NINEWA PLAINS AND WESTERN NINEWA SUSTAINABLE RETURNS AND STABILIZATION EFFORTS

Current Initiatives and Trends

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Stabilization initiatives in Iraq require specialized efforts in each of its diverse districts, which should be based on an in-depth understanding of their history and population compositions. Although coordination between stakeholders continues to improve, subject to various agendas and donor expectations, international and national organizations working on stabilization efforts are dealing with historically deep structural and social cohesion challenges (See Barriers to Stability and Return: A Meta-Analysis report).

Following the liberation of Mosul from the Islamic State (IS) in 2017, Ninewa governorate and its districts have had the most severe living conditions for returnees. This is largely due to the significant housing and infrastructure destruction in many areas, combined with slow reconstruction and compensation processes. In Ninewa's post-war context, concerns continue to rise with the prolonged mode of displacement, particularly in the areas of protection, infrastructure, demining, livelihood, housing-land-property, social wellbeing, basic services, social cohesion and reconciliation.

Through an analysis of the current initiatives in Ninewa, this report highlights critical challenges relating to stabilization and the return of internally displaced persons (IDPs). The areas of concern are as follows:

a) Unmet humanitarian needs critical for the return of IDPs;
b) Changing trends in donor priorities which impact initiatives on the ground;
c) Poor attention to the cultural and historical contextualization of displacement in Ninewa when implementing projects;
d) Lack of appropriate government policies in dealing with IDP returns and managing numerous implementing partners;
e) Bureaucracy and a lack of coordination between local and central governments and international donors;
f) Poor communication between the national and local governments and inadequate access to information on processes, plans and structures to ensure IDP protection throughout the region;
g) Clear discrepancies between the different definitions of what constitutes stabilization, affecting the selection of indicators, the stated conditions for stabilization, and the programming designed to achieve it;
h) Inconsistency in the length of the stabilization period and where it intersects with peace between security factions, which is an important factor in accessing areas to operate stabilization projects.

In order to understand IDP needs and interventions for their return, this "initiatives mapping" explores the following six (6) relevant themes in addition to stabilization:

1. Protection
2. Infrastructure and Demining
3. Housing, Land and Property (HLP)
4. Livelihood
5. Social Wellbeing and Basic Services
6. Social Cohesion and Reconciliation

This report identifies existing needs, initiatives & services, and actors within each thematic area. It also highlights critical failures, shortcomings, and gaps that are impeding stabilization and IDP return. This "initiatives mapping" is therefore created with a view to determine cross-cutting challenges, destabilizing factors and process failures in order to better inform stabilization programming.

The study's recommendations include:

1) As the role of international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) has become critical in providing mixed services in different sectors, tailoring projects in a realistic, flexible, and locally-sensitive manner is a priority.

2) Donors need to continue to fund protection initiatives and services inside camps and be prepared for a slow return of the most vulnerable individuals inside these camps.

3) A better process to identify beneficiaries is required based solely upon humanitarian need (principle of impartiality) and through clearly established vulnerability criteria.

4) There is a need for improved monitoring during and after the execution of work, as well as evaluation by technical experts upon expiration of the liability period.

5) Building capacity in local authorities to regulate markets is urgently required, as are reforms that revive agriculture as a platform for land cultivation and livelihood for returnees.

6) Regarding social wellbeing and basic services, building capacity in Ninewa's Departments of Health and Education will be central to providing equitable, high-quality services to IDPs in areas of origin and displacement.

7) Social cohesion and reconciliation initiatives should be embedded within the wider population they aim to represent. They should be inclusive of religion, ethnic identity, and gender. Existing efforts must be augmented by a transparent and accountable justice process.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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ABOUT MERI

The Middle East Research Institute (MERI) engages in policy issues contributing to the process of state building and democratization in the Middle East. Through independent analysis and policy debates, our research aims to promote and develop good governance, human rights, rule of law and social and economic prosperity in the region. It was established in 2014 as an independent, not-for-profit organization based in Erbil, Kurdistan Region of Iraq.