

THI-QAR  
GOVERNORATE  
CONFLICT  
ANALYSIS



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# IMPROVING PROSPECTS FOR PEACE AND STABILITY IN VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES IN SOUTHERN IRAQ



# **BACKGROUND & CONTEXT**

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## BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

Thi-Qar, one of the southernmost governorates of Iraq along the Euphrates basin, shares an **emerging environmental degradation problem** with the rest of governorates in the south which has affected people's immediate and long-term socio-economic prospects. As of recently, this has coupled with Iraq-wide governance and financial challenges. This has led to **instability in the south of Iraq, especially Thi-Qar**, making this area a particular hotspot for fragility as compared to the rest of the country, with **structural issues ranging from high levels of poverty, low levels of human capital, and lack of infrastructure development**. In the governorate capital, Nasiriyah, as in other neighbouring urban areas such as Basra or Al-Amarah, people have protested in large scale since 2015 against their deteriorating living conditions, in a period where the government and the international community were focused on the ISIL (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) conflict ravaging Iraq's north. The initial months of the protests in Nassiriya were particularly intense with clashes in the streets.

As of 2021, Thi-Qar remains the main stronghold of the protests in Iraq, concentrated in Nasiriyah. Despite the different attempts from security forces and other armed groups to break the protests, often with harsh actions leaving several casualties<sup>1</sup>, many residents continue protesting and asking for their demands to be implemented. In the past two years the protests in Nasiriyah have led to the change of multiple police chiefs and governors, but with no manifest improvement of the structural issues people suffer from. The most recent attempt to appease protests has been to appoint a new governor for Thi-Qar who was one of five candidates that was presented by the protestors to the Iraqi government.

To better understand social fragility and challenges to resilience in Thi-Qar, focus must be placed on what makes violence spiral up and become increasingly protracted. Rural areas in Thi-Qar, in particular, are narrowly connected to fragility present in general in the governorate, although it may manifest differently. Different drivers were found through interviewing community members and institutional actors alike, ranging from the **inability to pursue traditional rural livelihoods, absence of institutional responsiveness, bleak outlooks and lack of agency of youth, as well as social norms that are increasingly unable to foster change and respond to challenges peacefully**.

Resilience-building in Thi-Qar, thus, faces entrenched issues that have made the governorate a particularly fragile region in Iraq for years. This is seen in key indicators of fragility from 2012 in Table 1, obtained from the last nation-wide government held household survey available in Iraq.<sup>2</sup> **All districts in Thi-Qar systematically doubled the Iraq average in terms of poverty and male youth unemployment. It shows that almost half of families in the governorate were living below the poverty line and more than half of male youth were already struggling to find sustainable employment.**<sup>3</sup> Against this background it is not surprising to find that rural Thi-Qar has been a source of young recruits for the Popular Mobilization Units (PMUs) since 2014, as they offered employment prospects to a much neglected group. These units supported Baghdad's fight against ISIL as a response to a fatwa issued by the Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani to defend Iraq and its citizens, and remain mobilised after the formal end of the conflict in what is a very politicised topic impacting the future of Iraq.

**Table 1. Snapshot of fragility with data from 2012**

	Nassiriya	Al-Shatra	Al-Rifaa	Al-Chibayish	Suq al-Shuyukh	All Iraq
% of households below the Iraqi national poverty line	38%	49%	41%	52%	39%	20%
% of male population between age 16-29 that is unemployed or underemployment, but searching for work	58%	35%	39%	61%	49%	26%
% of people born between 1960 and 1990 with no education certificate	39%	29%	27%	39%	23%	30%
% of heads of households, or wives/husbands, that were born in a different Iraqi governorate or country	4%	5%	7%	5%	4%	11%
% of respondents that agree or strongly agree that corruption is more extensive now than two years ago	31%	60%	29%	72%	49%	53%
% of adult individuals that express being unsatisfied or not at all satisfied with the level of local security	6%	1%	1%	1%	3%	10%
% of adult individuals that expressed being unsatisfied or not at all satisfied with the trust/acceptance felt in the community/neighborhood	12%	19%	14%	2%	2%	10%
% of respondents that had either contacted a politician, attended a political discussion or attended a demonstration (or would have done it), as opposed to those that would never do such action	59%	62%	39%	52%	55%	48%
Confidence score (from 0 = no confidence to 10 = full confidence) given to the Government of Iraq, to local government village/town, and to tribal leaders (average of the three)	7.2	4.9	5.8	6.1	7.1	6.5

**Source:** Iraq Central Statistics Office and World Bank, Iraq Household Socio-Economic Survey 2012.

To maximise opportunities for resilience programming in local communities of Thi-Qar to contribute to peace and social cohesion amidst the current state of affairs, it is critical to gain a better understanding of dynamics on the ground. In particular, this report aims to gain a better understanding of how citizens in these rural areas perceive their current situation and how governorate-level authorities view these dynamics to integrate findings in programme design and implementation. This will ensure that resilience programming in these locations does not have any unintended negative consequences and can contribute to more peaceful communities and social cohesion wherever possible and appropriate.

Therefore, the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) cooperated with Social Inquiry to carry out a qualitative analysis of communities in Thi-Qar to better understand current group relations, structural violence, and conflict causes, drivers, and triggers related to access to (natural) resources, (lack of) livelihoods, climate change, and food insecurity.



# RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A qualitative approach was taken for the research, based on a series of semi-structured interviews with residents across the rural communities of the five districts of Thi-Qar:

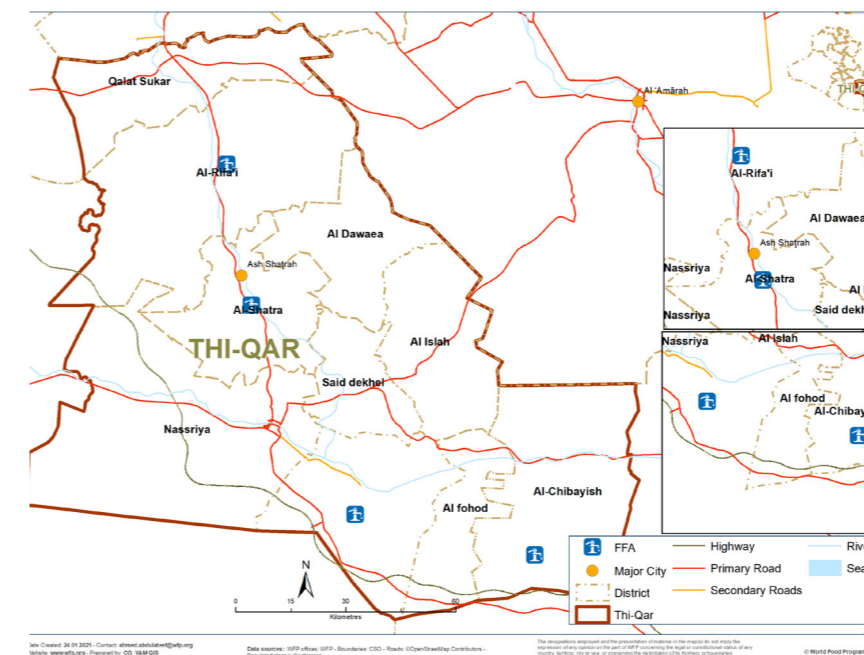
- Nasiriyah
- Al-Shatra
- Al-Rifai
- Al-Chibayish
- Suq al-Shuyukh

