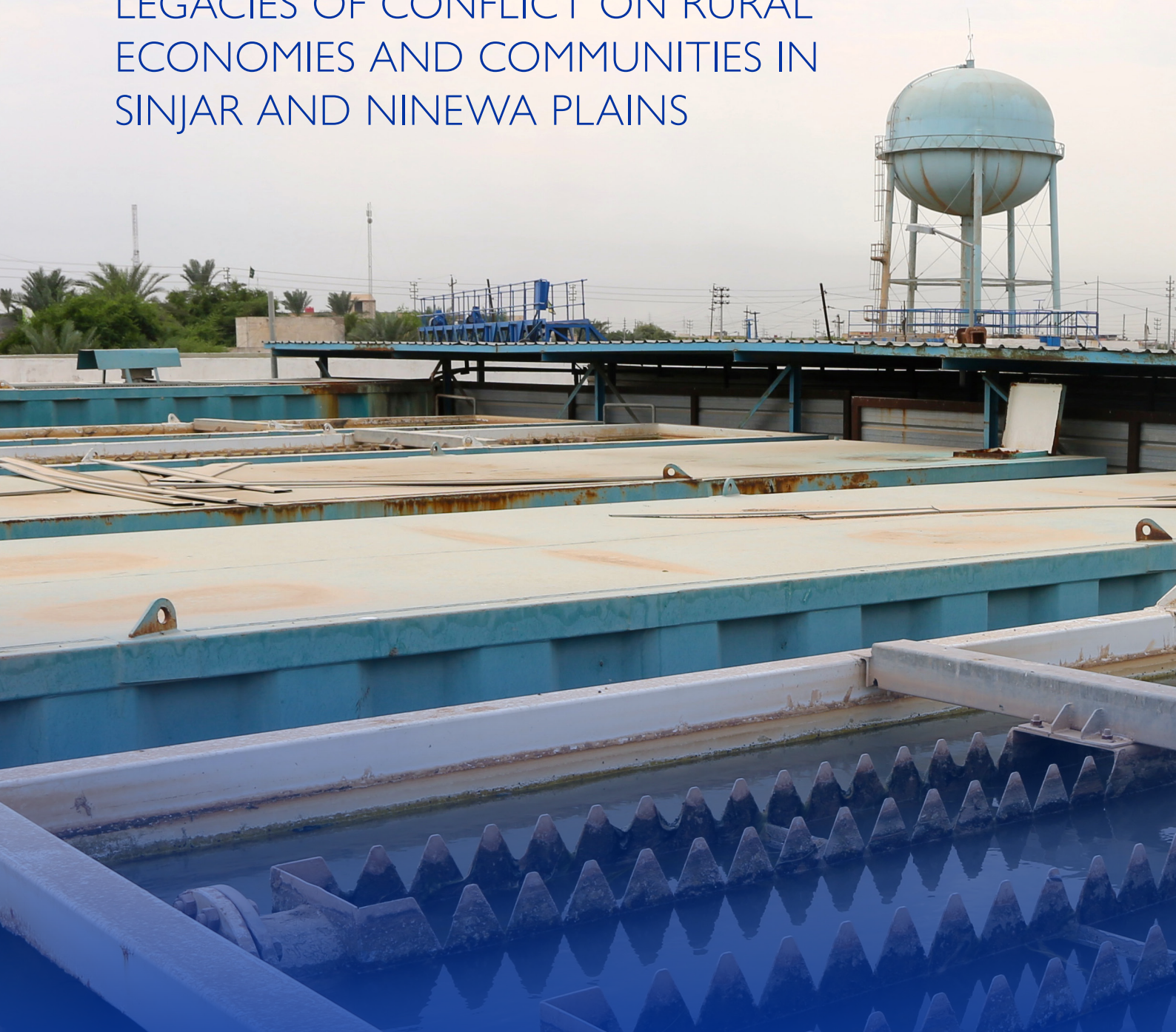


IOM IRAQ

RURAL AREAS IN NINEWA

LEGACIES OF CONFLICT ON RURAL
ECONOMIES AND COMMUNITIES IN
SINJAR AND NINEWA PLAINS



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report focuses on the impact conflict has had on agriculture and displacement prior and during the ISIL crisis in Al-Hamdaniya, Tilkaif, Baashiqa, and Sinjar, predominantly rural areas. The findings of this report are relevant for stabilization purposes and strategies around the return of IDPs originally from these areas and the restart of agricultural activities upon their return.

ETHNO-RELIGIOUS TENSIONS

- Ninewa Governorate is one of the most diverse governorates in Iraq in terms of the number and prevalence of minorities. It is also largely rural and responsible for a significant share of Iraq's agricultural production. Prior to the ISIL crisis, Ninewa's rural population constituted 39 per cent of the governorate's population.
- Ninewa's rural areas have long experienced ethno-religious tensions. In the second half of the 20th century, conflict between the Government of Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government as well as demographic engineering policies affected social cohesion and economic efficiency in rural areas and endowed the governorate with ethno-religious tensions—including land and property disputes—that remain today.
- The ISIL crisis and the specific targeting of minority groups further eroded trust between communities in Ninewa and compounded decades-long grievances among groups that persist after ISIL's departure.



IMPACT OF CONFLICT ON AGRICULTURE AND LOCAL ECONOMIES

- Ninewa is one of the most fertile governorates in Iraq and produces much of the country's grain and produce; nonetheless, farmers faced challenges relying on agriculture to sustain their livelihood. Inadequate government policies, the dry climate, urbanization, demographic engineering policies causing land disputes and insecurity hindered some farmers from achieving livable profits from agricultural work alone.
- The sectarian conflict that erupted in Iraq following the 2003 US-led military campaign was partially to blame. Ninewa was the most dangerous governorate in 2009. Prior to the ISIL crisis, Ninewa had the second lowest rates in economic activity in the country.
- Therefore, farmers in Ninewa tended to engage in other economic activities such as shop keeping and taxi driving to make ends meet.
- The timing of ISIL's capture of Ninewa allowed the group to profit from the 2014 harvest, completed in the months leading up to their takeover of the area. The group profited from the sales of the harvest and rainfed crops, as well as from forcing workers to operate agricultural infrastructure such as silos and mills.
- ISIL's benefit from agricultural production was by no means coincidental. ISIL had a strategic incentive to maintain agricultural production in order to use it as a source of political propaganda and income, with the ultimate goal of functioning like a state.
- Therefore, ISIL intentionally cultivated agricultural production in some areas and destroyed it in others.
- ISIL's use of water as a weapon further impacted agricultural production in Ninewa. ISIL's approach to weaponizing the water supply was tactical as well as part of its expansionary strategy. Controlling water sources allowed the group to control other resources such as electricity, as well as to extort and threaten populations.
- Agricultural infrastructure was damaged as a result of the fighting to expel ISIL from Ninewa. The group destroyed land, infrastructure and resources as they retreated, which explains how ISIL was able to profit from agriculture while in control of Ninewa despite the catastrophic damage they left behind. According to estimates, ISIL reduced Iraq's agriculture capacity by 40 per cent.
- Despite efforts to replenish supplies and livestock and rebuild infrastructure, returned farmers have yet to reach pre-ISIL production levels and unemployment levels remain high. Families who returned to rural areas are less able to meet the basic needs of the family compared to urban areas.

DISPLACEMENT AND RETURN

- Between June 2014 and March 2015, over one million individuals displaced from Ninewa Governorate, the majority of which were ethno-religious minorities: 500,000 Yazidis, predominantly from Sinjar, 190,000 Turkmen Shia from Telafar, 60,000 Shabak Shias from Ninewa Plains, and 60,000 Christians from Ninewa Plains.
- Rates of return in Ninewa Plains are high while in Sinjar they remain low. Of those families originating from Ninewa Plains and Sinjar who remain displaced, most are residing within Ninewa governorate or in the neighboring Dohuk governorate.
- Multiple security actors in return areas, house and infrastructure damage, lack of jobs and services, lingering explosive hazards, are some of the factors that inhibit the return of IDPs to the Ninewa Plains and Sinjar.

INTRODUCTION

The population of Ninewa Governorate consists of a kaleidoscope of Arab, Kurdish and minority ethno-religious communities. The histories of these groups are deeply intertwined with Iraq's political dynamics, and they have been affected by years of conflict and displacement.

