Navigating climate and conflict

Nike Löble
Kathrin Buddendieck

OUTCOME REPORT

Berghof Foundation

PEACE
PARADIGMS

ABOUT THIS PAPER

This report has been produced within the framework of the project "Strengthening Iraqi Capacities to Respond to Climate Risks and their Impact on Existing Conflict Dynamics" which is implemented by the Berghof Foundation and Peace Paradigms Organisation (PPO) with support from the German Federal Foreign Office and is part of the Weathering Risk Peace Pillar led by adelphi research.

WEATHERING RISK
PEACE PILLAR

TO CITE THIS PAPER

Berghof Foundation 2026: Navigating Climate and Conflict: Outcome Report. Berlin: Bergof Foundation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report would not have been possible without the valuable support and contributions of numerous individuals and organisations. We would first and foremost like to extend our sincere thanks to the Berghof and PPO teams for their continued dedication and tireless efforts throughout the project. We are also grateful to adelphi research for their valuable contributions to the analytical framework and for sharing their expertise. Finally, the project team would like to express its sincere appreciation to the German Federal Foreign Office for its generous support of the project under which this report was produced.

COPY EDITING Hillary Crowe
LAYOUT AND GRAPHICS AMBERPRESS, Katja Koeberlin, Gosia Warrink

FUNDED BY

german cooperation
DEUTSCHE ZUSAMMENARBEIT

COVER: PHOTO © BERGHOF FOUNDATION

PUBLISHED BY

Berghof Foundation

Berghof Foundation Operations gGmbH
Lindenstraße 34 10969 Berlin Germany

www.berghof-foundation.org

© 2026. All rights reserved.

PUBLISHING PARTNER

PEACE PARADIGMS

Peace Paradigms Organisation
Baghdad Palms Complex,
Business Center, Office No. 6,
Baghdad, Iraq

Park View, Building B1,
Floor 5, Apartment 14,
Erbil

www.ppo-iq.org

CONTENTS

1	Executive summary	4
2	Introduction	7
2.1	The Weathering Risk Peace Pillar	7
2.2	Country context: Iraq	8
2.3	Project description and Theory of Change	9
3	Evaluation approach and methods	11
4	Key outcomes	15
4.1	Workstream 1: Strengthened understanding, awareness and capacities	17
4.2	Workstream 2: Establishing inclusive dialogues and identifying consensus-based local solutions to climate security risks	25
4.3	Workstream 3: Integrating the climate security dimension into peacebuilding and adaptation measures	40
5	Conclusion	46
	Endnotes	47

1 Executive summary

Iraq is highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate and environmental pressures, including water scarcity, soil degradation, extreme heat, and increasingly frequent and intense dust storms. These pressures interact with weak governance, unequal resource distribution, social exclusion, displacement and unresolved community grievances, increasing the risk of local disputes. Climate-related pressures are particularly acute in areas already affected by weak governance, limited trust in public institutions, socio-economic marginalisation and unresolved inter-community grievances. As climate impacts increasingly affect livelihoods, access to essential services and patterns of displacement, they risk further aggravating existing fragilities and creating new points of contention between communities, local authorities and different levels of government.

These climate-related pressures unfold within a highly complex security and political environment. The Iraqi government continues to navigate competing political and security pressures, including its security partnership with the United States, the influence of Iran-aligned armed groups, and the spillover of regional conflicts and tensions. These pressures can fragment authority, consume institutional attention and complicate coordination across governance levels, particularly during periods of heightened regional tension such as early 2026. In this context, mechanisms for dialogue and coordination between different governance levels are increasingly important to maintain coordination and address shared challenges despite competing priorities. Cooperation around environmental and climate issues such as water, livelihood services and crisis management can provide practical entry points for dialogue and help strengthen trust and national ownership of collaborative approaches to conflict-sensitive resource governance. At the same time, as national institutions are stretched by multiple and overlapping crises, communities may rely on long-established local mediation and conflict resolution mechanisms to manage tensions. These mechanisms can provide avenues for addressing local disputes, but their effectiveness depends on inclusive representation and links to institutions with formal mandates. Strengthening these locally anchored mechanisms can help prevent climate-related disputes from escalating and becoming entangled with broader political and regional dynamics.

