NINEWA PLAINS AND WESTERN NINEWA BARRIERS TO RETURN AND COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

A Meta-analysis of Existing Studies and Literature

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The sustainable return of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Iraq occupies many international donor projects and resources. However, in the context of the Ninewa province, this problem is not straightforward. Both the concept of displacement and expectation of return are complicated by a long history and atrocious waves of violence, including war, genocide, state-discrimination and systematic demographic changes.

Displacement is ingrained in the history of Ninewa and forms part and parcel of community narratives about survival, identity and belonging. In this way, displacement cannot be conceptualized as a linear process or a uniform experience, but rather as a transformative experience conditioned on geographical, gender and identity factors.

This report is a meta-analysis of the vast literature on Ninewa IDPs and the barriers to their return. It covers important analytical and contextual gaps with firsthand research to inform and enhance stakeholder policies. The various sections of this report will delineate the following primary findings:

- The crisis of displacement should be studied through a combination of multiple causes and circumstances, constituting the environment or conditions of diffused long-term insecurity and uncertainty at both the local and national levels.

- An absence of trust in the government (central, regional and local), political institutions and security forces to safeguard Ninewa's citizens has cascaded into conflictual inter- and intra-community relationships and proliferated opportunistic security actors. This distrust is a fundamental barrier to both return and the building of community resilience.

- The dynamics of displacement and return are happening in a context and cannot be understood in isolation. The movements of IDPs are outcomes of a variety of complex developments, requiring in-depth understanding and contextual analysis, in order to develop effective and long-term policy and programming.

- Before, during and following stages of displacement, women are targeted and made vulnerable in different ways than men. Women's experiences of displacement are marginalized in both research and literature, which subsequently affects their participation and agency in political and development realms. Highlighting women's experiences of displacement is essential in order to adopt transformative approaches to safe and sustainable IDP return, promoting gender equality upon INGO exit.

- The recent crisis of displacement has contributed to the increase of social tensions, in particular between Shabaks and Christians, in the districts of Hamdaniya and Tal Keif. The high rate of Shabak returnees and their territorial expansion, empowered by units from the Popular Mobilization Forces in the area, are perceived by Christians as a threat to their future existence in the Ninewa Plain. The fear of demographic change, as well as a strong sense of political marginalization, characterizes the Christian community and contributes to a pervasive sense of uncertainty. This, in turn, influences their decisions to remain in displacement or migrate. Fears of demographic change and the sense of marginalization extends to other minority groups in Ninewa.

- Reconciliation efforts are critical for the return of IDPs to Ninewa. These are mostly led by International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs), in the absence of a clear policy and implementation structure of the Iraqi government to pave the road to community cohesion. In

order for reconciliation to succeed, it is critical to understand the transformation of violence and its effect on identity politics and female participation, pivotal to sustainable peacekeeping.

The data for this report has been collected during the time period of January through June 2019.

The meta-analysis situates IDP return and stabilization into Ninewa's history of displacement, which forms the backbone of the remaining analysis. The identified barriers to return are categorized into district, identity and gender specific barriers to return. Within each category, primary barriers to return are identified and discussed.

Several factors are relevant for IDP return (see Table 1). These are often interlinked and should not be understood as mutually exclusive (i.e. IDPs belong to all three barrier categories). The barriers and the solutions to overcome them are identified through quantitative research, literature and qualitative research to fill research gaps. This is carried out by focusing on the following:

- District-specific barriers in Hamdaniya, Mosul, Sheikhan, Sinjar, Tal Keif, and Tal Afar;
- Community specific barriers (Yazidis (Ezidis), Christians and Shabaks); and
- Gender-specific barriers (women).

BARRIERS TO RETURN AND DISTABILIZING FACTORS		
DISTRICT	MAIN BARRIERS TO RETURN	MAIN DISTABILIZING FACTORS
Hamdaniya	Trauma Housing destruction Demographic change and discrimination	Security concerns and high presence of Popular Mobilization Forces Compensation and reconstruction needs INGO lack of coordination with local authorities Disputed status of the district and competition between Government of Iraq (GoI) and Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG)
Mosul	Trauma Lack of livelihood opportunities and services Security concerns, including high presence of different armed groups, ongoing IS attacks, and mines and improvised explosive devices (IEDs)	Reconciliation and coexistence concerns Large-scale corruption ingrained in local authority Unclear justice and accountability procedures Social cohesion between populations in East and West Mosul are affected by stigmatization and revenge acts toward the former Risk of local political backlash against the increased visibility and influence of military and political groups affiliated with the Shia community. Marginalization of the majority of the population (women, children and youth) vis-a-vis old tribal structures
Sheikhan	Demographic change of the district Security concerns Housing destruction	Presence of a large number of IDPs

Sinjar	Security issues	Lack of livelihood opportunities causing unrest
	Lack of serious investment into reconstruction efforts	Lack of serious investment into reconciliation and community traumas
	Lack of HLP documentation of IDPs and returnees	Presence of a multitude of security forces, controlling the district's political and security landscape in a non-inclusive way
		The lack of a unified security force or command-and-control may create a vacuum for a renewed IS establishment
Tal Afar	Lack of livelihood opportunities	For Single Female Headed Households (SFHHs): discrimination and harassment or worse
	Lack of HLP Documentation and reconstruction activities	For youth: limited education or employment opportunities
	Lack of safety and security	Internal disputes within the Shia and Sunni Turkmen communities
		Presence of various security forces, with the dominant Shia forces supporting only Shia communities
Tal Keif	Lack of housing, land and property (HLP) documentation	Presence of various security factions
	Lack of financial means to return	Demographic change effects on social cohesion
	Housing destruction	Community distrust and minority representation
		Disputed status of the district
		Rise in local, hybrid and sub-state forces (LHSFs) and the high militarization of formerly high-population towns
		Economic disenfranchisement in farming due to explosives and lack of water
		Lack of compensation and access to drinking water
		Heightened pre-existing inter- and intra-community frictions

SECT AND RELIGION SPECIFIC BARRIERS TO RETURN	
ETHNO-SECTARIAN COMMUNITY	MAIN BARRIERS TO RETURN
Yezidi	Feeling of insecurity in areas of origin
	Militarization of Yazidis internal divisions
	Lack of political settlement between conflict parties, mainly in Sinjar
	Trauma of the crimes committed by IS
	Migration of more than 100,000 Yazidis to Europe following the occupation
	Absence of justice and reconciliation with Sunni Arab
Christian	Awaiting improved security and the lack of international protection

Decreasing employment and economic opportunities

Lack of hope in Iraq and strong pull factor abroad

Majority of Christians have already left the country, creating an imbalance between the number those who stayed and those who migrated

Territorial expansion of Shabaks in traditionally Christian areas

| Shabak | Better job opportunities in areas of displacement |
| | Social tensions with the returnees |

GENDER-SPECIFIC BARRIERS TO RETURN	
GENDER	MAIN BARRIERS TO RETURN
Female	Restriction of movement due to intimidation, assault, harassment, child caring responsibilities and social norms
	Protection needs during and following return movements
	New opportunities and aspiration since displacement
	Unwillingness to return to old oppressive power structures

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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.