Because of its position on the fault line of populations and territories traditionally controlled by the Government of Iraq (GoI) and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), Ninewa has also been a hotspot for economic and political competition. Minority populations located in disputed areas have been subjected to political and economic co-optation by Kurdish or Arab powers, which has impacted their representation historically.

Land ownership policies is an active theater of conflict between Baghdad and Erbil, utilized to seek dominance over the rich plains of Ninewa. Given the limited supply of fertile land in Iraq's dry climate, communities who are forced to urbanize or re-locate as a result of these shifting policies risk their traditions, cultures, and livelihood techniques. Moreover, over the past three decades, drought, sectarian conflict, sanctions, and the occupation of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) exacerbated challenges to agriculture in Ninewa, including the displacement of populations.

Even prior to the 2014 crisis, Iraq's agricultural sector had not modernized at the rate of neighboring countries, meaning Iraqi farmers could not compete with international prices. The government and Iraqi population heavily relied on the Ninewa region for its agricultural production. However, farmers were struggling to subsist on profits from agriculture. They often commuted for day labor to supplement their income, driving taxis, engaging in shop keeping, or obtaining jobs in the public sector.

Such was the situation when ISIL emerged in Iraq and Syria, taking over the Ninewa Plains and Sinjar in August 2014. To maintain agricultural output, ISIL forced the existing workers to continue operating the mills and silos. Fighting, abuse, and revenge destruction while ISIL was being pushed out of Ninewa caused severe lasting damage to the agricultural sector. Almost two years after the official defeat of ISIL in Iraq, livestock remain missing, agricultural lands remain contaminated with explosives, and necessary machinery is missing or destroyed.

Ninewa's role in Iraq's agricultural industry and the presence of historically marginalized minorities in these rural areas suggest that rebuilding agriculture livelihoods is an essential component to achieving successful stabilization in Iraq.

To date, however, stabilization and post-crisis development have largely targeted urban areas. Continuing urban-centric reconstruction will increase rural-urban economic inequality and push more people into urban areas, further impairing Iraq's agriculture and compounding existing tensions in urban centers. Agriculture is an underutilized entry point for stabilization that should be capitalized upon, while taking into consideration the sensitivities of ethno-religious tensions related to land ownership.

This report focuses on the impact of conflict in agriculture and displacement in Ninewa plains and Sinjar, before, during and after ISIL, which is highly relevant to stabilization in Iraq given the long term ethno-religious tensions present in rural areas that have been worsened or ignited due to land and water policies. This is not a comprehensive post-ISIL report, nor does it seek to explain all religious tensions in Ninewa. At times this report may be brief when discussing serious and consequential events, as it makes reference to essential events as they relate to land ownership, ethno-religious strife and the agricultural sector. The findings of this report aim to inform stabilization programming and strategies around the return of IDPs from Ninewa Plains and Sinjar, stressing the need to rebuild agricultural livelihoods impacted by years of conflict in the context of compounding ethno-religious divisions and legacies of demographic engineering.

This report uses IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM), Integrated Location Assessment (ILA), and Returns Index (RI) data. A desktop review of reports and open source data from other organizations also support this paper.



SECTION 1: THE NINEWA PLAINS AND SINJAR BEFORE THE EMERGENCE OF ISIL

1.1 NINEWA SNAPSHOT

Located in north-western Iraq, Ninewa Governorate is the third largest governorate in the country, including 2.8 million people and covering 37,323 square kilometers. Ninewa includes eight districts: Mosul, Telafar, Al-Hamdaniya, Al-Shikhan, Tilkaif, Al-Hatre, Sinjar, Makhmour and Al-Ba'aj.¹

Fifty-eight per cent of Ninewa's population live in Mosul district, 8.4 per cent in Sinjar, and 13.8 per cent in Ninewa Plains (5% in Al-Hamdaniya, 6.8% in Tilkaif and 2% in Al-Shikhan).² Thirty-nine per cent live in rural areas and 61 per cent in urban areas.

The Ninewa Plains and Sinjar are predominantly rural areas, home to many different ethno-religious groups. Kurds, Arabs, Turkmen, Shabak (all from different religious denominations), Yazidis and Christians live in the Ninewa Plains while Sinjar is a predominantly Yazidi area.³ Cities tend to be more heterogeneous while villages are generally homogenous in terms of population groups,⁴ but some villages are located very close to one another.

Table 1: Ninewa Plains and Sinjar, Number of Rural and Urban Locations by District

DISTRICT AND SUBDISTRICT	RURAL NUMBER	RURAL %	URBAN NUMBER	URBAN %	TOTAL NUMBER	TOTAL %
Al-Hamdaniya	43	89.60%	5	10.40%	48	100.00%
Al-Namroud	14	100.00%	0	0.00%	14	100.00%
Bartalla	16	80.00%	4	20.00%	20	100.00%
Markaz Al-Hamdaniya	13	92.90%	1	7.10%	14	100.00%
Baashiqa (subdistrict of Mosul)	26	89.70%	3	10.30%	29	100.00%
Sinjar	33	75.00%	11	25.00%	44	100.00%
Al-Shamal	30	93.80%	2	6.30%	32	100.00%
Markaz Sinjar	3	25.00%	9	75.00%	12	100.00%
Tilkaif	50	87.70%	7	12.30%	57	100.00%
Al-Qosh	27	96.40%	1	3.60%	28	100.00%
Markaz Tilkaif	7	58.30%	5	41.70%	12	100.00%
Wanna	16	94.10%	1	5.90%	17	100.00%
Total	152	85.40%	26	14.60%	178	100.00%

1.2 AGRICULTURE AND FARMING IN RURAL AREAS OF NINEWA

Historically regarded as the “breadbasket” of Iraq,⁵ Ninewa is one of the most fertile governorates in the country; it produces 20 per cent of Iraq’s wheat and 38 per cent of its barley annually.⁶ In the Ninewa Plains, profits from wheat and barley in the winter and fruits and vegetables in the summer constitute 70-80 per cent of household income, while animal husbandry (raising sheep, goats, etc.) makes up 20 to 25 per cent of agricultural activities.⁷ Agricultural output is 99 per cent rainfed, due to favorable weather and precipitation conditions in the area.

Despite these favorable conditions, farmers in rural areas of Ninewa have faced a number of significant challenges sustaining their livelihoods.

First, inadequate governmental policy to support agriculture poses a serious challenge. The Ministry of Trade (MOT) purchased wheat from farmers at an above market rate to encourage farming and then redistributed the wheat through Iraq’s public distribution system (PDS) system. However, the MOT only bought wheat of a certain quality and farmers were not guaranteed an opportunity to sell their wheat at an above-market price. When farmers were forced to sell their wheat at the market price, less revenue was available to cover their families’ basic needs or to purchase seeds, fuel and fertilizers to support other agricultural activities.⁸ The result was that their profits were often uncertain. The government also buys food from abroad and subsidizes it for Iraqis through the PDS.⁹ In 2012 alone, the government bought 5.4 million tons of food from abroad. Iraqis cannot compete with subsidized prices and domestic farmers especially suffer the results.

A second challenge is the dry climate. Several years of drought, water shortages, poor soil conditions, limited access to resources and the security situation make it impossible for families to survive solely on agriculture.¹⁰ Sufficient quality and volume of water for farming are increasingly unavailable. Iraq relies on the flow of water from the Tigris

and Euphrates rivers. Upstream countries such as Turkey, Syria, and Iran control 81 per cent of Iraq’s water supply and have been building infrastructure since the 1990s, slowly reducing Iraq’s supply.¹¹ Currently one fourth of the Euphrates’ flow reaches Iraq.¹² Lower water levels not only reduces the amount of farmland but also affects the salinity and contaminates water downstream, which is increasingly an issue in southern Iraq.¹³ Iraq does not currently have the infrastructure to treat the water.

Thirdly, decades of demographic engineering policies (Arabization and Kurdicization) forced populations to abruptly change their livelihoods practices and created land disputes, many of which persist today.¹⁴ Hundreds of thousands of minorities were relocated with the goal of preventing them from owning land and other property and in order to nationalize agriculture land. The compounded effects of urbanization and violence following the 2003 US-led military campaign also negatively affected crop production in Iraq.