Within this context, Berghof and PPO's approach pursues three overarching objectives: 1) raising awareness and strengthen evidence of the climate-conflict nexus through research and building capacities of Iraqi actors to identify, analyse and address climate-related conflicts through mediation and dialogue; 2) Support locally led and inclusive dialogue and mediation processes that produce practical arrangements between affected communities and relevant authorities; 3) support relevant authorities

YOUNG CROPS IN AN ARID AGRICULTURAL FIELD, IRAQ, 2026.

at district, governorate and national levels to integrate climate-security and conflict-sensitivity considerations into planning, coordination and decision-making.

These objectives reinforce one another. Evidence and strengthened capacities support local dialogue and mediation; lessons from local processes inform institutional planning and decision-making; and improved institutional coordination creates better conditions for implementing locally developed arrangements. The project therefore connects local conflict prevention with institutional change.

This report assesses the outcomes of the project “Strengthening Iraqi Capacities to Respond to Climate Risks and Their Impact on Existing Conflict Dynamics” implemented by the Berghof Foundation and Peace Paradigms Organisation (PPO) between July 2022 and August 2026. The project is part of the Weathering Risk Peace Pillar, which delivers projects in Iraq, Yemen, Somalia, Nigeria and the Bay of Bengal with support from the German Federal Foreign Office.

The report analyses key outcomes achieved by the project and provides evidence to support these results. It also examines instances where planned outcomes were not fully realised, offering insights into the underlying reasons.

Strengthening climate security in Iraq

- Conducting research, outreach and policy engagement to strengthen the understanding and awareness of the climate-conflict nexus, combined with building capacities in mediation and dialogue, has strengthened the capacity of stakeholders, built trust and contributed to more collaborative and solution-oriented narratives between authorities and community representatives, enabling stakeholders to cooperate more effectively in addressing shared challenges.

- Facilitating dialogue and mediating inclusive agreements has contributed to more equitable resource sharing, the establishment of conflict-prevention frameworks and resolution mechanisms, and stronger and more conflict-sensitive climate action.

- Connecting local, governorate and national stakeholders has supported an enabling environment for the implementation of agreements addressing climate-related conflicts. It has also supported the identification of opportunities to replicate effective solutions on the ground, informed international programmes, and facilitated the joint identification of solutions, strengthening coordination and governance and resulting in more effective responses to climate security risks.

    - Established five local-level agreements to address shared water and resource-management challenges and strengthen social cohesion, including through conflict-resolution mechanisms and climate action provisions across conflict- and climate-affected districts in Iraq.

    - Engaged more than 350 track 1.5 and Track 2 stakeholders, including civil society leaders, Iraqi policymakers and governmental authorities, security actors and international representatives, to better integrate climate security considerations into their efforts and coordinate more effectively to address climate security risks.

    - Trained over 300 governmental authorities, mediators, community leaders in climate security analysis, dialogue facilitation and mediation of climate-related conflicts.

2 Introduction

This report assesses the outcomes of the project "Strengthening Iraqi Capacities to Respond to Climate Risks and Their Impact on Existing Conflict Dynamics" implemented by the Berghof Foundation and Peace Paradigms Organisation (PPO) between July 2022 and August 2026. The project is part of the Weathering Risk Peace Pillar, which delivers projects in Iraq, Yemen, Somalia, Nigeria and the Bay of Bengal with support from the German Federal Foreign Office.

The report analyses key outcomes achieved by the project and provides evidence to support these results. It also examines instances where planned outcomes were not fully realised, offering insights into the underlying reasons. The project aims to contribute to three main outcomes:

2.1 The Weathering Risk Peace Pillar

The project is part of the Weathering Risk Peace Pillar, which integrates climate and environmental security into peace programming in regions severely affected by conflict and climate risks. The Peace Pillar is implemented by a consortium led by adelphi and consisting of the Berghof Foundation, the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue and the European Institute of Peace. Within this framework, projects are delivered in Iraq, Yemen, Somalia, Nigeria and the Bay of Bengal, where they address the climate, environment, peace and security (CEPS) nexus by using climate and environmental issues as entry points for consultation, dialogue and mediation. This flagship initiative is supported by the German Federal Foreign Office.

The Peace Pillar is building a growing evidence base on integrating climate and environmental security into peace processes. Consortium partners are conducting outcome evaluations for each project to assess the results of their programming. The evaluations cover various peace, climate and environmental issues and are intended to improve understanding of the value of integrated peace programming. These monitoring and evaluation efforts aim to generate insights that will enhance prospects for successful interventions now and in the future. The collected outcomes, lessons learned and good practices will be shared with practitioners and policymakers, enabling targeted and systematic integrated peace programming.