Qualitative data collection was used to be able to capture more nuanced views of local dynamics and perspectives on a number of structural factors that impact the daily lives of people in these marginalised locations and enable people to be able to speak in a less constrained way in their own words on issues that may be too sensitive to ask directly about in a close-ended fashion. Similarly, this method was applied for governorate level officials to gain more insights into broader dynamics and policy responses. Thus, two specific semi-structured questionnaires were developed for this analysis, covering the following topics for community members as well as governorate level authorities:

- Overall local dynamics: location characteristics, general socioeconomic situation and common occupations, tribal diversity, migration patterns, overall safety and security, public health concerns, social interactions, movement and accessibility across district and governorate, and any major changes noted among these dynamics in last five years.

- Social dynamics: major social concerns facing community including their emergence and evolution, authorities' responses to these concerns, major social tensions in the community and parties involved, the most vulnerable in the community, and whether or not rural dynamics connect with cities in the governorate.
- Governance and security: main concerns relating to governance and service provision, presence of state in the area and other actors people rely on, independence of the local civil administration, main safety and security concerns in the area, origins of threats, and current security configuration and effectiveness in providing safety and protection.
- Environmental conditions: main environmental changes the area faces and how they are evolving, the impact of these changes on livelihoods, social interactions, and security, causes of these changes and authorities' response, and equality of access to natural resources at present.
- Economic dynamics: main economic challenges the area faces and how they have impacted the community, adaptations people have made in this regard, authorities' response to these challenges, and participation in agriculture and small business.
- Dispute and conflict resolution: dispute and conflict resolution mechanisms, their peacefulness and effectiveness, and preference for formal or customary mechanism for resolving such issues.
- ISIL conflict impact and return of soldiers: level of returning soldiers still in security forces and those who have returned to civilian life, ability of former soldiers to reintegrate back into civilian life, and support they have received.

**Figure 1. Thi-Qar governorate in Iraq**



These questions were discussed and further refined with WFP. The target locations for the analysis were based on areas and surroundings where WFP and its partners are implementing programming (Figure 1). A total of 44 interviews were conducted – 8 in each of the five districts plus an additional 4 with governorate authorities<sup>4</sup>. Sampling of residents took into account social segments such as age (below or above 35 years old), occupation (member of security forces, farmer, fisher, housewife, civil servant, business owner, skilled or unskilled daily wage earner, unemployed, student, retired), education, and gender. The sample covers a wide span of ages (18 and over), occupations, and education levels found in these communities. Its gender balance is 14 women and 30 men interviewed. With regard to authorities, the bulk of interviews took place with different officials within Thi-Qar's Agriculture, Education, and Health Directorates, in addition to the office of the governor. Data collection took place between late December 2020 and January 2021 by an experienced team of local field researchers trained by Social Inquiry and WFP in Basra. The team comprised three members, one lead interviewer and two note-takers who rotated their time in the field to transcribe their notes as audio-recording of interviews was not deemed safe or appropriate.

All members were residents of Thi-Qar Governorate. The team incorporated both men and women interviewers to ensure greater women's participation in the study.

Finally, of note, interviews took place in accordance with public health regulations after COVID19- restrictions in Thi-Qar had already eased. For their own safety and that of study participants, the field team was provided with personal protective equipment (masks and hand sanitiser), and where possible, they conducted interviews outdoors or in well-ventilated spaces (e.g., respondents' yards, farms, along rivers and streams, markets, rooms with open windows, etc.).

# **SOCIAL DYNAMICS IN RURAL THI-QAR**

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## SOCIAL DYNAMICS IN RURAL THI-QAR

Common to all districts in Thi-Qar, respondents pointed to **a series of structural challenges** that their society faces and are contributing to deterioration of both the living conditions and co-existence in rural areas. Most of these challenges are not new, but they became more critical during the last decade, as economic opportunities from the change of regime failed to materialise after Saddam Hussein. As some of the government representatives interviewed noted, the recent ISIL conflict in the north of the country and the COVID19- crisis exposed how ill-prepared these areas were to withstand such shocks.

Topics range from social aspects (tribal issues, gender dynamics, population movement) to economic aspects (economic insecurity, unemployment, agriculture abandonment) as well as governance and security, including the reintegration of former combatants from the ISIL conflict. **All these dynamics are closely linked to each other, reinforcing themselves.** This interconnectedness is noted in the analysis below, as each section covers narratives for individual topics but explaining how it links to the others either as a potential cause or consequence.



### **Box 1.** *A description of the areas covered in Thi-Qar*

Qualitative interviews with community members took place in the governorate's rural areas, covering a number of villages within the main roads (thus, data collection did not take place in district or subdistrict capitals). Overall social and economic characteristics are similar across districts, which justifies the joint analysis conducted below for the whole governorate. All districts are tribally diverse, with most tribes present in different villages across districts (some also extending into Basra Governorate).

The villages selected for the interviews are located in the parts of the district where WFP and its Cooperating Partner SWEDO are implementing resilience-building programs. Some specificities of the areas covered are as follows:

- Nassiriya district: Interviews took place in the rural part of the central district in Thi-Qar, but relatively close to the governorate capital, Nassiriya Center. Probably because of being close to the capital, some of the areas here experienced some public infrastructure improvement. Sections of Thi-Qar University, for example, recently moved in the hinterland of the district and the area benefited from more population movement.
- Suq al-Shoyokh district: Interviews took place in villages north and north-east of the district, along the Euphrates river banks. This part severely lacks basic infrastructure such as public health centers or water purification plants.
- Chibayesh district: Interviews took place in the part between the Chibayesh marshland and the Euphrates river. It is the furthest area from the governorate capital. This has historically been one of the most neglected districts in the south of Iraq, in spite of its natural wealth. The marshlands, one of the key landmarks in Thi-Qar and place of Marsh Arabs, are heavily deteriorated. Other livelihoods present here, compared to other districts, include tourism as well as hunting and fishing.
- Al-Rifaae district: Interviews took place in the norther part of the district, relatively close to Wassit Governorate, in a series of villages along the river that shared tribal connections.
- Al-Shatra district: Interviews took place in the district part most affected by migration, according to estimates from IOM.<sup>5</sup> This district is significantly crossed by irrigation canals connecting to the marshes but, due to the lack of water, has the largest number of families leaving the area.