Finally, security impacted agricultural production and capacity. The proliferation of checkpoints and road blocks impacted the movement of wheat from storages to flour mills, which consequently impacted the food security of millions of Ninewa residents who were not displaced and were relying on PDS for more than 50 per cent of their energy intake.¹⁵ The security situation impacted the movement of harvested wheat to MOT silos, and access to lands and market¹⁶; and resulted in the reduction of available fuel for running agricultural activities which led directly to an increase in fuel prices. For example, in 2013 prior to ISIS, farmers in Tilkaif considered access to fuel as a main constraint for the coming harvest season.¹⁷

As a strategy to make ends meet, farmers often supplemented their income by engaging in shop keeping, driving taxis, through government employment, or working in day labor activities in the nearby governorates of Dohuk and Erbil.¹⁸



1.3 RURAL NINEWA: SERVICE PROVISION AND QUALITY OF LIFE IN NINEWA

Prior to the ISIL crisis, Ninewa was characterized by having the second lowest rates in economic activity in the country.¹⁹ In particular, Telafar and Al-Shikhan were the most impoverished areas in Ninewa in terms of per capita income and per capita expenditure.²⁰ Ninewa ranked behind national rates in most of the indicators measuring Millennium Development Goals (MDG) including poverty, education, women's enrolment in economic activities, child health care, and representation in the national parliament.²¹ Figures from 2011 indicate that in the years leading to ISIL's takeover of large swathes of Ninewa governorate, one quarter of the population was living under the poverty line of USD 2.50 per person per day.²²

The rate of illiteracy among men and women aged 24 and above was 11 per cent and 24 per cent respectively.²³ In rural areas, intermediate school enrollment rates were among worst in Iraq, with 17 per cent of boys and only four per cent of girls ages 12-14 enrolled.²⁴ In the Ninewa Plains and West Ninewa, illiteracy²⁵ was 16 per cent in the district of Al-Hamdaniya, 21 per cent in Telafar, 33 per cent in Al-Shikhan and 41 per cent in Sinjar.²⁶

In 2009, between two per cent and seven per cent of children in Ninewa faced chronic malnutrition. Telafar district

had the worst rates of malnutrition: between eight per cent and 10 per cent of children.²⁷ In 2013, the decrease in public distribution system (PDS) assistance, both in terms of the number of items given each month and delays in receiving the assistance, severely impacted Ninewa families and IDPs living in the governorate.²⁸ IDPs were especially affected by these decreases because they were more likely to find themselves in financially unsustainable situations.²⁹

Safe drinking water was an outstanding need in many areas of Ninewa in the years prior to the ISIL crisis. Between 2006 and 2010, nearly 1,364 families from Ninewa displaced due to water scarcity.³⁰ More than half of households in Sinjar were not connected to the general water network prior to 2010.³¹ This scarcity was due to drought, decline in flow from upstream countries, an increase in salinity due to lower volumes of water, and inadequate filtration of infrastructure.³²

The population of Ninewa also faced electricity shortages and experienced prolonged power cuts prior to the rise of ISIL.³³ Between three quarters and all households in Sinjar, Tilkaif and Al-Hamdaniya did not receive electricity via the national electricity network for more than 11 hours per day.³⁴

Table 2: 2010 Figures of the Iraq Millennium Development Goals study areas³⁵

INDICATOR		IRAQ	NINEWA	SINJAR	TILKAIF	AL-HAMDANIYA
Education	Prevalence of illiteracy (aged 10 +)	17.5%	20.9%	41.2%	20.6%	16.1%
Health	Prevalence of chronic disease	9.3%	9.6%	7.2%	9.7%	5.6%
Poverty	Households in the lowest per capita expenditure quintile	20.0%	26%	30.7%	37.9%	36.4%
Water and sanitation	Proportion of households with a toilet	91.3%	95%	76.3%	100%	98.2%

Prior to ISIL's ascent, the security situation in Ninewa was unstable. The Iraqi government's strong stance against anti-government demonstrations exacerbated Sunni resentment towards what was seen as discriminatory practices and political marginalization, and disputes over territory in

Ninewa between the KRG and the GoI in early 2013 further corroded stability in the governorate.³⁶ Violent attacks and armed group operations increased³⁷ with over 1,600 people killed in Ninewa from June 2012 through June 2013.³⁸



1.4 LEGACIES OF POLITICS AND CONFLICT ON AGRICULTURAL LAND OWNERSHIP AND CROP PRODUCTION IN NINEWA

The KRG and the GoI have contended for large swaths of territory in northern Iraq for decades including Sinjar, Telafar, Tilkaif, Al-Shikhan, Al-Hamdaniya, and Mahkmour districts, and Al-Qahtaniya and Baashiqa subdistrict, several of which are in Ninewa.³⁹ Such inter-governmental conflict exacerbates issues of land ownership, documentation of property and civil records, social relations, and economic efficiency and contributed to the economic underdevelopment of the region.

Demographic Engineering and Its Effects on Land and Agriculture

Due to Arabization and Kurdicization, there remain many disputes over property and land ownership, including agricultural lands.⁴⁰ The Baath Regime policy of "Arabization" forced ethnic minorities from their homes and replaced them with Sunni Arabs.⁴¹ The regime's strategy to achieve these goals included the use of force, intimidation, and destruction of villages to involuntarily move populations⁴² as well as official government policies and incentives, which essentially institutionalized and legalized discrimination.⁴³ Over 800,000 individuals belonging to different ethnic and religious minorities were pushed to leave or were expelled by 2001.⁴⁴ Signatures of these policies were to prevent minorities from owning land,⁴⁵ invalidate property titles, and nationalize agricultural land.⁴⁶ Destroying villages was also a method of the regime to force people to flee.⁴⁷

Following the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003, Kurdish forces moved into Ninewa, which caused many Arabs who had moved there in the decades prior as a result of the Baath Arabization policies to flee.⁴⁸ Beginning in 2005, the Kurdish government strengthened its power in Ninewa and dominated the provincial government despite the fact that Arabs were the majority of the population.⁴⁹ Minorities were incentivized to identify as ethnically Kurdish.⁵⁰ Arabs and minorities in Ninewa, especially in Mosul, were displeased with these efforts which they claimed amounted to "Kurdicization."⁵¹



Urbanization and Rural to Urban Migration

The lack of jobs and services necessary for an acceptable quality of life in rural areas led to urbanization, which accelerated during the second half of the 20th century.⁵² In 1965, half of the population in Iraq lived in urban centers, which rose to 73 per cent in 1988. Urbanization continued at a slower rate after the 1980s, reaching 77 per cent in 2000.⁵³ In 2010, 61 per cent of Ninewa's population lived in urban areas.⁵⁴ Urbanization in addition to ineffective agricultural investment negatively affected the agricultural sector, sparking further migration from rural to urban areas.⁵⁵ Urban areas often spread to fertile agricultural lands which increased land prices.⁵⁶ Rapid urbanization without simultaneous and effective policy planning in both urban and rural areas put pressure on rural lands and populations physically and economically, and is commonly linked to a departure of human capital from the rural areas to urban ones.⁵⁷

2003 US-led Military Campaign and Subsequent Sectarian Violence

The 2003 US-led military campaign of Iraq led to intensified conflict and disputes around sectarian identities, reflected in and aggravated by political parties' co-optation of ethnic, sectarian and religious affiliations.⁵⁸ Sunni-Shia conflicts and those among minorities groups proliferated throughout Iraq. Ninewa inevitably witnessed such cleavages from this country-wide conflict, which both resulted in and were compounded by waves of displacement and population changes. Incidents of violent sectarian attacks were widespread and frequent.⁵⁹ In 2009, Ninewa was considered to be the most dangerous governorate of Iraq on a per-capita basis.⁶⁰

Legacies of manufactured population movements into and out of Ninewa created lingering land ownership disputes. Additionally, the dual effects of urbanization and violence hindered crop production in Iraq. While crop production in the rest of the Middle East grew by 25 per cent from 1999 to 2009, Iraq's crop production first grew five per cent by 2005 and then dropped 17 per cent by 2009.⁶¹ During this same period following the 2003 Iraq war, the workforce shifted toward government employment.⁶² In 2008, farming provided 23.5 per cent of the jobs in Iraq but only contributed 3.9 per cent to the GDP, making Iraq's yields 50 to 70 per cent lower than that those its neighbors.⁶³



