



Field Report, 23 July 2022

1. North-Central Iraq – Government Delays, Disappointed Voters1

2. Najaf – Amber Rice in Danger2

3. Kurdistan Region – Medicine Scarcity in Sulaymaniyah...3

4. Muthanna – Climate Change Triggers Displacement5

5. Missan – A Wildlife Sanctuary in Iraq6

6. Saladin – Even One Thousand Dinars Could Make a Difference8



These Field Reports are prepared by the field staff of UNAMI's Development Support Office (DSO), who are based in Iraq's governorates, where they coordinate with local government officials, NGOs, community groups, and other development actors. They also monitor socio-economic and development trends to improve the UN's understanding of events in Iraq.

1. North-Central Iraq – Government Delays, Disappointed Voters



The opportunity to vote for a new government was a dream for Iraqi students who protested in the streets since 2019. On 10 October 2021, that dream came true: The Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC), with the support of the UN, organized fresh elections. Over 9.5 million citizens cast their ballots (from 22 million eligible voters, or 44%).

But the dream of elections turned into a coma. Political parties could not agree on a new administration or elect a President or a Speaker.

The Iraqi Constitution Article §54 and §76 states a government must be formed 40 days after the results of the election. This deadline has come and gone. Voters see only political deadlock, bickering, in-fighting, and rent-seeking.

Party politics in Baghdad also slows down North Central Iraq. Governors in Kirkuk and Ninawa need a new mandate for administration. As interim governors, they cannot hire new staff, promote employees, or allocate a budget to prepare a contingency plan to mitigate any urgent issue.

Fortunately, the Kirkuk government in 2021 had an implementation rate of only 70% for ongoing projects. This means that money not spent can be carried over to 2022.

Businesses worry that the current deadlock in government formation hampers the economy. Construction developer Emad won a tender to build five water stations across North-Central Iraq. As his contract was with the previous administration, local bureaucrats are delaying the bill of quantities.

In the face of such uncertainty, Emad paused his construction projects and stopped buying materials. He now saves his cash instead of investing it in the future development of North-Central Iraq.

Dana S. Saeed, the Managing Director of the Kirkuk Cement Factory, is also very concerned. The factory can produce 200 metric tons of cement per day (which Kirkuk needs to rebuild itself). With no central government in place, local authorities have suspended all purchases.

Many first-time voters are disappointed with elections. They wish the ‘old’ politicians, who lost many votes would make way for new parties. They were hoping for the next generation of leaders, but they see sons and cousins ‘inherit’ a position in government.



UNAMI-DSO monitored the elections in Kirkuk at the request of IHEC and Electoral Affairs Office. © UNAMI-DSO.



Students advocating for change in Kirkuk. With no job opportunities, many recent graduates have since emigrated from Iraq. © Shafaaq.

Most of the students who DSO interviewed no longer think that change is possible through the electoral process. After graduation, many have emigrated from Iraq and built a life in another country.

Yousif Amanj, an 18-year-old student, told DSO that he was very excited to vote for the first time. “I thought I could make a change in the government, but sadly, it did not turn out to be that way.”

This feeling is echoed by Yashar Yaljen, age 19, who said that all his expectations are dashed because he was dreaming to vote for changing the situation in Iraq and provide jobs for the youth.

Mona Gorgios, another student at Al Kitab University in Kirkuk, voted for one of the new parties. She hoped for a ‘New Generation’ of Government leaders, untainted by the corruption of the past.

2. Najaf – Amber Rice in Danger



Nahi, a thirty-eight-year-old farmer and father of five children is seriously considering changing his career. “I planted rice since I was a child and was hoping that my children will take over after my death.” Nahi talked while standing beside a dry water canal irrigating his two acres of land inherited from his father.

All his hopes and plans made for the summer cultivation season have vanished due to a decision made by Najaf’s Agriculture Directorate on 13 June to reduce the plantation area to 1.6 acres of rice paddy crops, representing only 3 percent of the 52.4 thousand acres area planted in 2021.