2.2 Country context: Iraq

The current situation in Iraq should be understood in the context of decades of conflict and war, including the US-led invasion in 2003, the rise of the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS, also known as Daesh) in 2014, and the lasting impacts of international sanctions. Iraq's security and political environment remains highly volatile, marked by drone and rocket attacks linked both to the ongoing conflict between the US and Iran and, at times, spillover tensions from other regional conflicts, which periodically escalate. The situation is further complicated by developments in neighbouring Syria, including changes in government control and the return of residents from the Al-Hol camp. In northern Iraq, the disarmament of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and Turkey's military operations against Kurdish groups add to the ongoing instability. Meanwhile, cuts in US funding to key security and development programmes have strained the government's capacity to address these challenges.

DIALOGUE SESSION IN AL-ZUBAIR, IRAQ, 2026.

Iran-backed groups, including the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), continue to exert influence. Government formation processes and election periods reveal the extent of political stagnation, heavily shaped by sectarian interests and ethno-sectarian identities, while ethno-sectarian tensions continue across multiple regions, including between Baghdad and Erbil. Further conflict drivers include long-standing inter-community grievances and widespread mistrust of government authorities; socio-economic marginalisation and limited opportunities, which fuel both protests and vulnerability to armed group recruitment; and structural factors such as ineffective governance, corruption and harsh suppression of dissent.

According to the ND-GAIN Matrix, Iraq ranks as the 104th most vulnerable and the 153th most ready country in terms of its ability to use investments and convert them to adaptation worldwide.[1] Iraq is highly vulnerable to climate-related impacts, including water scarcity, extreme heat and dust storms, which interact with and are compounded by factors such as upstream water management, infrastructure constraints, land degradation, resource allocation and service provision. Together, these pressures can strain resources and intensify and exacerbate existing tensions and conflicts related to governance, resource distribution, social cohesion and migration. Climate-related pressures can therefore increase conflict risks, rather than directly causing conflict, particularly where they interact with pre-existing structural and governance challenges. These pressures heighten conflict risks most acutely in regions already characterised by fragility: where trust between authorities and communities is limited, inter-community grievances run deep, and the resources, governance capacities and conflict resolution mechanisms needed to absorb and respond to climate-related shocks are weak or absent – highlighting the need for sustained and integrated peacebuilding.

The Iraqi government continues to navigate competing political and security pressures, including its security partnership with the United States, the influence of Iran-aligned armed groups, and the spillover of regional conflicts and tensions. These pressures can fragment authority, consume institutional attention and complicate coordination across governance levels, particularly during periods of heightened regional tension such as early 2026. In this context, mechanisms for dialogue and coordination between different governance levels are increasingly important to maintain coordination and address shared challenges despite competing priorities. Cooperation around environmental and climate issues such as water, livelihood services and crisis management can provide practical entry points for dialogue and help strengthen trust and national ownership of collaborative approaches to conflict-sensitive resource governance. At the same time, as national institutions are stretched by multiple and overlapping crises, communities may rely on long-established local mediation and conflict resolution mechanisms to manage tensions. These mechanisms can provide avenues for addressing local disputes, but their effectiveness depends on inclusive representation and links to institutions with formal mandates. Strengthening these locally anchored mechanisms can help prevent climate-related disputes from escalating and becoming entangled with broader political and regional dynamics.

Within this context, Berghof and PPO's ongoing engagement and partnerships provide an important foundation for maintaining open communication channels and supporting locally embedded dialogue processes. While the current environment requires flexibility and caution, the relationships, trust and analytical insights developed through the project continue to offer entry points for constructive engagement in support of stability and cooperation as the situation evolves.