1.5 ETHNO-RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY AND SOCIAL TENSION

There exist no precise estimates of demographic distributions in Ninewa.⁶⁴ Most estimates place Arab Sunnis as the largest population group in Ninewa, followed by Kurds. Arabs mostly lived on the southwest bank of the Tigris river⁶⁵ and in the north and east sides of Sinjar,⁶⁶ while Kurds resided on the other side of the river in the Ninewa Plains.⁶⁷

Prior to 2014, 140,000 Christians lived in the Ninewa Plains,⁶⁸ one third of whom were residing in Al-Hamdaniya district.⁶⁹ Yazidis in Sinjar numbered 142,000 and estimates for the number in northern Iraq hover between 400,000 and 500,000.⁷⁰

Up to 400,000 Shabak lived in the subdistricts of Namroud, Qaraqoush, Bartella, Baashiqqa and Tilkaif and Al-Hamdaniya, with an estimated 5,000 internally displaced within Ninewa.⁷¹ The Shabak community in Ninewa is culturally distinct from Kurds and Arabs and is composed of roughly two thirds Shia and one third Sunni.⁷²

Estimates for the number of Turkmen in Iraq range from 500,000 to 3 million.⁷³ Turkmen practice both Sunni and Shia branches of Islam,⁷⁴ and the Kakai are a religious group that practice a version of Shia Islam. Most of this population fled Ninewa for the Kurdish region or abroad following

the 2003 invasion.⁷⁵ In 2013, around 200,000 Kakai lived in Diyala, Kerbala, Kirkuk, Sulaymaniyah, Erbil, and Ninewa Governorates, including Mosul and Al-Hamdaniya.⁷⁶

Christians in Ninewa are mostly Assyrian, Chaldean and a small number of Armenians.⁷⁷ Christians formed a significant block in Al-Hamdaniya District (Bartella and Qaraqoush subdistricts), Tilkaif District (Al Qoash and Tel Esqof and Batnaya subdistricts) and Markaz Mosul.⁷⁸ Assyrians consider Tilkaif and the Ninewa Plains area to be their homeland and important to their cultural roots.⁷⁹ In the 1960s, half of Mosul's Christian population fled to Baghdad and other cities in response to targeted assassinations.⁸⁰ Christians also left Mosul in the 1990s due to deteriorating economic circumstances and migrated abroad or to the Ninewa Plains,⁸¹ where there have long been smaller Christian populations. A second wave of Christians displaced to Ninewa Plains in the late 2000s due to violent attacks targeting their communities. In late 2008 alone, half of the Christians from Markaz Mosul were displaced⁸² to surrounding areas, including the Ninewa Plains, for security reasons.⁸³

Despite inter-community and inter-religious friendships, social events and marriages in the Ninewa Plains before the ISIL crisis,⁸⁴ tension among ethno-religious groups remained constant as a consequence of the legacy of demographic engineering and divide-and-rule policies of KRG and Gol power-brokers. For example, Christians experienced tensions with the Shabak minority group and Sunni Muslims before ISIL's encroachment on the land. Bartella and Qaraqosh sub-districts within Al-Hamdaniya district are considered to be the two places most affected by ethno-religious tensions between Christians and Shabak Shia. Starting in 2006, the Shabak were also fleeing attacks in Mosul to the Ninewa Plains.⁸⁵

Yazidis faced forced displacement under the regime of Saddam Hussein starting as early as the mid-1970s. In 1974 and 1975, 100,000 Yazidis were forcibly relocated from their villages to 11 semi-urban townships to the north and south of Mount Sinjar.⁸⁶ As the populations were relocated, orchards and water sources were destroyed, which ruined farmland and forced them to sell their cattle. Yazidis were banned from registering their land in their name and lack property documents as a result. Meanwhile, Arab families who were moved into these areas in the place of departed minorities were allowed to register property to their names. Yazidi lands were given to Arab settlers up to 2003 with the fall of the Baath regime.⁸⁷ An estimated 250,000 Yazidis lack property documents to this day.⁸⁸ Additionally, the engineering of these settlements was not conducive to

agricultural productivity. Agricultural activity consisted of a series of 450 square meter plots placed next to highways, which were not large enough for animal husbandry. Instead, livestock were kept on communal plots.⁸⁹ These Yazidi settlements represent a break with tradition and the arrangement continues to impact their livelihood today.

In the decade following the US invasion of Iraq, many Yazidis fled to Syria and Jordan and the population fell from 750,000 in 2005 to a half of a million or less by in 2013.⁹⁰ Among the Yazidis remaining in northern Iraq prior to the presence of ISIL, they resided in Sinjar⁹¹ as well as Al-Shikhan district, the villages of Bahzani and Baashiqa near Mosul, and in Dohuk in Iraqi Kurdistan.

Intra-group tensions were also present before the advance of ISIL. Disputes between the Gol and the KRG over large parts of Ninewa Governorate⁹² created intra-group friction among the minority groups of the Ninewa Plains. Pro-Kurdish factions and politicians viewed this "Kurdicization" favorably and a reversal of the Baathist Arabization of the area. Others, however, saw it as demographic engineering and grievances accumulated over these changes.⁹³ For example, some Christians and Yazidis felt they were being used in KRG policies to counter the Gol in Ninewa Plains, which caused some cleavages within the two respective populations respectively.⁹⁴



SECTION 2: ISIL'S MARK ON NINEWA PLAINS AND SINJAR

In June 2014, ISIL advanced on Ninewa Governorate taking control of large swathes of territory between June 9th and June 16th.⁹⁵ On August 7th, ISIL captured the southern Ninewa Plains,⁹⁶ targeting non-Sunni minorities in the area and causing the displacement of more than 740,000 individuals by the end of August.⁹⁷

2.1 ISIL'S STRATEGIC USE OF AGRICULTURE AND FACTORS FACILITATING AGRICULTURAL REVENUE

ISIL's control of agriculture land, resources and production was essential for the group's revenue stream, political propaganda, and to their ultimate aim to function like a state.⁹⁸

Agriculture constituted seven per cent of the group's total income in Iraq and Syria in 2015.^{99,100} ISIL gained this revenue by selling the surplus of agricultural products that were available¹⁰¹ as well as through the taxation of flour mills, livestock and trucks to transport agricultural products.¹⁰² Three main factors facilitated the group's agricultural dividends: the timing of the occupation, forced labor, and favorable climactic conditions.

ISIL obtained control of the area at a time when agriculture production was improving and the fruits of planting season in 2014 were ready. Before ISIL's take over, crops were swiftly recovering from a severe drought that occurred from 2008 to 2009¹⁰³ and cereals production in 2013 was up 257 per cent over the five previous years.¹⁰⁴ The years 2014 and 2015 were likely a continuation in the improvement of conditions in the aftermath of the devastating drought. ISIL seized the areas in Ninewa Governorate directly following the 2014 harvest, and therefore they were poised to seize the profits from a full year of investment and labor.¹⁰⁵

ISIL forced workers to continue to operate agricultural systems such as silos by physically and often violently establishing control, forcing existing employees to maintain the silos' operations and remain on the payroll under ISIL's rule.¹⁰⁶ ISIL used the same strategy with landowners to force them to continue operations.¹⁰⁷

Finally, Iraq produces both irrigation-dependent and rainfed crops. Irrigated crops depend on existing, expensive and large infrastructure to function properly in order to produce desired quantities. Rainfed crops rely more on naturally occurring precipitation rather than on the proper operation of an irrigation system. The winter crops in Ninewa Governorate are 93 per cent rainfed.¹⁰⁸ In 2015, the area experienced average rainfall,¹⁰⁹ therefore contributing to the successful cultivation of crops. Further evidence to support this is that rainfed winter crops thrived under ISIL rule whereas summer crops that require irrigation suffered.¹¹⁰

Controlling the distribution of agricultural produce allowed the group to guarantee food supplies to the population living in the territories under their control. ISIL also used agriculture for propaganda. In Mosul, the group distributed bags of flour with the Islamic State stamp in an attempt to win over the population,¹¹¹ while simultaneously restricting supplies to minority Yazidi and Christian communities.¹¹² This was an attempt to win the population's trust that the group could provide certain services.¹¹³ However, ISIL set crop prices higher than in non-ISIL-controlled areas, which caused populations to reduce the quantity and quality of food consumption.¹¹⁴

In Ninewa, ISIL maintained function of all nine silos. A few months into their control of Ninewa, it had seized 290 harvests, one million tons of which was transported to Syria for milling. The group is responsible for at least the loss of USD 200 million in agriculture revenues.¹¹⁵



2.2 ISIL SABOTAGE AND LASTING IMPACT

While ISIL was able to maintain a high level of agricultural production and earn massive profits, these short-term advantages came at the cost of catastrophic damage to the agricultural sector in Ninewa in the long term.