Najaf is considered the primary source of rice production in Iraq (38%),¹ especially the high-quality variant called Amber, named after its distinctive scent, which is similar to that of amber resin.

It is consumed daily in Iraqi meals with an average of 3.4 kg per month with the government providing subsidized 3kg each month for each person through the Public Distribution System (PDS), but with irregular delivery as rice was distributed only 6 times during 2021.



Water shortage for paddy plantation courtesy Najaf agri. directorate

The decision by the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) to reduce land allocated to paddy plantations translates to a loss of over 200,000 jobs for the summer season. The agricultural sector is responsible for the creation of 20% of all job opportunities in the country, and last year the sector witnessed a shrinkage of

¹https://apps.fas.usda.gov/newgainapi/api/Report/DownloadReportByFileName?fileName=Grain%20and%20Feed%20Annual_Baghdad_Iraq_IZ2022-0001.pdf



17.5% according to the World Bank² due to droughts, energy outages, and the rising global prices of inputs.

Najaf's Water Resources Manager, Shakir Kadhum informed Najaf DSO that the reason behind this decision to cut the planting area came after a sharp decline in the available water share below the country's critical level of eighteen billion cubic meters.

This shocking news drove Nahi and his colleagues in the Farmer Union to organize a demonstration opposite the Governor's office to demand compensation for the losses.

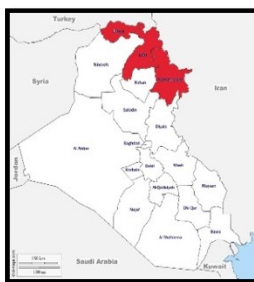
In response, Najaf Agriculture Director, Minum Al-Futlawi informed Najaf DSO that a committee has been formed by the Prime Minister's office regarding compensation. Currently, the mechanism for compensation is under discussion with the committee to be concluded by the end of this month with no information about the compensation rates.

The current situation possesses a fatal threat to food safety in the country considering that Iraq already imports 90% of its rice needs from other countries like Vietnam, India, and others. The price of the Amber brand is expected to rise about 10-15%, which makes it less competitive as an export commodity compared to the one offered by other exporting countries.

To face the challenge, MOA has been promoting the use of an alternative irrigation method called System of Rice Intensification (SRI) utilizing the management of plants, soil, water, and nutrients. SRI reduces water consumption exponentially in terms of volume (one-third of conventional irrigation method) and period by three weeks and increased productivity by 25% through better and more efficient soil improvement and weed control.

SRI is implemented under the supervision of State Bureau of Agricultural Research (SBAR) and Al-Mishkhab Rice Research Station (MRRS) in Najaf. Dr. Khidir Abbas Hameed, a rice scientist introduced the method after attending an international forum on hybrid rice in China in 2004. Dr. Hammed is now writing a proposal on this issue to discuss how can the UN support the promotion of this alternative method through FAO initiatives.

3. Kurdistan Region – Medicine Scarcity in Sulaymaniyah



Lack of money is crippling what is left of Sulaymaniyah's health sector in the Kurdistan region. Many public hospitals are unable to provide essential and basic medicines for their patients.

The pharmaceutical companies have declined to supply drugs to government facilities due to accumulated unpaid debts. The shortages also stem from inept governance, bureaucracy, and incompetent local government officials in addition to a political standoff between Kurdistan's dominant political parties.

Local people are now left to purchase their own drugs from private entities. Some of them have resorted to selling their possessions or borrowing money from friends to afford buying drugs.

The health sector in Sulaymaniyah in the last year was on verge of collapse. In the first week of April 2022, crucial services at Hiwa Cancer hospital as well as maternity, children, and vascular diseases management in various public hospitals were suspended.



Hiwa has been borrowing for two years and is stuck in debt, according to the spokesperson of Sulaymaniyah General Health Directorate, Saman Sheikh Latif. The Directorate owes pharmaceutical companies the sum of 10 billion IQD (7 million USD). Latif sounded the warning bells in early March 2022, when he announced the entire health sector was in trouble.