2.3 Project description and Theory of Change

Launched in summer 2022, the project was designed to support a medium- and long-term approach to sustainable peace in Iraq by "strengthening capacities to respond to climate risks and their impact on existing conflict dynamics". The project pursued three overarching and interconnected objectives: **1) raising awareness of the climate-conflict nexus, 2) fostering inclusive dialogues and mediating agreements for climate-sensitive peacebuilding, 3) and supporting Iraqi authorities in defining and implementing conflict-sensitive climate adaptation measures.**

The intervention logic is structured around three interconnected workstreams, corresponding to the three project objectives. The workstreams were designed to reinforce one another: building knowledge and capacities was expected to enable more effective dialogue and mediation; the experiences and lessons generated through these processes were intended to inform policy and institutional action; and engagement with authorities was expected to support more conflict-sensitive climate adaptation. Together, these strands were intended to contribute to more effective responses to climate-related conflicts and security risks in Iraq:

- Workstream 1 focuses on improving the understanding of the climate-conflict nexus and building the skills and capacities needed to address climate-

and conflict-related challenges. This workstream feeds into the other two workstreams, based on the assumption that understanding and capability form the basis for action. The activities in workstream 1 included targeted training, coaching and capacity-building activities intended for members of the communities, civil society and local governance involved in the five dialogue and mediation processes (implemented under workstream 2). In addition, a toolkit for climate-related dialogue facilitation and mediation was developed, which was grounded in dialogue facilitators' and mediators' experience and was used in several training sessions aimed at building participants' skills to actively contribute to ongoing CEPS-related conflict resolution processes. Complementing these activities, various reports, policy briefs and videos were produced, in some cases with the involvement of higher-level government representatives, to raise broader awareness of the climate-conflict nexus and feed into workstream 3.

- Workstream 2 addressed the climate-conflict nexus through dialogue and mediation engagement around resource-sharing and management, with a particular focus on water, resolving disputes between communities and local authorities and reducing tensions to prevent and address inter-community violence. Participants in these dialogues included local community members from diverse segments of society, such as young people and representatives – both male and female – of various religious and political groups, local authorities, civil society actors, religious and tribal leaders, and internally displaced persons (IDPs) whose displacement was often related to climate change, especially in the south of Iraq. The dialogues facilitated engagement in processes aimed at finding solutions to these climate security risks and also served as a space for dialogue and trust-building among the various community stakeholders and local authorities. After signing local agreements, the local stakeholders were supported throughout the implementation of the agreements, which include direct measures to improve local infrastructures and establish functioning conflict resolution mechanisms.

- Workstream 3 aimed to foster a more cooperative, coherent and strategic approach through round tables and consultation meetings with Iraqi authorities at the district, governorate and national level, alongside national and international NGOs working on peacebuilding, climate change and security. A network of key stakeholders engaged in addressing climate security risks was established and included actors from Iraq's federal government, the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), governorate- and district-level authorities, international organisations and mediators/facilitators. The insights and recommendations from the reports, outreach materials and capacity-building activities in workstream 1, as well as the experiences and lessons learned through the dialogue and mediation processes in workstream 2, have been taken up by policymakers and other international organisations working on the climate-conflict nexus, contributing to more informed decision-making and action.

The project team developed key assumptions and learning questions for each of the three workstreams. The learning questions allowed the project team to monitor, test and refine the assumptions and causal links that underpin the ToC and adapt the intervention strategy accordingly. Each workstream-related section of this report describes some of the most relevant learnings resulting from this reflection process.

3 Evaluation approach and methods

This report assesses the project implementation period from July 2022 to August 2026 and aims to:

- **Identify the most significant outcomes of the project:** Identify and assess the most significant outcomes achieved through the project and evaluate the medium- to long-term changes the project helped to bring about for local communities, governance structures and conflict dynamics.

- **Contribute to the evidence base:** Document lessons learned and best practices from this project to strengthen the evidence base for integrated peacebuilding and conflict-sensitive climate action.

While project activities will continue until December 2026, the outcomes and results presented here reflect evidence gathered and verified as of August 2026. This timing ensures that emerging lessons can inform the planning of future interventions ahead of the project's completion.

To meet these objectives, we employed the following methodology:

- **Theory of Change (ToC):** This outcome report is anchored in the project's ToC. The ToC is a comprehensive description and illustration of how and why a desired change is expected to happen, mapping the logical pathway from activities to long-term impact. It outlines the key assumptions and causal links that connect activities and outputs to specific outcomes and impacts, serving as a roadmap to test whether the project's underlying logic holds true and to identify where the chain of results succeeded or broke down.