# TRIBAL ISSUES

Tribes are the **main societal actors in the rural areas of southern Iraq** and, thus, they are discussed as the first topic of analysis. They **shape and determine intra- and inter-community relations through enforcing customs, norms, and traditions**. Therefore, peace and stability, especially in these rural areas, are linked to a great extent to tribal dynamics and relations among them.

In general, and historically, tribal disputes within the same village or between villages have been recurrent in all districts given the strongly tribally and informally configured nature of society in rural Thi-Qar. For several factors analyzed across this report, mainly linked to emerging economic insecurity and unemployment, **the recurrence of disputes has trended upwards for the last decade, contributing to a deterioration of general social environment and confidence**. These disputes are, however, always settled through internal tribal mechanisms without the participation of other, more formal, law enforcement actors. These mechanisms, in turn, can trigger violent actions and spiral up to large incidents if a peaceful settlement is not reached between the parties.



*In this society, we have the fear of tribal differences or tensions to become armed clashes, as sometimes happened in the absence of mediation or proper solutions to the dispute, especially because the security forces do nothing and cannot interfere with the tribal customs.*

*(man, government employee, 42, Suq al-Shuyukh)*



*Some tribal disputes have evolved into real armed clashes while security forces do nothing about it. Most [tribal conflicts] appear unnecessarily.*

*(man, farmer, 42, Al-Rifai)*



*The largest security threat] is the way of resolving disputes through tribal norms and customs, creating problems because this resolution might be non-peaceful sometimes, bringing the presence of weapons.*

*(man, daily Labourer, 36, Chibayesh)*

The likelihood of settling it peacefully is however largely determined by the type and scale of the issue. Respondent feedback gathered during the research, as well as responses from local authorities indicate that **non-peaceful outcomes from tribal relations are becoming more recurrent** in the last few years. This could either mean that parties did not take the initiative to peacefully solve a dispute via non-violent resolution mechanisms, opening the door for affected actors or individuals to resolve it violently, or the type of the issue is such that one of the tribes takes an immediate violent action both to show their power and make their counterpart tribe accept their terms for any potential peaceful settlement. In addition, when tribes agree to a peaceful settlement but fail to implement the agreed terms, they may then resort to violence. All these outcomes inevitably generate rivalries that can go on for years, triggering a series of different types of revenge actions against each other. Given the centrality of tribal dynamics, the discussion is further divided in subtopics for a deeper analysis.

## **Causes of tensions**

Respondents from all districts referred to **tribal disputes and conflicts to be the main security concern** in their areas. These are generally triggered by social issues such as youth quarrels that develop into violent acts, domestic violence, disputes over land and employment access, etc. The most predominant causes among them, however, are linked to **negative dynamics among the youth** which, in some way, form a lost generation similar to other places in the Middle East.<sup>6</sup> **Lack of opportunities, lack of voice, lack of education, or general unrest** – these are the main reasons driving youth towards starting disputes, then feeding into larger tribal disputes and violent responses. Given its centrality, these dynamics and, in turn, their causes are analyzed in more detail later in this report.

## **Disputes and conflict resolution**

As mentioned, social incidents or disputes are virtually always resolved through tribal processes as opposed to formal processes. The settlement of these processes sometimes could end up peacefully, but they can escalate to parties resorting to violent means and armed confrontations (this is also facilitated by the spread of weapons out of formal law enforcement actors). There are specific codes of conduct that are known within all tribes for each type of infringement or violation of tribal customs and norms. These codes are set to resolve issues and hold perpetrators, whether individual or a whole tribe, accountable for breaching them. Minor issues are generally able to be resolved peacefully, but crimes like murder, honour related issues, grand theft are naturally highly sensitive and complicated, and they are often not settled in peaceful terms.

The time these processes take to reach a settlement or not varies depending on different factors such as the scale and type of the issue, the history of the relations between the rival tribes, and also the efforts of other tribes who usually mediate between the rival tribes to reach a peaceful settlement. The rival parties meet with the presence of other tribes and religious scholars and, during the meeting, they aim to



These terms are pre-set for each type of issue or dispute based on customary norms that apply to and are followed by all tribes, frequently involving financial compensation.<sup>7</sup> If discussions end with no agreement, it may lead to back-and-forth retaliation acts between affected tribes, which can last for a long time unless a truce is declared to discuss new terms and try to reach an agreement. When a peaceful settlement is not reached, tribes usually resort to armed confrontation where armed members of the tribes coordinate attacks into each other's territory, as well as taking the form of revenge acts where the members of the rival tribes target each other individually.

It is important to highlight the fact that even some peaceful resolutions entail negative consequences for society, further weakening social ties. Respondents refer to fasliya as one of these negative solutions. Fasliya means, giving away a woman from the family or the tribe of the perpetrator to the tribe of the victim. Another negative aspect **is the lack of true accountability**, as perpetrators are not held accountable for their actions as they just pay blood money as compensation, giving room for grievances to accumulate and protract over generations. This is because agreements are usually made between tribe leaders and not directly between the victim and the perpetrator –in most cases, the demands of the victim are taken into consideration, but this may not always be the case. This means that there are cases where the settlement between the tribes does not necessarily always satisfy the victim family, but they must agree and sign. This may lead to the re-emergence of the issue in the future, for example from the side of the family of the victim.

#### ***Interaction with formal rule of law***

Respondents point to the fact that **government authorities, mainly law enforcement actors such as local police, do not usually intervene in tribal conflicts** unless it develops into very violent events and risks spreading to a wider area. When there is an incident or a dispute, affected individuals resort to the tribal elders to resolve it and reach a settlement. It is mentioned that the incident is indeed reported to the police and a lawsuit is filed for formality and to increase pressure of the perpetrator, but no action is taken by the police until the tribal process is completed. In case of an agreement reach between tribes, the case is dropped to avoid formal procedures.

There is, however, a recognition by most respondents that the formal justice system should be responsible for the resolution of disputes, crimes, and violations. Most interviewees felt that tribal mechanisms are not always the best manner to resolve disputes, especially when tribes are politicised and have more power than before. Most respondents indicated to be keen to rely on formal justice system but only in case it is effective and above tribal laws. But people still mainly resort to tribal mechanisms because formal procedures are considered slow and ineffective, often with sluggish bureaucratic processes, corruption, and nepotism.