Hiwa cancer treatment hospital in Sulaymaniyah © media

The authorities stopped paying companies for several months. He reported that the Kurdistan Regional Government did not provide a health budget since September 2021. He explained that the sector had resorted to borrowing to buy medicine and equipment. The sector needs 1.6 billion IQD (1.1 million USD) per year to stay afloat, he says.

The Director General of the Directorate, Dr. Sabah Hawrami admitted to DSO in late May that the shortages were caused by lack of money to pay the suppliers. He said before the crisis, the ministry of health was allocating 4-6 million USD to Kurdistan region of which roughly 2.5 million USD was meant for Sulaymaniyah.



Cholera patients receive treatment in Sulaymaniyah hospitals © media

Hawrami suggests that the stoppage of health sector support from Erbil might be political pressure applied to Sulaymaniyah.³

The increased public outcry over the state of affairs of the health sector and the fear of possible protests from Sulaymaniyah forced Erbil to take note. Then on May 19, Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG)'s Health Minister Saman Hussein Barzinji announced, that the ministry will increase the monthly budget allocated for the purchase of medicine and other medical supplies.

He directed the Health Directorates in the Region to use 25 percent of the budget to directly buy the medicine themselves, and the remainder to be used for tenders from different companies.

Further to the pronouncement, a surge in diarrheal cases and reports of cholera infections towards the end of May, also worked in favor of Sulaymaniyah as the same health minister announced an additional allocation of 800 million IQD (540,000 USD) to support the management of the situation on June 20.

Finally, lack of medicines, unpaid salaries, unemployment, power crisis, and water shortages are part of a broader economic catastrophe looming in Sulaymaniyah. The political rivalry of two dormant parties KDP and PUK drastically divide the Kurds into two camps. It also takes way the main priority of focusing on service delivery. The two parties are now busy competing

³ There is a brewing political rivalry between Kurdistan dominant political parties, the Erbil/ Duhok- Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and Sulaymaniyah based, Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). Previously both formed a single list to contest national elections. However, in the recent concluded October 2021 elections, the two run separately since 2005. This has since affected government formation in Bagdad each choosing different alliance to support i.e., KDP allied with Sadrist and Sunnis well as PUK ended up with the 'Coordination Framework.' The two political giants find themselves on two opposing sides.

for the post of the Iraqi presidency. The developing situation in Sulaymaniyah might lead to a more complicated political and social outcome -if at all-important issues are not well dressed.

4. Muthanna – Climate Change Triggers Displacement



Southern governorates in Iraq are facing significant impacts of climate change – the worst drought since 2018 – due to low rainfall and reduced water flow from Turkey and Iran into the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers this year, according to the water resources directorate.

A large number of smallholder farmers have abandoned their lands and moved to urban areas for better living and livelihood opportunities.⁴

Sawadi Auda, a wheat and barley farmer in Muthanna says, “I left two hundred acres of land and moved with my family to Samawah (the capital of Muthanna). Now I work as casual labor and do not earn enough to meet the family’s needs.”

DSO and IOM visited a group of farmers, who have migrated to Al-Khader city (35 km south of Samawah) recently.

Ajoub Abudlla, a 53-year-old, farmer says that he is preparing to move to Babylon Governorate to work as a farmer. “A few years ago, farming was lucrative. Twenty-five acres of farmland produced enough to feed my large family.” He explains, “Today when I walk on the land, the dust flies under my feet.”

Ali Abdul Kadm, the Director of the Immigration Department, explains that the farmers intend to migrate to cities, but urban areas have limited opportunities. Farmers need to adopt updated farming practices and resilience to cope with climate change. The government strives to support farmers, pay compensation for damaged crops, and urge farmers to stay and cultivate their lands.

Amer Jabbar, the Director of the Agriculture Department, adds that the majority of inhabitants depend on agriculture, and Muthanna suffers a chronic water scarcity, which affected agricultural lands severely.