- **Outcome harvesting:** Outcome harvesting is one of the central monitoring and evaluation methods used by the Berghof Foundation to gain a deeper understanding of change in complex and volatile contexts such as Iraq, where linear cause-and-effect relationships are often disrupted by shifting political and environmental conditions. Rather than relying solely on pre-defined indicators, this approach captures a broad spectrum of observable behavioural and relational changes – both intended and unintended – to build a realistic picture of the project's contribution. By focusing on these real-world outcomes, the evaluation can trace how specific interventions influenced change, while using the project's ToC as a reference to contextualise findings.

COMMUNITY CONSULTATION MEETING IN IRAQ, 2025.

(1) reflections guided by learning questions developed from the ToC assumptions, and (2) ad hoc insights emerging from a diverse set of internal learning and reflection spaces.

This mixed approach was chosen with two major considerations in mind. First, the complexity of the project context requires flexible methods that do not rely on a linear understanding of cause and effect. Second, integrating climate and environmental resilience into peacebuilding is a relatively new field with many unknowns about what works and what does not. By incorporating learning questions and allowing space for ad hoc learnings, the evaluation has sought to address these knowledge gaps, generate evidence and create practical insights to enhance the project's long-term contributions to climate security and peacebuilding.

Data collection tools and principles

The data informing this report was collected through a combination of stakeholder consultations, outcome harvesting, surveys, reflection and learning sessions, and document reviews. By incorporating multiple data sources, the evaluation aimed to capture a range of perspectives and improve the reliability and validity of findings.

- **Stakeholder consultations:** Semi-structured conversations and group discussions with project participants and stakeholders took place alongside regular project interactions and included joint activities, consultation meetings and follow-up consultations with project participants and team members, allowing stakeholders to share observations in familiar, low-pressure settings conducive to candid dialogue.

- **Outcome harvesting sessions:** These sessions engaged project team members in identifying and analysing key project outcomes by reflecting on observed changes and the contribution of specific interventions to those changes.

- **Surveys:** The evaluation additionally drew on survey data collected through Impaxio and Leonardo, two phone and online survey platforms which were used to reach dispersed or otherwise hard-to-access stakeholders and capture a broader range of perspectives beyond those available through interviews and focus groups.

- **Document review:** Analysis of project documents, reports and other relevant materials offered additional context and complemented the primary data.

Berghof conducted a mid-line evaluation covering the project phase from January 2023 to December 2024, where first outcomes, learnings and needs for adaptations were identified.[2] This report builds on the results of the mid-line evaluation.

Limitations of the evaluation approach and data collection

Several methodological and practical limitations shaped the evaluation process and should be considered when interpreting the findings.

First, many of the project's intended results concern intangible changes, such as trust, relationships, awareness and attitudes. These types of outcomes are inherently difficult to measure, often only becoming visible over longer timeframes, and are not always directly observable in behaviour. While outcome harvesting is designed to measure these intangible changes, it also poses methodological challenges. As the approach relies on stakeholder perspectives to identify and describe outcomes, careful validation and substantiation were required to reduce the risk of bias or over-reliance on individual accounts. To enhance the credibility and robustness of the evaluation, data triangulation was prioritised throughout the process; this involved systematically comparing findings across documentation of various stakeholder consultations, surveys and document reviews. In addition, contribution analysis was applied to assess the project's plausible contribution to observed outcomes by examining causal pathways, triangulating stakeholder accounts and reviewing supporting evidence. Continuous engagement with project teams and stakeholders also supported the validation of emerging findings and broadened the range of perspectives considered. Dedicated reflection sessions with facilitators and mediators were also helpful in capturing lessons learned.

In addition, the conflict-affected settings in which the project operates required strong ethical safeguards throughout monitoring and data collection activities. Particular attention was therefore given to informed consent, confidentiality and adherence to do-no-harm principles when collecting and handling sensitive information.

Overall, outcome harvesting proved extremely valuable for adaptive management. By continuously identifying outcomes, the project team was able to reflect on progress and adjust activities in response to evolving needs and contextual changes. This iterative process increased the project's responsiveness and ensured that implementation remained aligned with local realities. Stakeholder engagement emerged as another key strength. Involving local stakeholders in identifying and validating outcomes enhanced the credibility and relevance of the findings while fostering ownership and accountability. The process also helped to build monitoring and evaluation capacities among project partners and stakeholders.

4 Key outcomes

This chapter assesses the key outcomes achieved by the project and examines the extent to which the ToC underpinning each workstream held true in practice. Drawing on the evidence base gathered through outcome harvesting, it presents findings against each objective and, where planned outcomes were not fully realised, explores what this reveals about implementation conditions, underlying assumptions and adaptive capacity.

