middle East conducted 7 FGDs with the 20 participants to explore their perspectives on diverse subjects of the sessions. The majority of the participants were aged from 25 to 45. Ethno-religious wise, Christians, Yazidis and Shabaks were well represented at the sessions.



Abdulrahman Mohammed, Mosaic Middle East Iraq Programme Manager, Khidher Domly, trainer and delegates



Abdula Shaghar from a Shabak organisation, Sonya Moradian, member of the Iraqi Minority Network and Leila Barzinji, JOD organisation

Local knowledge

1. What are the main threats and opportunities for livelihood project development in the Nineveh Plain now and over the next 3 years?

Challenges

- i. Security arrangement and presence of different militia groups in the region is one of the primary challenges of the business growth in the region. The militia groups are not cooperating together and at the same time each one fighting for themselves, thus, that leaves negative effect on the NGO interventions. An example which all participants were agreed on: as a small NGO or as a businessman if you want to create a small business in the region, you have to make compromises with the dominating militia group around you.
- ii. Unresolved and unimplemented [Article 140](#) of the Iraqi Constitution contributes to further instability in the region, meaning individuals, families and communities are affected by Baghdad and Erbil government tensions as their land is located in the disputed territories. Consequently, any move from Baghdad or Erbil in the region will contribute to more deterioration of the current fragile situation. All participants were agreed that the article should be implemented or alternatively GOI and KRG find another viable solution for the disputed territories as that step will bring more peace and stability to the region.
- iii. [ISIL sleeper cells](#) still are active in Mosul, Diyala and Kirkuk and several districts of these Governates. ISIL also is very active in several neighbouring towns, cities and Governates around the Nineveh Plain. This poses a major threat for minority groups in the region, given ISIL's previous violent sectarian actions.
- iv. The lack of small and medium sized employment projects for young people in the region is believed to be pushing unemployed youths to join militia groups, so that they can afford to feed themselves and their families. One of the female participants highlighted this: "While I don't see joining militia groups as a good solution for unemployment, this opportunity is constantly open for men (not women); this will contribute to the increasing militarisation of Iraqi society".
- v. The absence of the GOI government investment in the region created disappointment among people. All participants were agreed that the GOI is totally absent from the scene and they are not ready to allocate any budget to combat the widespread unemployment in the Nineveh Plain. As one of the participants mentioned: "GOI has a military presence here, no more than that. They are not very caring about us; they are just spending on their militias".
- vi. What has been termed by the delegates as "old-fashioned" governance, bureaucracy, complications, laws, procedures and wide-spread corruption doesn't create a conducive and enabling environment for business development.
- vii. Political parties influence is another roadblock. All participants were agreed on the point that some political parties in direct or indirect ways interfere in

their business. One of the participants highlighted the interference in this way. "They will try to impose you to do the job in favour of their specific group, ethnicity or even individual and families".

- viii. There is a huge gap in terms of communication and coordination between NGOs themselves and between NGO's and local authorities. In addition, there is a negative competition to obtain funds from INGOs among government entities rather than a positive one.
- ix. Wrong targeting, lack of monitoring and presence on the ground is another problem. Most of the UN agencies and INGOs targets are wrong. They are targeting people and entities which are not in need of support. For example, one INGO was spending a large sum of money to restore 200 shops in one of the Nineveh Plain towns. But in reality, there were not more than 50 shops who were damaged during the ISIL attack in that town.

Opportunities

- i. Relative stability in some towns of the Nineveh Plain such as; Shekhan, Alqosh, Teleskuf, Bashiqa, Qaraqosh and Karamles supports the implementation of livelihood projects.
- ii. The majority of participants reported that there are certain jobs and sectors in the region that are more desirable to invest in. Furthermore, the people of the region have a wealth of experience, expertise and willingness to work in the areas of agriculture and small economic projects.
- iii. The size of the damage in the above towns of the Nineveh Plain is huge with too many people returning, all seeking for support to re-establish their destroyed businesses. In this situation small and medium size projects will bear the most fruit in the short term. Most people are interested in such projects, as they can soon see its results.
- iv. People of the region have experience in establishing and running small production factories and shops before the ISIL invasion. Hence, this is a great opportunity to support them to rebuild their previous businesses.
- v. Residents of the Nineveh Plain are familiar with businesses such as beekeeping, sweet-making, raising livestock and chicken farms and running shops and factories. In addition, the Nineveh Plain has fertile land, thus investing in agricultural projects (wheat, sesame, olive, soap, pickle ...etc.) and those professions will be attractive and impactful.
- vi. The pre-existence of several grassroot organisations to support local people in different phases of the project is very positive; from project conception and initiation to implementation, monitoring and evaluation. These organisations have a great relationship with local leaders, authorities and other relevant stakeholders on the ground. Having such contacts will support a smooth execution and progress of the projects.
- vii. Availability of the local markets for buying and selling the livelihood products, especially the agricultural ones.