It was reported that even law enforcement actors advise rival parties to resolve their disputes through tribal mechanisms to avoid further conflict. Members of the security forces are individuals from these communities and also have tribal affiliations, which means they could be held accountable by the tribes for their actions – if a member of law enforcement acts in a way that is against tribal customs, his rank and the institution he belongs to are bypassed and his tribe is held accountable for his acts.<sup>8</sup>

Officials interviewed from the government in Thi-Qar reported that authorities do not support these mechanisms of dispute resolution as they contribute to protracting violent dynamics. However, they also mention that, due to the sensitive social climate in rural areas, any wrong intervention by the government could cause more issues, which makes them very cautious in intervening in tribal disputes.

Local authorities feel there is no support for change in rural areas (which seems to somewhat contradict the recognition by citizens that tribal resolution mechanisms are not the preferred mechanism). Nevertheless, some efforts are attempted to allay the negative impact of such processes: “authorities try to resolve these extreme traditions through awareness campaigns with the help of civil society organisations and also give the police a role to deal with domestic abuse and bad behavior,” (governorate official).



# ECONOMIC INSECURITY AND UNEMPLOYMENT

The links between increasing tribal disputes and deteriorating household economies are emphasised by nearly every resident interviewed in Thi-Qar.

There is a recognition from government authorities that this increase in disputes in rural areas is due to “the increasingly poor financial conditions in these communities, which reflects negatively on their daily lives and triggers menial disputes between people in the same village that can evolve into large tribal conflicts” (governorate official).

**Economic insecurity has been trending upwards for the last decade in a region that was already extremely vulnerable.** In rural areas, potential economic opportunities failed to materialise due to several structural factors. While the change of regime in 2003 brought an expansion of public sector jobs,<sup>9</sup> these were less available for people further away from Nasiriyah center, especially for those in villages. Only recruitment into hybrid security forces, mostly PMUs, recently offered a respite. The inability to continue with agricultural activities due to lack of profitability, a topic explored in detail later in this report, also contributed to diminishing economic opportunities. Living conditions are reportedly increasingly expensive, adding economic distress for the household breadwinners – a situation worsening as the exchange rate of the Iraqi dinar evolves downward and imported products, which fill most of the food markets in rural areas, thus become more expensive.

In addition to these structural issues, a further shock to an already fragile domestic economy has been triggered in the last year, when lockdown measures due to the COVID19- crisis affected families relying on informal labour, at the same time that the central government faced delays in paying salaries of public employees, affecting in turn this segment of the population. All families, thus, irrespective of their livelihoods, were equally affected. Some respondents reported trying to resort back to agriculture for subsistence in a time when other farmers were selling their land; in other cases, women household members started handicraft activities to support the family economy. In none of the cases, respondents viewed these as sustainable



***We could not adapt to the new situation. I did not find a source through which I could provide income or avoid these financial crises. I worked with my family in agriculture, but it does not provide good income and it is not a stable employment of my own.***

*(man, unemployed, 26, Suq al-Shuyukh)*



***Our biggest concern now is the deterioration of the economic situation, because there is no support for farmers, there are delays in salaries, prices are increasing, there is a failure to provide job opportunities, and there is widespread unemployment among the youth. All these appeared because of the failure to manage the country properly.***

*(woman, housewife, 51, Al-Rifai)*

Amid these dynamics, **unemployment attracts people’s fear due to its destabilizing consequences.** Indeed, most of the competition and struggle between social groups, mainly between tribes, is for employment opportunities – less for other resources like land or water. Especially for public jobs, followed by private jobs (mostly within the oil sector, but also with international organisations), tribes are trying to secure the few opportunities that appear for their ingroups. While unemployment is not a new phenomenon, it is its pervasiveness in the last decade and the lack of social and institutional mitigation mechanisms which has raised the alarms – especially when it comes to the youth, as examined in the next sections. Unemployment was monopolizing discussions with residents in Thi-Qar for this research and, as one resident mentioned, “in every tribal gathering, there is now a discussion on unemployment affecting our youth,” (man, farmer, 41, Nasiriyah)



## EFFECTS OF UNEMPLOYMENT ON MALE YOUTH

As highlighted in Table 1 above, most of the districts in Thi-Qar featured around %60 of male youth either unemployed or underemployed back in 2012. These were already unprecedented levels as compared to previous decades, when agriculture absorbed family employment. Currently, with agriculture in decline (as explored later in the report) and no new jobs in the public sector available, “the situation has created a poor class of youth, which has contributed to create many challenges and problems that have affected the young people, their families and, by extension, the entire society,” (man, unemployed, 23, Nasiriyah). Those young men who stay unemployed in rural areas have to face severe pressures linked to their expected role in society. The previous resident quoted, who is unemployed, explains the problem in more detail:



***Our problem comes from society not understanding the needs of young people, as most of us do not have an income that helps us live and achieve our dreams; it is a reality that a young man without work leads to many problems within the family, because the family cannot provide for these needs. Rather, the family asks the young man, despite his circumstances, to provide money to support the family, which drives young people to quarrels, theft, or exposure to severe psychological conditions that affect society.***

*(man, unemployed, 23, Nasiriyah)*



***The main concern for me is the widespread unemployment especially among young people and the problems that come with it; they do not feel like they have a part in society and are unable to fulfill their demands and needs, therefore many problems occur, leading to some fights and tribal disputes.***

*(man, farmer, 52, Suq Al-Shuyukh)*



***The neglect on youth is resulting in that they invest their energy only in quarrels and conflicts between them, translating into wider tensions within society.***

*(man, daily labourer, 33, Suq Al-Shuyukh)*

This situation of youth unemployment is reportedly present among many families in these communities. **The virulence of the problem is what triggers concerns among residents across ages, while society lacks proper responses for it.** People recognise that the unfulfillment of youth in terms of living standards and opportunities is narrowly linked to other issues such as committing suicide<sup>10</sup> and domestic violence. There are mentions of the bleak future that youth faces and how it supposes a burden for them: “because they know unemployment is inevitable, they become careless and ignore their studies and duties,” (man, government employee, 42, Nasiriyah).

This situation is also linked to social conflicts and tensions becoming more prominent recently. **The social strata of unemployed youth that has been unable to materialise the economic and social aspirations they were hoping for has directed anger against the state** – many protests in Thi-Qar and other governorates in Iraq have been youth-led. In rural areas, such as the ones explored here, youth unemployment has also translated into frictions and disputes within the communities that have the risk of spiraling up into tribal conflict (this is explored in further detail in the security and rule of law implementation sections).