Fighting in Ninewa inevitably damaged agricultural equipment and infrastructure, but much damage was also due to indiscriminate targeting and sabotaging by ISIL.¹¹⁶ ISIL misused agricultural land, resources and equipment for ad-hoc purposes: sometimes for battle, preparation, revenge or political and military intimidation. The exploitation and abuse of agricultural systems did not contribute to an overarching military strategy, but was rather a mode of economic warfare.¹¹⁷

The group looted and destroyed 90 per cent of water infrastructure—pipes, sprinklers, water pumps and channels—sometimes directly using the materials for explosive devices.¹¹⁸ In 2017, only 20 per cent of farmers in Ninewa could access irrigation, compared to two thirds of farmers before the arrival of ISIL.¹¹⁹ In Sinune sub-district alone (Sinjar district), ISIL sabotaged 88 per cent of irrigation wells to the point of inutility.¹²⁰ Rubble, tires, concrete blocks and oil were found in irrigation wells and water pipes and the corresponding water pumps and electrical systems were

destroyed.¹²¹ The Ministry of Water Resources levels ISIL's damage to hydraulic infrastructure at USD 600 million.¹²²

Sixty per cent of greenhouses in Ninewa Governorate were completely destroyed, and forty per cent were damaged to the point of inutility.¹²³ Heightened prices of greenhouses¹²⁴ and agriculture equipment in the post-crisis period prevents farmers and local governments from replacing these devices¹²⁵ and prolongs the rehabilitation period for agricultural activity.

ISIL also destroyed orchards by burning fields, chopping down trees and poisoning land as part of a campaign of collective punishment and economic warfare.¹²⁶ One third of wheat-producing areas in Ninewa were considered to be badly damaged and 68 per cent were considered destroyed to the extent that no production is possible.¹²⁷ Likewise, 43 per cent of areas producing barley were damaged while 57 per cent were destroyed.¹²⁸

During ISIL's occupation, subsidized seeds, fertilizers and fuels¹²⁹ did not reach the territory. Lack of pesticides for fields allowed spiders, mold, insects, rodents and weeds to contaminate land, which has caused a decrease in agricultural production.¹³⁰

Improvised explosive devices (IEDs), were planted in rural environments in minefield patterns to defend territory and to prevent continued agricultural livelihood activities,¹³¹ a practice that continues to hamper renewed agricultural activities among returnees.¹³² In 2017, mine clearing operations destroyed 8,341 mines in Ninewa alone. Mine clearing operations have also encountered devices with chemical agents.¹³³ An estimated 111 locations in Ninewa are contaminated with IEDs;¹³⁴ In the subdistrict of Baashiqa in Al-Hamdaniya, three stretches of IEDs with multiple rows devices exist in lengths of 12, 18 and 24 kilometers. Throughout 2018 and 2019, 41, 11, and 4 confirmed hazardous areas and 35, 2, and 7 suspected hazardous areas were identified in Al-Hamdaniya district, Baashiqa and Tilkaif respectively.¹³⁵ Of the confirmed and suspected hazardous areas, 75 per cent were located in agricultural fields in Al-Hamdaniya, 85 per cent in Baashiqa, and 100 per cent in Tilkaif.¹³⁶

Beyond land destruction, ISIL also confiscated and destroyed equipment. A few months into their control of Ninewa, ISIL had seized 2,600 tractors and 7,488 other pieces of equipment.¹³⁷ The group looted, burned or destroyed 85 per cent of agricultural machinery in Sinjar's sub-district of Sinuni and 70 per cent of these items in Sinjar city.¹³⁸

2.3 ISIL'S USE OF WATER AS A WEAPON

ISIL's use of water as a weapon is a key facet of its expansionary strategy in addition to tactical pursuits, the group wielded this approach to a level unprecedented in modern conflict.¹⁴⁵ By controlling certain water sources, ISIL could also control electricity, flooding or droughts, and livelihoods. Through controlling and manipulating the water supply, they were able to maintain thorough control over the territory they occupied.¹⁴⁶

Moreover, when communities fled ISIL's encroachment, they were only able to take with them a small portion of their livestock, and many animals were lost along the way. When communities returned, they found livestock to be missing, looted or slaughtered by ISIL.¹³⁹ The average amount of cattle, sheep, goats and buffaloes lost in all areas was 75 per cent, with figures as high as 95 per cent in some areas.¹⁴⁰ For example, the pre-conflict town of Sinune was home to 120,000 sheep and goats, 500 cows and 1,000 beehives. After ISIL was pushed out of Sinjar, only 35,000 sheep and goats remained, and no cows or beehives were found.¹⁴¹

During the military campaign to remove the group from the area, ISIL destroyed the same structures and systems it had kept intact during its reign. This explains how ISIL was able to benefit from production during occupation while also leaving massive lasting damage once they were removed.¹⁴² Over one million acres of arable land in northern Iraq have become uncultivable¹⁴³ and the Iraqi government estimates that ISIL reduced the country's agriculture capacity by 40 per cent.¹⁴⁴

These factors are currently hampering renewed agricultural activities in rural Ninewa Plains and Sinjar and delaying the return of IDP farmers to their areas of origin.

ISIL also weaponized water access in order to intimidate residents and to extort or incentivize populations.¹⁴⁷ One instance of extortion / incentivization took place in early June 2014 following the capture of Mosul, when ISIL cut off water provided by the Mosul water purification plant to surrounding villages including to Christian minority villages (such as Qaraqosh and Bartella in Al-Hamdaniya district).¹⁴⁸ The only remaining source of water required USD 6.25 per cubic meter. When ISIL restored water services in mid-June, Sunni-Muslim residents who returned to the city were offered more favorable prices.¹⁴⁹



SECTION 3: POST-ISIL SITUATION IN THE NINEWA PLAINS AND SINJAR

3.1 THE RETURN OF IDPs POST-ISIL

The defeat of ISIL in Iraq was gradual; Sinjar City was retaken from ISIL in December 2014¹⁵⁰ and the majority of Sinjar district in November 2015¹⁵¹ by joint Iraqi-Kurdish military operation with air support from the international coalition.¹⁵² In October of the same year, Qaraqosh in Al-Hamdaniya district was retaken by Iraqi security forces.¹⁵³ Peshmerga forces retook Baashiqa and Tilkaif near Mosul city in November 2016.¹⁵⁴ Ninewa governorate was fully retaken by 10 June 2017 following the recapture of Mosul city.

The rate of return of IDPs to their locations of origin in the Ninewa Plains is high, and as of 31 August 2019 a total of 323,514 have returned. In Tilkaif district, 86 per cent of families have returned and 85 per cent of families have returned to Al-Hamdaniya district.¹⁵⁵ In the capital of the district, the town of Qaraqosh, 59 per cent of town's pre-ISIL population of 50,000 have returned.¹⁵⁶

In contrast to the Ninewa Plains, only 18 per cent of households originating from Sinjar have returned,¹⁵⁷ which accounts for 1.4 per cent of all Iraq's returns. Nearly 20 per cent of these returnees are unsure whether to stay or leave again due to the lack of basic services and instability.¹⁵⁸ While a semblance of normality has returned to areas north of the district, Sinjar town and surrounding villages remain in effect ghost towns.¹⁵⁹ One fifth of the locations in Sinjar report that streets are sparsely populated and another 28 per cent indicate that the feeling in the streets is tense.¹⁶⁰

The patterns of returns in rural and urban locations in the Ninewa Plains and Sinjar mirror each other and follow closely key events in the military campaign to remove ISIL.