2. What aspect of economic growth do you think NGOs should focus on and why?

Majority of the participants believed that NGOs in this zone should focus on small and medium business creation and income generation opportunities due to the scarcity of government investment in this sector. As the inhabitants in this region are very vulnerable and mainly unemployed, NGOs can strongly contribute to the first phase of the project initiation and then they can help them to make their way to the local markets in the

final phases. Furthermore, one of the business owners suggested: "NGOs are able to support local business owners who own successful shops to replicate their models with the proper training and creating more jobs within affected communities. So, the problem is most shops lack of the ability and the training to know how to manage multiple shops, inventories, development plans".

3. What geographic areas should NGOs focus on and why?

Majority of the participants suggested below geographic areas to focus. At the same time, they warned any intervention in those areas should follow an inclusive approach and, especially not exclude the other major groups in and around their communities, as this would

result in negative consequences for the minority groups in the future (community competition, and community jealousy). These communities are classified based on the degree of their security and stability.

No.	Town	Security Provider	Security Situation
1	Alqosh	KRG	Very safe and secure as it's under the control of the Kurdistan Regional Government
2	Teleskuf	KRG	Very safe and secure as it's under the control of the Kurdistan Regional Government
3	Shekhan	KRG	Very safe and secure as it's under the control of the Kurdistan Regional Government
4	Qaraqosh	NPU-PMF	To some extent safe as they are protected by a Christian militia called Nineveh Plain Units (NPU). NPU is One of the Christian branches of the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF)
5	Karamles	NPU-PMF	To some extent safe as they are protected by a Christian militias called Nineveh Plain Units (NPU).
6	Bartella	GOI-PMF	Compare to the above towns is less safe. This town is under the GOI-PMF protection
7	Telkef	GOI-PMF-Babiliyon Brigade	Compare to the above towns is less secure. This town is under the GOI-PMF protection
8	Sinjar	GOI-PMF	Less secure. There are several militia groups in and around the town

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ABDULLAH DARWISH, THE TAHINI FACTORY OWNER

I am the director of the Al-Aela food project management, including tahini, molasses, Halva (sweets) and grains of all kinds. Currently we work in two locations as the original site is located in Bashiqa and the alternative site is in the governorate of Erbil. The two are still in the stage of work and development, as we started working after returning from displacement and our financial capabilities are limited.

We are continuing at work and we are working hard so that our work is as before the entry of ISIS in our regions in 2014. We developed the factory, increased production means, and introduced mechanisation and modern technologies. We hope that this meeting will be supportive for us so that we can move forward, helping us to serve our country, Iraq, and employ the workforce by creating job opportunities, whether in the market or in the production of raw materials. In this case we have contributed in one way or another to reducing unemployment.

We are waiting for such opportunities, especially when an organisation comes and creates livelihoods and they are serious about it, so we must take these opportunities. We want to communicate and follow up, not only to give us money, but that (the organisation) will monitor, supervise, follow up and develop with us, as well as the benefit from the organisation's experience in developing our business from a technical point of view and marketing.



We must come out with a positive result from this meeting and, God willing, a new horizon will appear for us to advance our reality. This is what we aspire to. We are serious about developing our work, whether with or without the help of other organisations. But certainly when there is no help from the organisations, the work will be slow because we do not have the required capital (money), which is the basis of any project. We are now working slowly and we hope that opportunities will be given to us by the state when it regains its strength, or we receive international support or compensation from the state due to the loss of our factories and businesses. But so far we have not received any compensation. All are just promises; we hope for better times to come.

NGO's way of working

1. What are your guiding principles/criteria when selecting a project / beneficiaries?

The majority of the participants stated that they will listen to people and most relevant stakeholders on the ground and after that they will formulate their projects. They were very happy with the Mosaic Middle East listening approach, as most of them highlighted that in the following way: "Most of the INGO and big organisations and donors, don't listen to people, they are just copying the projects from other countries without adjusting it to the Nineveh Plain ground. Some of them have their money and are in a rush to spend it. So, they will go for direct implementation without any consultation with the local NGOs and the people who know what works and what does not. In the end, the result is clear; total failure".