Central to this outcome evaluation are the three objectives the project set out to achieve:

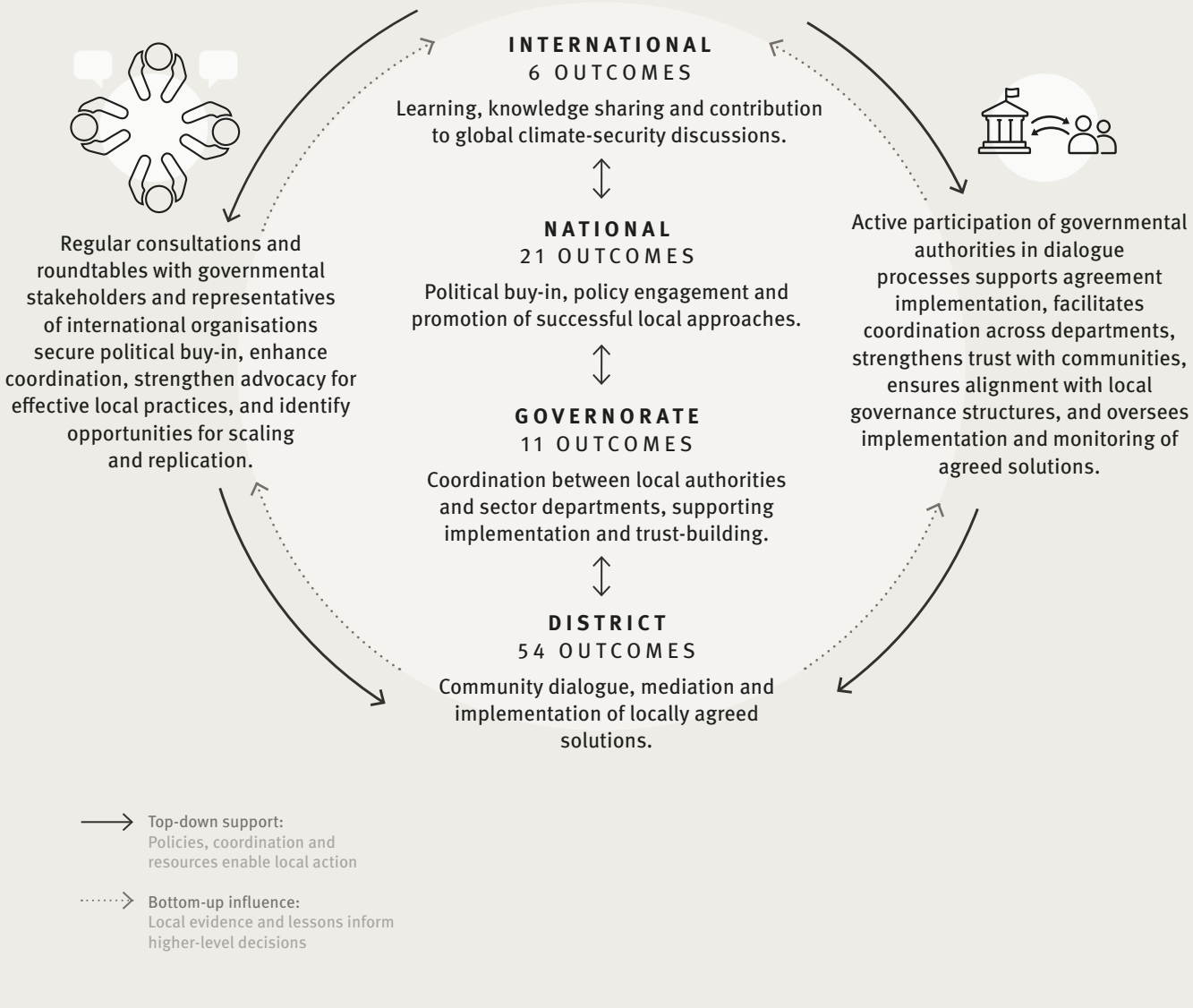
- **Objective 1:** Improve understanding and raise awareness of the impact of climate change on existing conflict drivers at the local, federal and governorate level and building capacities for climate-related mediation and dialogue engagement.
- **Objective 2:** Establishing and maintaining inclusive dialogues and mediation engagement on climate impacts that are increasingly putting pressure on local conflict contexts, as well as related concerns; identifying consensus-based local solutions and ensuring their application.
- **Objective 3:** Iraqi government authorities implement climate adaptation measures in a more conflict-sensitive way and peacebuilding interventions in a more climate-sensitive way.