DSO and IOM met displaced farmers © DSO



Drought hits the crops © DSO

⁴IOM reported that as of 15 March 2022, 3,358 families (20,148 individuals) remain displaced because of water scarcity and other climatic factor across ten governorates in Iraq. The primary governorate of origin for these displaced families is Thi-Qar (1,542), followed by Missan (733), Qadisiya (326) and Basra (246) and Muthanna (188). The displaced families are dispersed across 128 locations, with the majority (74%) being urban locations.



IOM warns that more than five thousand people in Muthanna are at risk of displacement due to water shortage and drought. An influx to urban areas in Muthanna and neighbouring governorates may lead to internal strife, community conflict, and instability in the host areas.

DSO informed UNDSS that the tribal leaders and the angry farmers in Muthanna are preparing for an armed popular uprising. After it was announced on social media, the governor met with the tribal leaders to calm the situation and promised them to meet with the Minister of Water Resources to find a solution.

In June, a new project designed to accelerate climate action in Iraq was launched through a partnership between the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Ministry of Environment. The three-year Catalytic Climate Action in Iraq project is designed to strengthen Iraq's capacity to mitigate climate change and adapt to its impacts by managing natural resources, developing renewable resources, and increasing resilience to climate-induced hazards.⁵

Mr. Youssef Swadi, the director of the Environment of Al-Muthanna, says that this program serves is a first step towards more diversified and green economy by encouraging the use of renewable energies, promoting nature-based solutions, strengthening integrated water resources management, and reducing greenhouse gas emissions from the oil and gas sector.

5. Missan – A Wildlife Sanctuary in Iraq



One of the first and most eye-catching projects to preserve biodiversity and salvage the wilderness in southern Iraq is the newly established gazelles natural reserve in Missan.

The natural reserve is located close to the Iraqi-Iran borders in Ali Al-Gharbi district north of Missan. The deer reserve is an isolated area of high biodiversity value where self-reliant recreation occurs in an undisturbed and natural setting.

The reserve spans over an area of around 500 acres of wire-fenced land to host more than 380 Reem gazelles under the auspices of the Ministry of Agriculture. The reserve aims at safeguarding this endangered species, dozens of which have already disappeared from Missan due to climate change and other challenges, mainly drought which result in poor grazing areas.

The Reem gazelles, also called the slender-horned gazelles, are the only gazelle species that can survive in this harsh desert climate. They live mainly in the open sand deserts in Muthanna, Diyala and other parts of Iraq. There is recent evidence that they have been increasingly targeted by poachers both for meat and for live trade.

⁵ The source of this information is UNAMI-Information, posted on Wednesday, June 29, 2022, and Subject: UNDP Press Release: UK and Canada commit to combating climate change in Iraq.

Mahdi Jabur, an official in the Missan Agriculture Department, explains, “The drought and lack of water were the main challenges we faced while preparing for this project. We dug wells to use the underground water for irrigation and supply water to the project.”

In March 2022, the Ministry of Environment announced a group of sites as national reserves within the draft of the national strategy for biodiversity. The sites in Missan are devoted to investment as tourist areas and an important center for scientific research in wildlife and preserving biodiversity – fauna, flora, birds, and fish.

According to locals, the initiative needs more support from the government, there are no facilities or infrastructure for visitors in the area.

With few tourists, the natural reserve proponents have sometimes struggled to incentivize locals to buy-in for protecting their native environment. Desperate to salvage the ruins of the region’s battered environment, conservationists and officials are struggling to carve out a string of new wildlife reserves in the area.



Teeb natural reserve in Missan© Iraqi News Agency



Reem gazelles in Missan© Dijla TV news

“If the wildlife is not given an adequate living space to survive and flourish, they will disappear,” says Sami Naser, a member of a leading local environmental group in Missan. Despite the setbacks and ongoing difficulties, Naser adds that there is real hope, and much of this is coming in the form of small, locally propelled projects.

In 2018, the Ministry of Health and Environment in Iraq, with the support of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), initiated a project funded by the Global Environment Facility and implemented through the UNEP, over a period of three years.⁶

There are other smaller initiatives, such as cultural sites and some wildlife protection areas. These areas all need resources, law enforcement, and development for their proper protection. Some areas may be possible to restore, and others may be damaged by industrial, hydroelectric, or oil development.