2. What is your record of working with other organisations? What have been the good aspects of this? What has been challenging or difficult?

Only 4 of 10 participant organisations in the workshop mentioned that they have worked with their counterpart organisations in the course of joint project implementation. But all of them had a great record in terms of delivering projects as an implementing partners for bigger INGOs. Just few number of them were received funding from UN agencies.

While the majority of the participants determined it as a good approach, especially when it comes to transparency point, but at the same time, they emphasised that they should be properly prepared for such work. "We need training first, then a clear-cut agreement which determines who is responsible for each part of the execution. We also need a third party to monitor us at least during the first project implementation".

According to the participants, financial management is the most challenging part of it. Initially, they were all agreed with joint execution, but when it comes to the financial part they had different opinions. Some of them stated that it is manageable and some mentioned it is difficult to manage and they require a training course first. Otherwise, they will not accomplish their task in a transparent way.

3. Institutional and government organisations identify positive and/or negative outcomes associated with collaborating with religious and/or faith-based groups to achieve development goals. What is your experience of working with government institutions?

In general, due to institutionalised nature of governmental entities in Iraq, there is no clear perspective with respect to working with the other, "outsider" organisations. Institutions within this country are under the hegemony of individuals, political parties or ethno-religious groups. Thus, more or less the positive or negative experience is very much depending on which (individual, political party or ethno-religious group) is running the particular institution. Thus, the majority of the participants reported a good record of cooperation with governmental bodies in the territories under the KRG governance. Several of the participants had a good working record full of trust with local authorities in Qaraqosh and Karamles. At the same time, some of them had had a negative experience with a lack of cooperation, and even problems with several GOI institutions in Bartella, Telkef and Sinjar.

Beneficiaries

1. What beneficiaries do you believe NGOs should be targeting in particular and why? What are the problems faced by these people?

Woman, youth, farmers, owner of factories and shops whose businesses have been damaged by ISIL (self-employed and small-scale entrepreneurs). The participants stated that the majority of youth and women in their communities are jobless. Those with jobs are the people who are self-employed (either farmers or non-farm activities). They mentioned there are some people who are working within different GOI offices in the region.

The participants in response to above questions highlighted below points:

- i. There is a huge need on the ground, employment and production wise
- ii. Most of the returnee people coming back to their region don't have a source of income to feed their children
- iii. The availability of jobs and working opportunity will help individuals and families to stay in their place of origin and reduce migration abroad
- iv. There are an increasing number of graduate young people who are unemployed
- v. There are too many factories and shop-owners all seeking financial support to restart their production again
- vi. There are many young farmers lacking financial support to cultivate their lands
- vii. Having a job will help young people to stay far from negative extremist propaganda
- viii. Availability of job opportunities in the region will attract the attention of the young people of the region. This will dissuade them from joining militia groups to raise money to feed their families.
- ix. Minority women, especially the Yazidi one would like to work in the farms, but when there is not support, they cannot work. They will have to stay at home, and be at the risk of exposure to family violence and negative propaganda.

2. What is needed to address these problems?

The majority of the participants mentioned that providing people with working opportunities is an important response to those problems. At the same time, they mentioned the size and scale of the damage and needs is beyond the power of NGOs to resolve on their own. Therefore, the main duty-bearer (the government) should come in and act to solve the problem. In addition, participants invited international community in the first instance to hold the GOI accountable to act in favour of minority groups. Secondly, to provide direct aid to persecuted minorities in the region. As one of the participants summed it up: "please do not put the aid in the Baghdad or the religious leader's basket. Come here and see on the ground how the people are persecuted and how they are desperately in need of your generous help".

3. How will you include the beneficiaries and community in planning the projects?

Most participants in this workshop stated that they are within the communities and in direct communication with the local people. They listen to people to know what are their problems are and what are their viable solutions; an approach of problem-based learning and then ground-based solutions. Participants determined that this is the best approach to engage people and communities before and during and after the project execution, whilst acknowledging that they need training to frame and formulate their approach in a much more effective way to achieve the project objectives.

Sustainability

How can we ensure that Nineveh SEED projects are sustainable and do not fail after the initial enthusiasm?