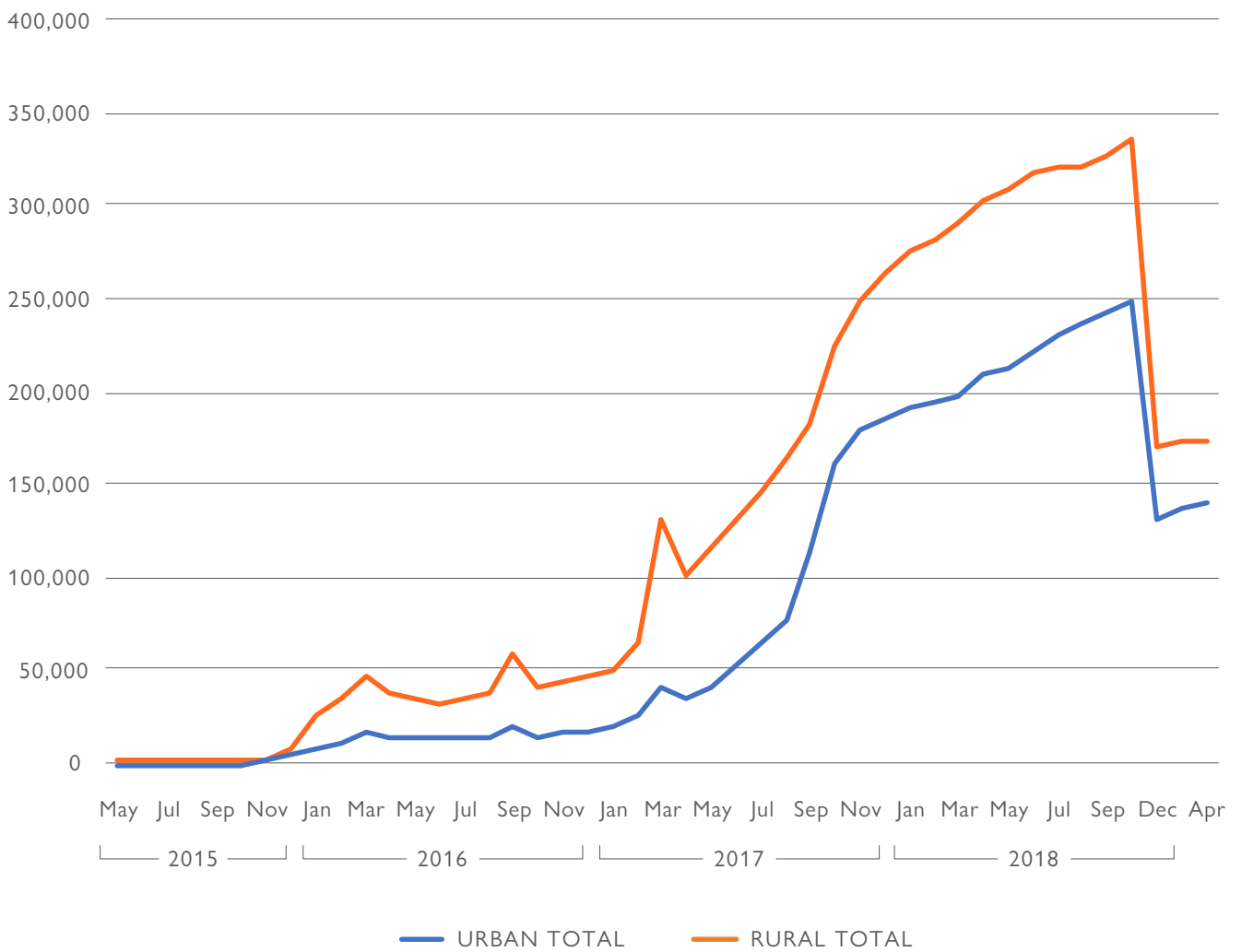
Table 4: Returns to Ninewa Plains and Sinjar, Rural vs. Urban (IOM-DTM Data, as of August 2019)

DISTRICT	SUBDISTRICT	RETURNEES AS OF AUGUST 2019	% OF NINEWA RETURNEES	% OF IRAQ RETURNEES	URBAN	RURAL
Al-Hamdaniya	Al-Namroud	24,468	1.4%	0.6%	180	24,288
Al-Hamdaniya	Markaz Al-Hamdaniya	51,702	3.0%	1.2%	31,218	20,484
Tilkaif	Al-Qosh	13,452	0.8%	0.3%	3,708	9,744
Tilkaif	Markaz Tilkaif	47,142	2.8%	1.1%	40,788	6,354
Mosul	Baashiqa	125,058	7.4%	2.9%	53,550	71,508
Ninewa Plains Total		261,822	15.4%	6.0%	129,444	132,378
Sinjar	Al-Shamal	46,812	2.8%	1.1%	7,542	39,270
Sinjar	Markaz Sinjar	10,602	0.6%	0.2%	6,414	4,188
Sinjar	Qaeyrrawan	4,278	0.3%	0.1%	2,916	1,362
Sinjar Total		61,692	3.6%	1.4%	16,872	44,820
Total		323,514	19.1%	7.4%	146,316	177,198

Table 5: IDPs from Ninewa Plains and Sinjar, (IOM-DTM Data, as of August 2019)

DISTRICT	IDPs FROM	% OF NINEWA IDPs	% OF IRAQ IDPs
Al-Hamdaniya	28,266	3.1%	1.8%
Sinjar	279,432	30.2%	18.0%
Tilkaif	15,846	1.7%	1.0%
Total	323,544	34.9%	20.8%

Chart 1: Patterns of Return to Ninewa Plains and Sinjar, Rural vs. Urban (IOM-DTM Data, as of April 2019)



Despite the return of 323,514 individuals to the Ninewa Plains and Sinjar, a similar number of 323,544 individuals remain displaced, mostly in Dohuk governorate (63%) and

within Ninewa governorate (28%). Families originating from Ninewa Plains and Sinjar constitute 20 per cent of Iraq's 1.6 million IDPs.

Table 6: IDPs from Ninewa Plains and Sinjar by Governorate of Displacement, (IOM-DTM Data, as of August 2019)

GOVERNORATE OF DISPLACEMENT	NINEWA AL-HAMDANIYA	NINEWA SINJAR	NINEWA TILKAIF	GOVERNORATE TOTAL	%
Dahuk	2,412	196,518	5,742	204,672	63%
Ninewa	9,702	72,546	7,740	89,988	28%
Erbil	5,892	4,014	252	10,158	3%
Sulaymaniyah	642	5,358	12	6,012	2%
Kerbala	3,012	414	1,614	5,040	2%
Wassit	3,486			3,486	1%
Qadissiya	1,458			1,458	0%
Baghdad	828	120	234	1,182	0%
Najaf		390		390	0%
Missan	294	12	60	366	0%
Muthanna	228		126	354	0%
Basrah	102	6	60	168	0%
Thi-Qar	132	24	6	162	0%
Kirkuk	60			60	0%
Anbar		30		30	0%
Babylon	18			18	0%
Total	28,266	279,432	15,846	323,544	

3.2 LIVELIHOODS, SERVICES, COMMUNITY RELATIONS AND PERCEPTIONS OF SECURITY

Restarting Livelihoods in Rural Areas of Ninewa Plains and Sinjar

As farmers returned to their places of residence after the recapture of ISIL-held areas, they found much of their infrastructure destroyed, assets looted and livestock stolen, missing or slaughtered.¹⁶¹ Instability following ISIL's defeat continues to slow reconstruction and the return to sustainable livelihood activities.^{162,163}

As of spring 2019, only 61 per cent of locations of return in the Ninewa Plains and Sinjar reported that most or all of agriculture or livestock activities that took place before ISIL's presence have recommenced, while 37 per cent of locations reported some activities have restarted.¹⁶⁴

In Al-Hamdaniya and Sinjar, farmers have not reached pre-ISIL production levels. Farmers in Al-Hamdaniya have not been able to retake orchard and livestock activities, but have restarted wheat and barley production.¹⁶⁵ Those who have restarted production are impacted by supply chain interruptions, access to resources, delays in access to capital that was looted, lack of financial resources, and damage to water irrigation infrastructure.¹⁶⁶

Table 7: Levels of renewed agricultural and livestock activities in Ninewa Plains and Sinjar after the defeat of ISIL (IOM Returns Index Round 4, April 2019)

	RURAL	URBAN
Are the regular agricultural or livestock activities that take place in your location over the course of a year taking place again?		
Most or all	61%	30%
No agriculture in the location	1%	59%
None	1%	0%
Some	37%	11%
<i>Total</i>	<i>100%</i>	<i>100%</i>