Rules such as the environmental impact assessment do exist, however, those rules are not enforced effectively. Practices like unregulated hunting and trading in endangered species should be prohibited. Awareness-raising campaigns and education sessions to the public can help to preserve the environment and prevent further degradation of ecosystems.

⁶More information at <https://www.iucn.org/regions/west-asia/projects/current-projects/initial-steps-establishment-national-protected-areas-network>



Iraq is working to join the relevant international conventions, such as the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

Joining such conventions can play an important role in facilitating increased collaboration and coordination to support the government measuring and monitoring the effectiveness of their law enforcement responses to wildlife and endangered species. It also prioritizes nature conservation and embracing strategies to promote climate change adaptation to enhance species survival.

6. Saladin – Even One Thousand Dinars Could Make a Difference



Alif Dinars (1000 IQD, or \$0.68) is considered a trivial amount of money, but even so, it can make a difference in peoples' lives. The Alif Dinars Volunteer Team is a group of youth from the Saladin community working to support and advocate for children and vulnerable families, government institutions, and re-coexistence and peace among the community in Saladin.

Haifaa, age 43, is the head of an 11-member household. Her husband is disabled and does not receive a social assurance salary. She nevertheless makes her living by cooking pastries and fast food at home.

The Alif Dinars team raised donations and purchased supplies for pastry-making and gas ovens. Haifaa said, "I never dreamed of having my own business one day!" She is now optimistic about the opportunities the business will provide for her family. Haifaa hopes that one day soon she will be able to fully support her family expenses through the assistance of the volunteers.

The team was established in 2013, taking advantage of social media to collect donations and publicize cases that need assistance from local government and society. The team launched the first campaign in the city of Baiji in north Saladin Governorate called the "One thousand Dinars Campaign," which asked the local community to donate one thousand Iraqi Dinars as a minimum amount.

The campaign was suspended in 2014 when ISIS took over areas in Saladin. After the liberation of Saladin in 2017, the initiatives resumed to include Tikrit city and later all regions of Saladin.

The team consists of 30 members (18 men and 12 women), who have a university education and capacity-building volunteering skills. The team went through training sessions about the roles of institutions and projects, as well as administrative and financial management.

The team conducted activities like strengthening the partnership between civil society institutions, local communities, and community police; enhancing internal security; and the rule of law. Resources are limited, but ambition is infinite. The team's goals are relief and development.



Distribution of Humanitarian Aid of Alif Dinar Volunteer team ©Alif Dinars Volunteer team



Government support to these volunteering groups is limited, except for facilitating movement and access through the security checkpoints in Saladin areas.

The team received donations from donation boxes in pharmacies, shopping centers, and local rich donors, which enabled the team to cover the costs of 73 various surgeries and renovate 16 destroyed houses for vulnerable people.

The team obtained support from international and local organizations such as UNDP, Oxfam, DRC, Save the Children, KordSat, and Sahara.

The volunteering team has implemented awareness-raising activities to promote the COVID-19 vaccine, distributing children's clothes, cleaning materials, and heaters.

Another activity of the volunteers is raising awareness seminars to encourage women to vote, engage in political life, and participate in the political and electoral process.

The team also provided an educational seminar on underage marriage, negative effects on youth and society development, women's leadership skills, family violence during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the quarantine that affected the psyche of society.

"Iraq Al-Khair" and "Basma Ansanian" teams are spinoff volunteers who work in remote rural areas.

The team is officially licensed by the Voluntary Work Center at the Ministry of Youth and Sports, and the team's management plans to upgrade themselves to an organization, and register it with the Ministry of Planning, to get more support from donors, open other branches, and train more youths in volunteering skills.



Alif Dinar Volunteer team accompanies a child to the surgery room in Hospital © Alif Dinar Volunteer team



A forestation campaign of Alif Dinar Volunteer team ©Alif Dinar Volunteer team