When it comes to sustainability of Nineveh SEED livelihood projects, the participants of the workshop pointed out the following tips:

1. The project must be people-centred
2. It should follow responsive and participatory approach
3. It should be conducted in partnership with the public or private sector. At minimum the public sector stakeholders should be informed about the project and implementing partners. Third party involvement is vital
4. It should be tailored to the reality of the ground in terms of its viability
5. Supply chain should be considered

Monitoring and Evaluation

Mosaic Middle East has an accountable system of monitoring and evaluation. Do you think your organisation would be able to meet our criteria?

All of the participants stated that they are open to learn about the Mosaic Middle East monitoring and evaluation system and they are ready to follow its benchmarks. Although, they cited that it would be great if Mosaic Middle East train them about the system before starting the implementation. In addition, the participants expressed their full support for any kind of Mosaic Middle East field monitoring visits or any sort of evaluation in any stages of the implementation or after execution.

How will you work with Mosaic Middle East to ensure we can tell the story of how people have been helped by the projects we fund?

All the workshop participants agreed there should be standards for communicating successful interventions with donors or individual and the groups who are supporting projects, to encourage them to continue their support for vulnerable people in Iraq. They are open to accept any framework or approach to do it in the best way. One of the female participants stated "my organisation like all the other organisations can produce visibility materials for the project. In case, if Mosaic Middle East wants to see beneficiaries or relevant stakeholder of the project, we can arrange it. Even you want to film it, we will be ready to help you. Otherwise, if you want to use our materials we can share our recorded communication materials with you".

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KHIDHER DOMLY, THE TRAINER

My name is Khader Domaly, I work in the Centre for Peace Studies at the University of Duhok, I have a Master's degree in conflict resolution and peacebuilding. I have been working in the field of training and consulting with international and local organisations for 15 years in the areas of peace building, conflict resolution, social cohesion, training in small project management, promotion, marketing and media.

Today was a very special meeting (session) facilitating community representatives from businessmen, representatives of civil society and activists from local governmental organisations in the Nineveh Plain and Sinjar. This was for the following reasons:

- All relevant matters were covered by the participants in the meeting
- The vision they carried in choosing ideas and projects were appropriate to the reality of the region, including the specifics around sustainability and success
- I noticed a diversity of ideas that complement each other, which included women, the disabled, youth, farmers and vulnerable groups. This diversity has a great positive impact



- Another aspect that caught my attention in this fruitful meeting are the recommendations, which were very accurate, particularly the advocacy campaign to amend decisions and how to advocate for the process of strengthening communication between the government, community decision centres and civil society.
- There was a precise description in the meeting (session) of previous experiences with international organisations. These donor organisations did not work at a sufficiently productive level. They did not target real groups and did not focus on sustainable needs. There was inconsistency and interference in changing the focus of projects and needs of local communities
- In addition to the gender, ethnic, sectarian and national diversity, I also noticed in the session that all have a common vision. This is very important because everyone lives in one region. Despite their different political, national and religious affiliations, their vision is common, and this is evidence of their enthusiasm to continue and communicate with the project

How can we enable good working practices in partnerships that are both creative and accountable?

- i. The Mosaic Middle East, donors and our local partners should recognise what we need
- ii. Prioritise the needs in close cooperation and coordination
- iii. There should be a mechanism in place to track our records
- iv. Our objectives must be clear and prioritised
- v. In the end, we both have to ensure the partnership will work for us
- vi. There must a clear and concise contract between us to make things move forward

How would you improve communication and accountability between local NGOs and government?

All participants were agreed that establishing an effective, coordinated working relationship with the local administrations at the provincial and district levels should be one of the most important aspects of NGO work over the coming years. Building bridges between local authorities and local NGO is an important step for rebuilding the lack of trust. In this INGOs can play an essential role and mediate between both sides. Furthermore, local NGOs should engage the local authorities before, during and after the project implementation to at least get their ideas and attract their attention. This will pave the way between them for greater cooperation. As one of the participants stated, their relations with the local authorities are generally good, but frustrated by both expectations and low capacity.

“The local authorities here are good at identifying problems; but the criticism they make of NGOs is often unfounded. Their criticisms are of a technical nature and there is a little regard to the long-term sustainability of projects. Still their minds are on emergency responses. Some of the local authorities here view NGOs as a source of cash and sometimes as a threat, which undermines the technical expertise and resources that NGO brings in. We are working with the relevant authorities, but their technical capacities are incredibly low and restricted. Their access to facilities, equipment and training is very limited”.

What else interests you?