We conducted an analysis of outcomes achieved across the three project objectives and across governance levels (district, governorate, national and international). From the outset, the programme was designed around the assumption that progress in one outcome area would reinforce progress in the others. For example, capacity-building and awareness-raising (objective 1) equip stakeholders with the knowledge and skills needed to engage effectively in CEPS-related dialogue and mediation processes (objective 2) and increase decision-makers' knowledge of the climate-conflict nexus (objective 3). The dialogue and mediation processes (objective 2) generated locally owned agreements and practices that can inform policy and decision-making (objective 3). In turn, engagement with policies, institutions and coordination mechanisms created an enabling environment that supported the implementation and sustainability of dialogue outcomes. The first graphic visualises how the total of 92 outcomes[3] identified throughout the project period are interconnected across the three planned outcome categories. Rather than representing separate streams of change, the findings demonstrate a mutually reinforcing cycle between capacity development, dialogue and mediation, and policy engagement. In addition, six unintended outcomes were

identified, demonstrating the programme's ability to generate positive effects beyond those initially anticipated and highlighting the importance of capturing both planned and unplanned results.

The programme also adopted a multi-level approach, generating outcomes at the district, governorate, national and international levels. The interconnectedness of the governance levels, illustrated below, shows that sustainable change depends on the interplay between local action and supportive institutions, policies and coordination mechanisms. Lessons learned and experiences gained at the district level informed higher-level decision-making, while policy engagement and institutional support created the conditions necessary for effective implementation on the ground. By connecting actors and processes across governance levels, the programme established firmer foundations for climate resilience, conflict-sensitive climate action and sustainable peace infrastructures.

IMPACT ACROSS GOVERNANCE LEVELS: TWO-WAY LEARNING AND INFLUENCE



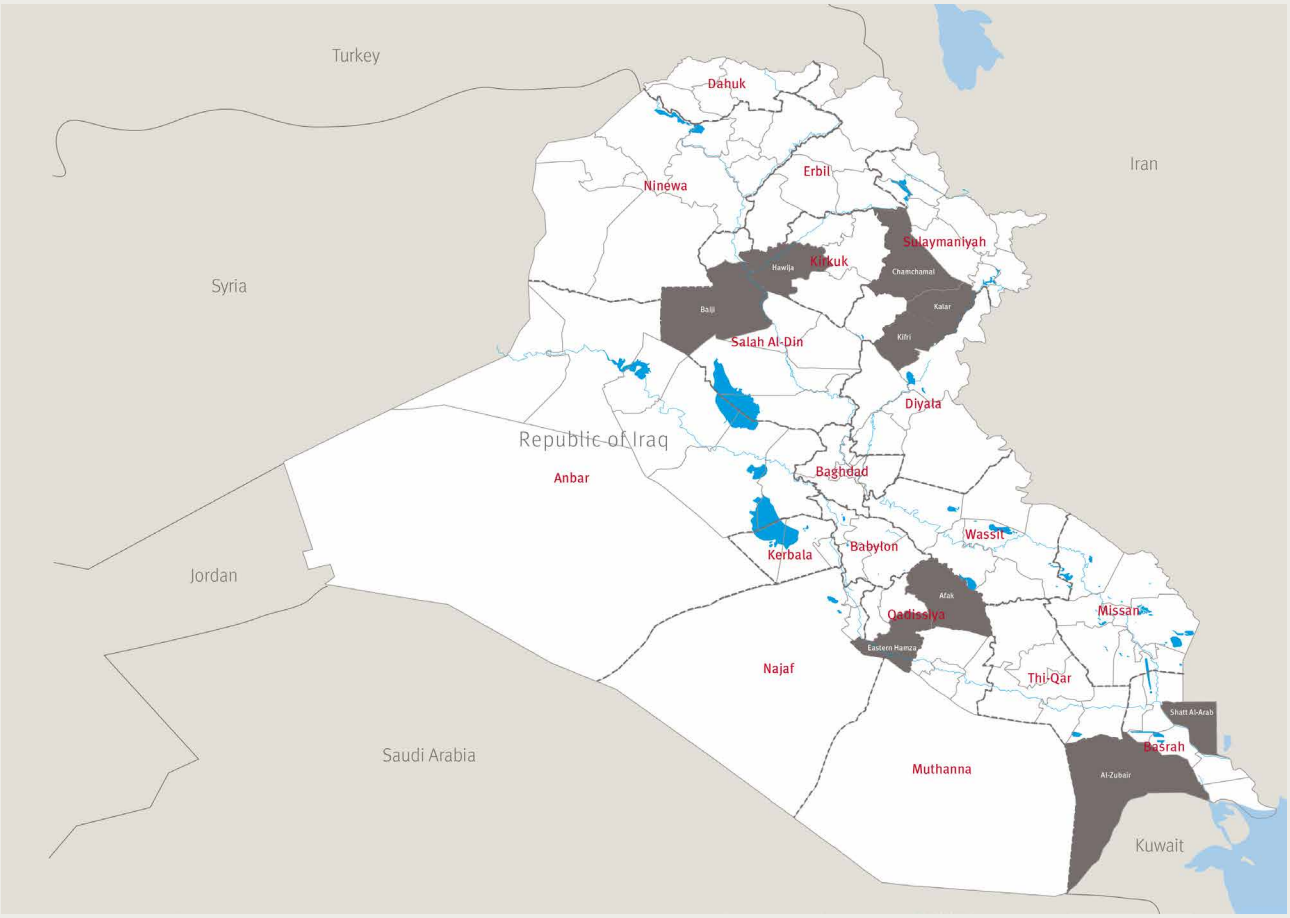
4.1 Workstream 1: Strengthened understanding, awareness and capacities