***Youth must be absorbed because we are a time bomb without work.***

*(man, unemployed, 23, Nasiriyah)*

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***There are significant changes in the behavior of youth, some of them aggressive. Some committed suicide in villages close-by. Our situation is worrisome and causes unrest; some try to marry but cannot because of these difficult economic conditions and thus ambitions are destroyed.***

*(man, unemployed, 27, Al-Rifai)*

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Traditional roles and customs play a role in reinforcing this link between youth inactivity and conflict, in relation to the expectations and pressure vested on Iraqi youth. Such roles and customs have not been adapted to offer a response to a new normal of high levels of economic insecurity. Youth, in turn, have a minimal role and no say in making their own decisions. Both people and authorities recognised it, as listed below.



***Societal masculinity is the basis of anxiety in the family and [when within poor economic conditions] it leads to tribal tensions that occur between members of the tribe or others due to arguing for certain rights or because of the simplest reasons that some feel, it affects their dignity.***

*(man, government employee, 42, Nasiriyah)*

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***Men are the most affected by unemployment because they are regarded as an important part of supporting the family. Young people are the most impacted because a lack of job opportunities kills their ambitions and creates a sense of failure. They cannot provide for their needs and, for these reasons, they do not get married. Because of their unfulfilled needs and how limited their families are financially, this is causing a lot of personal issues that can make them commit suicide, as we have recorded in some cases.***

*(interview with governorate official)*

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## GENDER DYNAMICS: ON LIMITATIONS FOR WOMEN

Paired with male youth unemployment, another social dynamic that residents pointed out as affected by strict customs and traditions was the role of women in society. In most cases, residents described how the limited role of women was a social problem, narrowly tied to short-sighted local traditions. Many also argued for a needed change in the current status quo to build a better society and break a cycle in which discrimination translates from generation to generation.



***The inequality between men and women due to societal norms and traditions is one of the important social concerns that we face, an example of which is the discrimination in education or work between men and women . . . it makes women lose self-confidence and thus it translates the effects to her children.***

*(woman, housewife, 37, Nasiriyah)*



***Wrong traditions and customs have a direct negative impact on women's mentality in rural areas; it makes them feel that their role in society is unimportant.***

*(governorate official)*



***Domestic violence should be treated as a societal threat as it strongly harms the cohesion of the family and thus the unity of society. Society conceals the issue as they consider it a customary legacy. Economic pressure and the failure to provide a livelihood for the family comes into play. This became especially important to pay attention to, since the public health crisis.***

*(woman, housewife, 33, Nasiriyah)*

When specifically looking at how conflict affects women in these areas, one very telling consequence is that women can become the 'subject' of conflict resolution. Some of the peaceful resolution techniques used entail negative consequences for women, such as the practice of 'fasliya', which consists of giving away a woman from the family or the tribe of the perpetrator to the tribe of the victim for marriage – this practice substituting for financial compensation.

Besides being the potential subject of a settlement, women do not seem to have any official role in conflict resolution in these areas, remaining marginalised and sidelined in these matters.

Women may have some influence, but not visible – meaning that they are not part of the public customary meetings that are used to resolve issues. Internally they may play a role (through within family dynamics, that is, influencing the male family members that participate in these processes). The depths of this influence however, need further research and a specific focus on gender analysis.

In terms of public participation of women on these customary processes, it has to be noted that their participating can be perceived as derogatory for them by other community members.

Beyond this, there are indirect ways of how women are being affected by conflict, as noted in some experiences recounted in the interviews – these are linked to the psychological burden of enduring the difficulties within the household (with livelihood issues or with the sons affected by structural unemployment), domestic violence, and health issues frequently linked to pregnancy and the absence of rural health infrastructure.

There were mentions by both men and women respondents for the need to support programmes that can bring attitudinal change within society, that can facilitate young women to get as much education at least as young men, and that increases the participation of (and tolerance towards, women in the labour market. Respondents in the area (women mostly, but also men) were asking for awareness raising activities (however they may take place) regarding the role of women in society, promoting education, and mental wellbeing.

Attitudinal change needs to be directed towards men in society even more than to women empowerment. This should focus on a realisation of the negative impacts of customary law on women (and why it is negative). There have been reportedly some awareness campaigns in media and from the government, although not significantly effective according to community and institutional respondents alike.

In terms of schooling, this is only based on observations from rural areas, but girls tend to drop out of school when they are teenagers, usually around intermediate school. It happens especially when upper education levels are of mixed gender.

Decision-making over this dropout tends to come from male family members (usually father, but not always – brothers are involved too).

## ON GOVERNMENT ACTIONS AND RESPONSE

Across Thi-Qar Governorate, responses point to **an overall poor level of trust in governmental institutions**. Only in rural parts of Nasiriyah district (thus closer to the capital than the other districts) do public institutions garner better levels than those in the other districts, although still not rising to satisfactory degrees either. Services provided across the governorate are either severely lacking or do not rise to the expectations and the needs of the residents. Residents point out that, in addition to major deficiencies in health and education services, they suffer from major shortages in basic infrastructure such as drinking water and electricity. Health services are reportedly inadequate across the areas and especially worrisome for pregnant women and emergency cases in Al-Shatra and Al-Rifai, areas far from the governorate capital. In this area, there is reportedly only one health clinic, providing only basic health services and lacking medical equipment and expertise to deal with childbirth and other severe emergencies. This longstanding deficiency in services and absence of significant capacity investment creates distrust among the population about public institutions acting equally in the best interest of residents. This translates into people feeling not represented and feeling marginalised compared to residents in areas closer to the governorate capital.

Trust in governmental institutions is also eroded due to perceived high levels of corruption and poor service delivery often lacking in quality, efficiency and incommensurate to the requirements of the rural areas and to the needs of the people residing in them. Most participants would readily criticise public institutions for being obsolete and sluggish in processing their services. Not only have these areas not seen investment attempts by the government or by the private sector, but they have also increasingly been subject to pervasive neglect. Especially frustrating for the residents across the prioritised areas is a common belief that politicians fail to deliver on promises they give. For instance, as one resident put it, “we did not witness any reaction [from authorities] because people are still unemployed, violence is still very extended, and negative customs and traditions are spreading day by day without any solutions for them,” (woman, housewife, 43, Suq Al-Shuyukh).

Most backlash is found in the lack of reaction to the current structural and economic deficiencies. For instance, despite promises of improvements, there has been lack of maintenance in irrigation canals, a lifeline to agriculture activities. Institutions are blamed for being apathetic not only in addressing this challenge, but also for lacking interest in and vision for the agriculture sector. State interest in supporting essential agricultural needs, as it has reportedly been in the past, has waned considerably. Seeds, pesticides, loans, and relevant tools are no longer subsidised as they formerly were in this area. Additionally, state support in marketing agriculture products has been increasingly shrinking, leaving farmers to assume that process as well.<sup>11</sup>

If anything, these factors indicate that service provision and state support account heavily for institutions trust. **For public institutions to build or boost communal confidence, providing services in quantity and quality are the way forward.** Authorities do respond that efforts are in place: “we are trying to find solutions for some of the problems people face, such as providing water for agriculture, providing veterinary clinics, providing paved roads even though they need maintenance, and providing support for agriculture and livestock productions in the local market” (government official).