The majority of the participants have prioritised below areas which Mosaic Middle East may focus in the coming years:

- Youth and women empowerment
- Economic Growth
- Workforce development
- Health
- Peace building
- Conflict Management and Mitigation
- Humanitarian Assistance (based on the situation)

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GHANEM, GHASIN AL-ZAITON ORGANISATION

My name is Ghanem from the Ghasin Al-Zaiton Organisation, which was established in 2012 and is licensed by the governorate of Baghdad and the Kurdistan region. It has offices in Bashiqa, Sinjar and Erbil. I came to attend this meeting expecting little contact among the organisations because of the Coronavirus pandemic. But it turned out to be a very helpful meeting both with the interaction and the people who were chosen to attend the meeting. This was wonderful because the participants were experienced, and because of the content of the meeting. It was looking at small projects and their success in the areas of the Nineveh Plains and Sinjar and what are the challenges facing these projects. Indeed, these vision and aims were clearly defined. In particular, the people who attended the meeting were businessmen and organisations that are operating in these areas.

After the return of the displaced, especially the minorities, to their areas, they found that the infrastructure was destroyed, including the factories in which they were working. Supporting these projects and providing job opportunities for local people would have a very effective impact on their communities.

We have participated in the work of a project with Mosaic Middle East in Qaraqosh. A local family were about to migrate to Australia, but after the implementation of the project, the family changed their minds and did not migrate and now they are working on this project which created many job opportunities. If these projects continue then certainly the situation will be better in terms of financial stability and general stability in the areas people return to on the Nineveh Plain.

Recommendations

Workshop participants stated that the presence of INGOs in the region is crucial for the people and local NGOs in the region. They emphasised, that besides financial support, there are other areas which INGOs can help by transferring their knowledge, expertise and experience to local NGOs, creating a cornerstone for the local NGOs to move forward.

Youth Employment

Workshop participants commented that NGOs can play an important role in influencing policies to support youth employment and in the rebuilding the Nineveh Plain and Sinjar. They can develop advocacy strategies to promote youth employment, but to do so, they need INGOs direction and support. NGOs should also ensure that they have suitable policies and procedure in place to create a safe and enabling environment in which different members of affected communities can gain from the interventions.

Training

Findings from this workshop indicate that programmes to support employment and income generation should include job training, especially focused on gender, digital skills and the sector- specific topics discussed above. Workshop participants recommended that training opportunities should be inclusive of those in rural areas. NGO's should provide training opportunities for all relevant and interested people within those communities, especially women and young people who want to have their own jobs.

Social and Gender Inclusion

Furthermore, INGOs can help local NGOs to open capacity building opportunities for government entities, private sector and women, ensuring gender balance in the workplace. Developing programmes that provide employment opportunities for men which also introduce the idea of women working could potentially soften and support a shift in perceptions and the balance of financial power.

Longer Term Commitment

Participants also recommended that NGOs should advocate to international donors to shift their focus from emergency response to longer-term investment and private and public sector.

Sustainability

Finally, participants suggested that programmes like Nineveh SEED are crucial for returnees and will enable them to rely on themselves and feed their families. Therefore, such programmes should go beyond short-term interventions and stay within communities for more than 5 years to bear fruit. The programme can create employment and income-generation opportunities in agriculture by providing inputs and financial support for small and medium size businesses as well as offering training courses, ideally by collaboration with government entities or private sector.

Appendix

The Mosaic Middle East Board of Trustees met in November 2020 and considered the report of the Beyond 2020 conference. The Board welcomed the report, particularly the emphasis on the benefits of working in partnership with local beneficiaries. The Mosaic Middle East Board agreed to seek to:

- Develop Nineveh SEED projects targeting the employment and training of women and young people, working in tandem with the Mosaic Middle East Advocacy programme.
- Provide for additional conferences in Erbil which focus on the needs of these target groups. Such engagement should include a wide range of civil society leaders (including representatives of faith groups);
- Expand engagement with local representatives of both Iraqi Government and Kurdish Regional Government, including heads of districts/mayors;
- Investigate the inclusion of more local business people from Iraq/KRI, with the aim of developing potential matched funding/joint investment with UK or US business investors;
- Develop local social cohesion and empowerment. Form advisory group of beneficiaries from different communities to share advice and insight, and provide mentoring for new businesses;
- Share findings of Beyond 2020 report with international government bodies, including USAID and FCDO to encourage potential capacity building of Nineveh SEED, including grant support in replicating programme methodology.



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