Families who have returned to rural areas in Al-Hamdaniya, Sinjar and Tilkaif rely heavily on business followed by agriculture/farming and raising animals on their land. These results contrast with urban areas, where a larger number of returnee families rely on public employment.¹⁶⁷ Both rural and urban locations reported that most returnees are not economically active at high rates: 70 per cent and 73 per cent respectively.¹⁶⁸

Unemployment in areas impacted by ISIL conflict is twice that of Iraq's national average¹⁶⁹ and estimates for unemployment among returnees is about 50 per cent.¹⁷⁰ In Ninewa Plains and Sinjar, few returnees report being economically active: 70 per cent of returnees in rural areas and 73 per cent in urban areas are not economically active.¹⁷¹ The largest barrier to accessing income in rural areas is quantity of jobs, with 77 per cent of rural locations report there are not enough jobs in the area.¹⁷²

Some agricultural activities have restarted in Sinjar, but not to pre-ISIL levels during which 85 per cent of locations in Sinjar relied on agriculture. Few existing business activities in Sinjar have been restored, and less than half of residents are able to find jobs. Residents are also struggling to access educational and health services.¹⁷³

In Tilkaif, opportunities for income such as small businesses, agricultural work and other jobs are scarce.¹⁷⁴ In Al-Hamdaniya, job seekers fare better than in other areas, with small business operations and agriculture activities having restarted in all locations. Educational services are also accessible for most locations; however, most locations do not have functioning health centers.¹⁷⁵

Families who returned to rural areas are less able to meet the basic needs of the family: 44 per cent of returnees in rural locations were able to meet basic needs compared to 64 per cent of families in urban locations.¹⁷⁶ Nine out of ten families in both rural and urban areas reported that they are not thinking of moving again.¹⁷⁷

Access to Basic Services

The lack of or inadequate access to basic services such as water, electricity, education and schools pose serious challenges in rural areas of Ninewa Plains and Sinjar.¹⁷⁸

Rural locations have lower rates of access to services compared to urban areas. For example, there is not enough water to meet the domestic and daily needs of 26 per cent of rural locations, while only four per cent of urban locations face water shortages. All urban locations have enough electricity to meet their needs, while 87 per cent of rural locations reported having enough electricity. Residents in only half of rural locations have access to primary health centers, compared to 9 out of 10 urban locations. Access to primary schooling is also lower in rural locations (87% compared to 100% of urban locations).¹⁷⁹

Food Security

Urban locations reported at higher rates that returnees do not have reliable and sufficient food (73% compared to 65% of rural locations in the Ninewa Plains and Sinjar).¹⁸⁰

In late 2017 to early 2018, Al-Hamdaniya and Tilkaif districts in Ninewa Plains reported better food consumption rates than that of Mosul City, while Sinjar was worst area in terms of food consumption out of the four areas.¹⁸¹

Table 8: Services in rural and urban locations in Ninewa Plains and Sinjar (IOM Returns Index Round 4, April 2019)

	RURAL	URBAN
'Do residents have enough electricity for their needs?'		
Most or all	87%	100%
None	6%	0%
Some	7%	0%
'Do residents have enough water for their drinking and domestic needs?'		
Most or all	48%	52%
None	26%	4%
Some	26%	44%
Can children from this location access/attend primary schooling?		
Most or all	87%	100%
None	2%	0%
Some	12%	0%
Can residents from this location access primary health centers?		
Most or all	51%	93%
None	6%	0%
Some	44%	7%
Total	100%	100%

3.3 CONSEQUENCES OF THE ISIL CRISIS ON SOCIAL TENSION AND THE MULTIPLICITY OF ACTORS: URBAN VS. RURAL AREAS

Social Tension

The recent history of conflict, high-scale human rights violations, conflicting political loyalties and cycles of displacement had greatly impacted relations between communities before the emergence of ISIL in Ninewa.¹⁸² These pre-existing issues were compounded and further complicated as a result of the conflict against ISIL—both within and between communities. But does this differ in urban versus rural locations in Ninewa Plains and Sinjar?

In general, patterns of social tension in rural areas mirror those of urban areas. There are small differences in reports of favoritism of groups in access to aid from the government: 24 per cent of urban areas reported favoritism between tribal groups in terms of access to aid from the government compared to 10 per cent of rural locations.¹⁸³

In terms of access to basic services, rural locations were less likely to report the existence of favoritism among different ethnic and religious groups, and there were no reports of this in urban areas.¹⁸⁴ Rural and urban locations of Ninewa Plains and Sinjar reported similar rates of favoritism among ethnic, religious and tribal groups when it comes to access to public employment, political representation in local councils, as well as threats, mistrust and physical altercations among groups.¹⁸⁵

Concerns about ethno-religious tensions is stronger in urban locations, with one fifth of locations in Ninewa Plains and Sinjar reporting being somewhat or very concerned about ethno-religious or tribal tensions.¹⁸⁶ This could be attributed to the fact that most tensions do not occur within the location, which is homogenous in terms of population background, but rather between locations or sub-districts.

Incidents of revenge attacks, ethno-religious/tribal tensions and the lack of community reconciliation are particular concerns in Sinjar.¹⁸⁷ Four out of five locations reported a need for community reconciliation, yet only 1 out of 10 locations reported the existence of such efforts (mostly in Qayrawan).¹⁸⁸

Multiple Armed Groups and Strengthened Sectarianism

In many districts, the security arrangement is more fragmented and contested than before the ISIL crisis. The KRG had initially increased its control of Ninewa compared to before the ISIL crisis, although this trend reversed after the 2017 Kurdish referendum when Baghdad responded with a military offensive to retake Kirkuk and parts of Ninewa that were under Kurdish control.¹⁸⁹ Also in Ninewa, there has been a proliferation of smaller armed groups along ethno-religious lines.¹⁹⁰ Joining the security actors is a common strategy to obtain employment, especially among young men. Such affiliations may also come with a sense of social power and prestige.¹⁹¹

In general, urban areas have a higher number of security actors per location: between two to three,¹⁹² as compared to rural locations which are usually controlled by one or two security actors.¹⁹³ Furthermore, the control of checkpoints to access the location falls under the purview of an additional security actor in almost 9 out of 10 urban locations, and 7 out of 10 rural locations.¹⁹⁴ Despite more security actors being present in urban locations, restriction of movement affects urban and rural locations in a similar manner, with restrictions of movement occurring in 30 per cent of urban locations and 31 per cent of rural locations of return.¹⁹⁵

The presence of new security actors further intensifies ethno-religious tensions in the area:¹⁹⁶ while the communal and ethnic ties of one community to members of an armed group may make those individuals feel more secure, it makes neighbors feel less secure.¹⁹⁷ The proliferation of armed groups incentivizes each ethno-religious group to disassociate with the others and heightens sectarian identities in the area.¹⁹⁸



DISCUSSION

Years of demographic engineering, conflict, and displacement have complicated the demographic makeup of Ninewa Governorate, resulting in tensions between different ethno-religious groups and disputes around land ownership. The fact that these rural areas are situated in disputed territory between Kurdish and Iraqi Governments has furthermore contributed to divisions between rural communities and has resulted in an unstable environment dominated by continuous competition over loyalties and entrenched patronage systems. More recently, relations between the various communities have been negatively affected by the presence and territorial control of ISIL between 2014 and 2017.

Rapid urbanization in Ninewa since the 1960s has impacted rural areas, with government services, employment and housing increasingly concentrated in the urban areas. Although Ninewa is one of the most fertile governorates in Iraq, agriculture was greatly affected by years of conflict and net crop production dropped between 1999 and 2009. Economic stagnation and challenges in the agricultural sector dominated rural areas prior to the takeover of ISIL. The territorial control and quasi-state functioning of ISIL distinguished it from other violent groups and led to destruction in many urban and rural areas. In certain sectors, rural areas were more damaged than urban ones, while in others they were equally or less damaged.

In the Ninewa Plains and Sinjar the unemployment rate is high among returnees: 70 per cent of returnees in rural areas economically inactive due to the lack of sufficient jobs. Ninewa agricultural fields and fertility were devastated by ISIL's occupation and will require years of reconstruction efforts to return to previous levels of economic activity. In this context, low employment rates in Ninewa's rural areas are to be expected.