However, local authorities do not have the capacity to undertake major changes and they blame, in turn, central authorities for not providing enough funds to cover all the projects and needs in Thi-Qar. The central authorities, however, are currently already facing a pressing macroeconomic situation, with the need to borrow externally to cover their operational budget and are under pressure to cut salaries further.

At present, thus, institutional trust is on the very low end, causing social frustration and displacement in pursuit for better conditions (this displacement being triggered both by living conditions that are lacking, alongside a lack of trust that authorities will or can address this issue), in a governorate tightly restricted by traditions, norms and tribal territorial control. Left unaddressed, such challenges may escalate into instability and entrench more practices of patriarchy and inequality. In addition, recently announced financial measures<sup>12</sup> by the government (additional currency devaluation, cuts in public salaries, and decisions to stop additional public enrollment) are likely to spark anger and resistance among an already economically vulnerable population.



## ON AGRICULTURE ABANDONMENT

**Shortage of water is a common denominator across villages in rural Thi-Qar**, mainly experienced through low water levels and flow in rivers and canals as well as poor quality of water, even for agricultural or livestock use, due to lack of wastewater treatment upstream. This situation has been exacerbated within the last two decades, as regional competition for water resources in the Tigris and Euphrates basin triggered the construction of numerous new dams and reservoirs in neighboring countries, all without coordination between the countries in the basin. The rapid increase in water storage capacity among Iraq's neighbours is their response to the advancement of climate change, with predicted lower rainfall at the source of the rivers in the next decades. Iraq has bilateral water-sharing agreements with these countries that guarantee an agreed flow of water downstream for Iraq, but these are not generally implemented.<sup>13</sup> Most agriculture in Thi-Qar, as in the rest of Iraq's south, relies on intensive irrigation facilitated by a vast network of canals (the northern governorates tend rely more on rainfed agriculture). Water is usually pumped out of the water bodies and directly dumped into the farmland for wheat, barley and rice crops.

However, with water volumes reaching the south highly severed in the last years, many canals in Thi-Qar run dry or have minimal flows that cannot even sustain the natural ecosystem.<sup>14</sup>

Neglect in taking care of the canals and lack of investment also deteriorated infrastructure during the last two decades, preventing the flow from reaching all areas. While cleaning and maintaining the infrastructure is crucial to open the stream up, the absence of enough water volumes reaching Thi-Qar nevertheless significantly diminishes its medium-term efficacy.



Residents relying on agriculture claim that the response of authorities has been “irresponsible” and “slow and disproportionate” to the magnitude of the problem. They request to see more investments either in bringing in more water or in better storing it. However, such supply-side measures would not be effective against water supply issues the whole basin is facing, especially in relation to expected decreases in precipitation and water available upstream on the Tigris and Euphrates rivers and rising temperatures in the region.<sup>15</sup> Supply-side measures may temporarily improve the situation for Thi-Qar water users (provided that upstream governorates do not do the same), but deteriorate the situation even more downstream in Basra.<sup>16</sup> While anger from residents is directed towards local authorities, these authorities blame the central government for lack of initiative and investment. In the absence of an integrated strategy for resolving these issues at the national level, the approach to solve water-related issues has been piecemeal with governorate authorities across the river competing among themselves and infringing upon each other's water quota (that is, capturing more water for their use than the share allocated at national level).

It is then not surprising that the end result of such dynamics (lack of water coupled with a relative institutional paralysis) has been the gradual abandonment of agriculture over the course of the last two decades.<sup>17</sup> Farmers are increasingly unable to rely on agriculture and make a profitable living. **Most of the respondents linked to agriculture indicated that the equipment, most inputs, and the expertise for farmers are generally available, as well as a market to sell the produce. The key input, water, is however lacking.** Without this, the output generated is insufficient or not existent at all. Thus, many farmers turned to other livelihoods when they found the chance, mainly in the public sector. In the best case, agriculture became a side job or subsistence farming.

In the worst, the land was left barren and no activity was pursued. As agriculture is labour intensive due to the absence of mechanisation, **fewer farming labour opportunities.** As mentioned in previous sections, with agriculture unable to absorb an increasing number of youth entering the labour force, this has triggered unemployment as well as forced migration towards agricultural areas in Iraq that have better water availability, located more upstream, such as Karbala and Najaf governorates.

**Of note, water scarcity is reportedly not triggering disputes between villages or families that spiral into conflicts.** Virtually no respondent indicated that there is competition for water resources among the population or tribes.<sup>18</sup> Not every farmer has equal access to water, as it depends mostly on their location in the canal network and on owning equipment such as pumps or wells. Only respondents in the district of Al-Rifai pointed out anecdotally that there are frequent “verbal quarrels” between farmers and it creates “poor relationship between individuals”, but without reaching a stage in that it could be called a conflict.

“Technically, water is guaranteed for everybody and there is equal access, but due to the declining water level, this causes some people not being able to use enough water for what they need, especially if they are located at the end of the village or they do not own water pumps,”

# ON POPULATION MOVEMENT

Another social dynamic directly related to emerging economic insecurity and the gradual abandonment of agriculture has been **forced migration and rural depopulation**. Based on data on population movement collected by IOM, the majority of this movement has been rural-to-rural areas, that is, from Thi-Qar's rural areas to other rural localities in neighbouring governorates where agriculture jobs are relatively more available. Tribal networks play a role in this regard, in facilitating connections between people willing to migrate with employment opportunities in rural Karbala, Najaf, or Basra.



To a lesser extent, families have also left towards large neighboring cities such as Nasiriyah or Basra center in search of daily labour opportunities.

Living conditions in the rural areas of Thi-Qar also seem to contribute to gradually pushing people away. Lack of investment in improving basic conditions so that migration is less prominent, has been in fact pointed out by authorities: "rural areas are lacking when it comes to general services; there are few medical clinics with good medical equipment and staff and that results in poor healthcare; they lack clean drinking water and water purification plants in rural areas; they lack economic projects and support for the private sectors; they have few schools in quantity, while current ones are made of clay or caravans until this day; electricity is not good either, equipment is old," (governorate official).

Residents interviewed for this research, nevertheless, have not described the current population movements as a large societal issue, but rather as a gradual movement that those most in need have opted for as a coping strategy.

Reportedly, youth has been the population segment more ready to migrate in search of livelihoods. Sometimes this came at the behest of heads of households who sent their children to work in cities or other governorates.







## ON FOOD SECURITY

Across the areas examined in this study, and despite the many challenges mentioned in the agriculture sector and domestic finances, **very few of the respondents flagged household access to food as an issue at present. For them, families could access food with relative ease**, through their main sources: local markets, mainly stocked with imported products (including fresh produce), and domestic production.

Markets have remained fully functional for families to satisfy their needs. Even in cases of limited financial resources available, formal and informal safety nets provide sufficient access to food. When local food production decreased due to water shortages, (both the production dedicated to the market as well as for own consumption), imports from neighbouring Iran, Jordan, and Turkey covered the gap.<sup>19</sup> Many respondents, however, signaled concerns should the economic landscape and the agriculture worries be left unaddressed in the long term, both in terms of being unable to afford more expensive food (linked to unemployment as well as the devaluation of the dinar) or to domestically grow food (linked to lack of enough water resources).

This is in line with assessments conducted in Iraq on household food security and vulnerability.<sup>20</sup> The food insecure population does not exceed %5 of the total in any of the southern governorates. More recent assessments post COVID-19 crisis indicated that about %8 of the population in Iraq does not have sufficient food consumption.<sup>21</sup> These evaluations, however, warned of the risk that half of Iraq's population may become food insecure in the near future if socio-economic indicators deteriorate, especially in reference to food price increases due to currency devaluation and thus more expensive food imports in the market.



## ON GENERAL SAFETY AMIDST VIOLENT DISPUTES

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By and large, nearly all residents (both men and women) interviewed across districts refer to their area as safe and adequately protected. This mostly refers to an absence of crime as well as virtually no risk of external attacks or security incidents – especially as residents compare it with the security situation in the central and northern governorates of Iraq. There are no movement restrictions in effect or places where residents feel unsafe to go to. There are only regular requests to make local police more present in rural areas so that accessing them is easier, as they are now mostly found in urban areas.

Nonetheless, residents do point out that “tribal disputes sporadically evolve into real clashes and the security forces do nothing about it,” as one resident in Al-Rifai put it and occasionally other respondents stated this too. The sources for emerging tribal disputes are found in elements discussed in previous sections: **as youth remain economically inactive and families struggle to make ends meet, social cohesion resents and frictions within villages are more common** (from competition for livelihoods to perceived honour issues). When the customary mechanisms of resolving disputes (which, as seen in previous sections, virtually hold the monopoly of rule of law) are ineffective, armed clashes can take place. The fact that there is “a proliferation of weapons in the hands of tribes and other groups than the government” (woman, housewife, 37, Nasiriyah) facilitates the appearance of violence.

What is more worrisome is the fact that it is the same youth who are mobilised by the tribes to participate in these violent incidents, even individuals that had nothing to do with the issue. This situation reinforces the negative dynamics that caused tribal disputes to spiral up in the first place, as it contributes to entrench violent dynamics and victimise an already vulnerable group even more. Manpower and the number of armed members in a tribe determine the strength of the tribe, both socially and politically. Unemployed youth are then the easiest group to target and mobilise when tribal conflicts emerge. Youth who are recruited usually join for purely customary reasons, with the belief in defending the tribe they belong to. However, there are also others who join for economic reasons or to get closer to the tribal leadership and have access to benefits, others don't have access





## ON REINTEGRATION OF PMU MEMBERS

One last social dynamic emerging from these areas, although partially disconnected from the chain of events discussed in other sections, refers to the challenge of reintegrating demobilised combatants within the PMU. Many families have members within the security forces, mainly the PMU after 2014, as it offered for young people a stable income source with which to avoid unemployment and dismay in home locations. Most of the recruits reportedly remain mobilised elsewhere in Iraq, mainly in the central and northern governorates where PMUs are still deployed. There is no foreseeable large-scale demobilisation of PMUs, which means that communities in Thi-Qar will not immediately face an influx of return of fighters.

However, there have been a small number of fighters returning due to disability and psychological distress. While it is not possible to measure its impact on current society dynamics, there are some qualitative narratives on the challenges their reintegration poses. Such reintegration, that is, the fitting of ex-combatants into civilian life back home, is reportedly difficult given that they are fully dependent on others and they struggle to find alternative livelihoods, in addition to reported family instability and domestic violence. “The only support for reintegration is given by the community itself, especially by the elder people in the community who try to guide them,” (man, farmer, 41, Nasiriyah). Indeed, as indicated by government authorities interviewed, “some healthcare and financial support was given to only a few of them through some governmental agencies like the health directorate together with joint security operations, but they need psychosocial support, rehabilitation, and financial support,” (interview with governorate official).



# **CONCLUSION AND KEY CONSIDERATIONS**

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## CONCLUSION AND KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Thi-Qar's rural areas suffer from a series of structural challenges that contribute to the deterioration of both living conditions and co-existence. Most of these challenges are not new, but they became more critical during this last decade, thus making efforts to reduce fragility a much-needed contribution in this area. In this sense, resilience-building programming should take the following considerations into account:

- Tribes are the main societal actor in the rural areas, as they shape and determine intra- and inter-community relations through ruling and enforcing customs, norms, and traditions. Social disputes are part of the sphere of intervention of tribes, without the participation of other, more formal, law enforcement actors. These customary dispute resolution mechanisms, however, can also create violence and spiral up to large incidents if a peaceful settlement is not reached between disputing parties. This is also facilitated by the spread of weapons beyond formal law enforcement actors.
- Rural areas in Thi-Qar have been affected by decades of upheaval and neglect. Residents in these communities face intertwined challenges related to corruption, migration, poverty, environmental degradation, lack of voice, low responsiveness of institutions, and lack of security and rule of law, among others. The main transmission belt between the current situation and violence is economic fragility and unemployment, especially among the youth. It is a new phenomenon that neither the government nor society has been able to respond to appropriately yet.
- Agriculture was traditionally the sector that absorbed people entering into the labour force, but this is becoming less possible because of environmental degradation in combination with a institutional response that has been lacking in fully addressing the situation or offering sustainable alternatives in other economic sectors for the population. The state had been able to incorporate some of the new and old workforce into the public payroll after 2003, but people in rural areas had fewer chances for that and, nevertheless, Iraqi public finances are only able to absorb a limited number of public salaries. Currently, Iraq is critically affected by profound macroeconomic issues that even further undermine its ability to respond to current challenges.
- This situation created a social segment of unemployed youth that has impacted instability. This segment of society has been unable to realise their economic and social aspirations. They directed anger to the state – most protests have been youth-led. But it also created disputes and conflicts within their communities and between tribes competing to secure economic opportunities for their youth. As youth remain economically inactive and families struggle to make ends meet, social cohesion weakens and frictions within villages are more common – from competition for livelihoods to perceived honour issues. These social frictions are partially by-products of social configurations and norms that are increasingly unable to offer peaceful solutions. The material and psychological toll of these issues both individually and collectively are high.