In the reconstruction phase, there has been a focus on public government jobs, restarting and starting businesses, security, and strengthening institutions, all of which all city-centric plans. Urban favoritism in the reconstruction phase will contribute to the already-existing urban-rural economic divide and push more individuals to leave rural areas for cities.¹⁹⁹

Agriculture is a key point of entry for stabilization programming that can overcome urban favoritism and rebuild livelihoods in rural areas of Ninewa, where many ethno-religious minorities reside. Increased access to livelihoods and agricultural activities will allow for these populations to overcome the main barriers preventing the return of many former Ninewa residents. Several simultaneous and overlapping programs can contribute to restarting some agricultural

activities efficiently: replacing stolen and damaged equipment and missing livestock, providing sufficient fertilizer and seeds and cleaning contaminated wells are all activities that can quickly help families return to farming and livestock activities. Furthermore, removing explosive remnants of war, rebuilding water irrigation systems and providing capital and financial aid are larger projects needed to ensure safe, serviceable land in the upcoming seasons. Further research is necessary to understand the demographics of those participating in agriculture activities in areas of return in Ninewa Plains and Sinjar.

Parallel to agricultural and infrastructure rehabilitation, community relations in Ninewa's rural areas require particular attention through social cohesion and community stabilization programming. These efforts should be viewed through the lense of the sensitive history of the region pre-dating the ISIL crisis. Understanding past demographic engineering policies and their impact on the lifestyle and livelihoods of communities in Ninewa is essential when engaging with minority communities in the present day. If such issues are not fundamentally addressed, the risk of protracted cycles of conflict in Ninewa remains.

While these approaches have been linked to conflict in the past, joint usage of irrigation channels, sharing of cattle grounds, and employment of day laborers can also provide opportunities to rebuild trust and inter-communal relations among IDPs, returnees and stayees. If sensitivities around particular conflict histories are duly recognized and factored into reconstruction activities, prioritizing agricultural livelihoods will be key to achieving stabilization in Ninewa. Conducting reconciliation processes parallel to agricultural rehabilitation is a promising approach to allowing populations to return home in the long term and restart their livelihoods, allowing them to return to a better life.

Finally, the legacy of demographic engineering and the disputed status of many of Ninewa's rural areas pose a continuous threat for stability and the reconstruction. Disputes over land and property need to be addressed through transparent legal mechanisms in which all groups in the rural areas feel equally represented. In this regard, it is vital that local institutions and law enforcement capacities are strengthened and extend beyond urban areas to those rural areas in great need of such interventions.

END NOTES

- 1 NGO Coordination Committee for Iraq (NCCI), "[Ninewa Governorate Profile](#)," December 2010.
- 2 Inter-Agency Information and Analysis Unit (IAU), "[Ninewa Governorate Profile](#)," March 2009.
- 3 Most Sunni Arabs live in Mosul district but some are scattered in Ninewa Plains. Sunni Kurds mostly live in Mosul, Sinjar, and Ninewa Plains. Kurds in Ninewa speak a dialect of Kurdish that is close to the Turkish dialect Kurmanji. The Norwegian Country of Origin Information Centre, "[Iraq: The situation in Ninewa province](#)," 17 February 2015; Eric Hamilton, "[Iraq Report](#)," The Institute for the Study of War, 2008, page 4; Danish Refugee Council (DRC), "[Multisector Needs Assessment Ninewa Plains](#)," 2018, page 3.
- 4 PAX for Peace, "[After ISIS: Perspectives of Displaced Communities from Ninewa on Return to Iraq's Disputed Territory](#)," June 2015, page 63.
- 5 Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), "[Iraq Agriculture and Livelihoods Needs Assessment](#)," March 2016.
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- 7 FAO, 2016, page 6.
- 8 Government policies in the agriculture sector have been characterized by state determination of prices of strategic crops, such as wheat and barley. Over the past decades, the sector has continued to decline due to effects of stagnation due to sanctions from 1990 to 2003 and mismanagement and violence since 2003. Insufficient funding to modernize methods, capacity building and corruption compelled traditionally agricultural workers to seek employment in urban areas. Mismanagement coupled with economic uncertainty and cyclic conflict resulted between 50 per cent and 75 per cent less agricultural yields in Iraq compared to neighboring Turkey and Jordan. In 2009, Iraq's agricultural output was 17 per cent below that of the 1990/1991 baseline. The sector, however, fared slightly better between 2010 and 2013, according to ACF International, "[Rapid Assessment of Agricultural Livelihoods, Tilkaif District – Ninewah Province](#)," September 2014; Matthew Schweitzer, "[Iraqi Agriculture in Crisis](#)," EPIC, 10 July 2017, page 7.
- 9 Musings on Iraq, "[Iraq's Troubled Agricultural Sector](#)," 16 May 2013.
- 10 Eva Savelsberg, Siamend Hajo, and Irene Dulz, "Effectively Urbanized: Yazidis in the Collective Towns of Sheikhan and Sinjar," *Études Rurales*, no. 186, 2010, pages 101–16.
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- 12 Ellis, 2019; Arwa Ibrahim, "[Iraq's farmers hit hard by water shortages](#)," Al Jazeera, 2 August 2018.
- 13 Ellis, 2019.
- 14 For more details, see section 1.2, Demographic Engineering and its Effects on Land and Agriculture.
- 15 ACF International, 2014, page 8.
- 16 ACF International, 2014, page 8.
- 17 ACF International, 2014, page 8.
- 18 FAO, 2016, page 8, 55.
- 19 In 2007, Ninewa had the second lowest economic activity rates in the country (38%), according to Iraq National Population Commission, "[Iraq Population Situation Analysis Report, 2012](#)," UNFPA, June 2012, page 123.
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- 21 2010 numbers from Inter-Agency information and Analysis Unit (IAU) "[Ninewa Governorate Profile](#)," November 2010.
- 22 Ala Ali, "[Security, Religion, and Gender in Nineveh Province, Iraq](#)," Pease Inside, 2015.
- 23 Illiteracy rates were of men and women who had not completed primary education, according to Alternatives, "[Iraq: A Generation Without Education?](#)" 2010. Among women, illiteracy in Al-Hamdaniya was between one per cent and 20 per cent, 45 per cent to 65 per cent in Al-Shikhan and Sinjar and 27 to 37 per cent in Tilkaif districts, according to IAU, 2009.
- 24 IAU, 2009.
- 25 Illiteracy among the population aged 10 years and over.
- 26 IAU, 2009.
- 27 IAU, 2009.

- ²⁸ Iraq's Public Distribution System (PDS) provides domestically produced food to almost the entire population. It is likely the largest food-based program in the world and is the largest safety net for Iraq's population.
- ²⁹ International Organization for Migration (IOM) Iraq, "[Governorate Profile: Ninewa](#)," 2013.
- ³⁰ For more details on water shortage in Ninewa, see section 1.4. NCCI, 2010.
- ³¹ International Organization for Migration (IOM), Iraq, "[Review of Displacement and Return in Iraq](#)," August 2010.
- ³² This is explored further in section 1.4 titled Agriculture and Farming in Rural Areas of Ninewa.
- ³³ IAU, 2010.
- ³⁴ International Organization for Migration (IOM), Iraq, "[Review of Displacement and Return in Iraq](#)," August 2010.
- ³⁵ IAU, 2010.
- ³⁶ IOM, 2013, page 10.
- ³⁷ NCCI, 2010.
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- ³⁹ Sean Kane, "[Iraq's Disputed Territories, a view of the political horizon and implications for U.S. policy](#)," United States Institute of Peace, 2011, page 16.
- ⁴⁰ UN Habitat, 2015.
- ⁴¹ Several regimes before Saddam Hussein also practiced such policies, dating back to the 1930s. John Fawcet and Victor Tanner, "[The Internally Displaced People of Iraq](#)," Brookings and Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies, October 2002, page 11-13.
- ⁴² The Baath regime used brutal force and mass murder of Kurds and other minorities as part of the Arabization efforts. Most notorious among these incidents is the Anfal Campaign. Starting in 1986, Saddam Hussein ordered series of aerial bombardment, ground offensives, destruction of villages, mass deportation, and chemical weapon attacks against the Kurds. By September 1988, 100,000 Kurds had disappeared and many more were displaced. Human Rights Watch (HRW), "[On Vulnerable Ground Violence Against Minority Communities in Nineveh Province's Disputed Territories](#)," 10 November 2009, page 19-20.
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