- Currently, levels of food availability are still sufficiently high to not contribute to an increase of food insecurity. Even though financial resources are limited for some groups, those interviewed still stated they could access food – either via informal or formal manners. However, research findings indicate concerns for the longer term. As agricultural lands continue to be abandoned, this could lead to a decrease in availability, if imports from other areas do not fulfill needs. Separately, access to food could be impacted if prices of food products increase and people need to spend larger portions of their available income on food and food becomes inaccessible, which would impact overall food security.
- Finally, the decision to leave rural areas and migrate elsewhere has been increasingly taken by households in Thi-Qar. Residents define this as a gradual movement that those with fewer opportunities where they are, have opted as a coping strategy. Youth, again, are the population segment most ready to migrate.



# REPORT REFERENCES

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1. At least 490 people have been killed since the start of the protests, with over 9000 people wounded. See, for example, <https://www.menarights.org/en/caseprofile/prominent-activist-dhi-qar-governorate-disappeared-september2020-19-;https://www.uniraq.org/images/SGReports/N2102353EN.pdf>; [https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Demonstrations20%in20%Iraq\\_UNAMI20%OHCHR20%report\\_202020%2027%08.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Demonstrations20%in20%Iraq_UNAMI20%OHCHR20%report_202020%2027%08.pdf); <https://news.un.org/en/story/1056312/01/2020>.
2. A government nation-wide household survey was done in 2007, another in 2012, and another was scheduled in 2016-2015. The ISIL conflict made this last survey impossible. UNICEF launched a Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MIC) in 2018 that is nation-wide, but it does not contain any indicators that would fit into “fragility” analysis, thus the 2012 survey is the last measurement point to draw upon.
3. Ibid.
4. The number of interviews was based on the following calculation: 8 interviews with community members per district and 4 interviews with governorate level authorities per district.
5. IOM, “Assessing water shortage-induced displacement in Missan, Muthanna, Thi-Qar, and Basra,” (Baghdad: IOM, 2019).
6. See for example, International Crisis Group, “Fight or Flight: The Desperate Plight of Iraq’s Generation 2000,” (Brussels: ICG, 2016).
7. There could sometimes be disagreement between the rival tribes on categorizing the dispute; for example, whether to categorize the violent death of a tribe member as an accidental death or a murder.
8. This is quite a common occurrence and there are reports of incidents where tribes were engaged in armed confrontations and security forces had no power to intervene. Sometimes, politicians, security forces commanders and even judges are part of tribal settlements but only as mediators. It is important to note that these actors attend these tribal settlement meetings as individuals and not as representatives of the institutions they belong to.
9. Ali al-Mawlawi, “Public payroll expansion in Iraq: causes and consequences,” (London: LSE Middle East Centre, 2019).
10. According to the WHO, over 590 people died in 2019 in Iraq due to suicide, and 1112 attempted suicide; %80 of these people were women. Exact numbers are difficult to gather as families often hide the cause of death in case of death via suicide of a family member. See for example, <http://www.emro.who.int/iraq/news/an-increasing-number-of-suicide-cases-in-iraq-worries-public-health-experts-amid-covid-19-pandemic.html> and <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/10/2020/iraq-suicide-politics-society.html>
11. Under the centralised economic system of the 1980s and 1990s, the state provided the necessary inputs to farmers and later purchased all crops produced at a fixed price and marketed them nationally and internationally. This system fell out of use after the change of regime in 2003, leaving individual farmers to compete with imported and cheaper agricultural products, although these public monopolies still (partially) operate in some agricultural sectors.
12. One of the main financial issues is the delay of paying salaries to government employees. Another measure taken was the devaluation of the Iraqi dinar against US dollar which added another economic burden to citizens. Meanwhile, the annual budget was facing troubles to pass in the Parliament

- for political reason, making it unclear how the economy will look like. The annual budget originally included cuts in the salaries of public employees (the main source of employment for many families) and the freezing of extra public hiring and contracting. Respondents referred to these measures in the budget, which was publicly discussed and blocked in the Parliament at the time of the fieldwork and people were fully aware. As of April 2021, the budget was finally passed by Parliament with most of the salary cuts waived and with promises of extra public hiring. The latter could spark even more dissatisfaction, when not fulfilled.
13. Belkis Wille, “Basra is thirsty: Iraq’s failure to manage the water crisis,” (Beirut: Human Rights Watch, 2019).
14. IDMC, NRC, and Social Inquiry, “When canals run dry: displacement triggered by water stress in the south of Iraq,” (Geneva: IDMC, 2020).
15. Jason Evans, “21st Century Climate Change in the Middle East,” *Climate Change*, 2009, pp.431-417; and Jonathan Chenoweth et al., “Impact of Climate Change on the Water Resources of the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East Region: Modeled 21st Century Changes and Implications,” *Water Resources Research*, 2010.
16. It is important to note here is that respondents seemed to have the expectation that there is enough water for everyone, if enough supply-side measures would be taken. More emphasis in demand-side measures (water saving not only in agriculture but in urban areas) would contribute to “free” water resources that can be used in agriculture. It would also be beneficial to manage expectations in terms of how much water people could have access to, to prevent further grievances in the future.
17. For example, data from Iraq’s Ministry of Agriculture indicated that, between 2016 and 2017 alone, the land surface dedicated to cultivating wheat and barley in Thi-Qar, Missan, and Basra altogether was reduced by %12. See IDMC, NRC, and Social Inquiry, 2020.
18. In terms of other conflict drivers, land disputes sometimes lead to tensions and may escalate to conflict. These disputes arise due to lack of clarity of each other’s boundaries or in livestock of one farmer entering into other’s land. Moreover, conflict between herders and land farmers is not as extended as, for example, in the Sahel region.
19. Iraq is, however, a country significantly reliant on food imports, making it food insecure in macroeconomic terms. See, for instance, World Food Programme & ICARDA, “National strategic review of food security and nutrition in Iraq,” (Baghdad: WFP, 2018).
20. World Food Programme, “Iraq: comprehensive food security and vulnerability assessment,” (Baghdad: WFP, 2016). The CFSVA looks at district level and is undertaken every few years. A new assessment round is planned for 2021.
21. FAO et al., “Iraq COVID19- food security monitor”, Issue 25 (Baghdad: FAO, 2021).
22. Food security is based on four pillars: access, availability, utilisation and stability.



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