Workstream 1 set out to improve government and community-level stakeholders' understanding of how climate change affects existing conflict dynamics, while building their capacities for climate-related mediation and dialogue facilitation. The underlying theory of change holds that stakeholders equipped with both an understanding of climate-conflict linkages and practical facilitation skills are better positioned to co-create context-specific and sustainable solutions to climate security risks. This approach is grounded in conflict transformation theory, which emphasises the importance of addressing the structural and relational roots of conflict.

Overview of key activities and key intervention logic

The project team implemented several interconnected activity strands that combine research, outreach, capacity-building and policy engagement to increase understanding and awareness of the climate-conflict nexus and build capacities to address climate-related conflicts in Iraq.

In the initial phases of the project, a comprehensive mapping process to analyse climate security risks was conducted in nine districts.[4] It included 46 interviews with key informants and 27 focus group discussions with community members, reaching a total of 311 participants (263 men and 48 women) in the provinces of Basra, Kirkuk, Al-Qadisiyah, Salah Al-Din and Sulaymaniyah. The ways in which climate change is exacerbating conflict and insecurity in these districts were examined in an analysis of climate security risk pathways based on adelphi's WRPP approach.[5] This led to the publication of the report **"Climate Security Challenges in Iraq: Entry Points for Local-Level Dialogue"** in December 2023 (available in Arabic, English and Kurdish). The report shows how climate change increases existing tensions, e.g. over natural resources, and identifies practical opportunities for dialogue, consultation and mediation. It also provides recommendations for policymakers and practitioners to address climate-related risks and build community resilience. Following the assessment, five districts were selected for implementation of the project's dialogue and mediation activities (workstream 2): Kalar (Sulaymaniyah), Al-Zubair (Basra), Hawija (Kirkuk), Tal Afar (Nineveh) and Balad (Salah Al-Din).[6]



The second activity strand focused on outreach and raising awareness. In 2024, the project produced four short clips[7] and a video, “Drops of Hope”, to explain the link between climate change and conflict in an accessible and engaging format. Promoted through paid campaigns on Facebook and YouTube, the video reached a broader audience beyond the direct project participants, including local authorities, communities and practitioners, extending the project’s outreach on climate security issues. In August 2025, the project team published a toolkit on climate-focused mediation and dialogue (in Arabic, English and Kurdish). Grounded in the experience of project implementation and interviews with Iraqi mediators and facilitators, the toolkit offers practical, context-specific guidance on addressing climate-related tensions through dialogue and mediation at the local level.

In addition, the project team worked on sharing knowledge and influencing policy and practice. Several stories on our impact in tackling water scarcity, uniting divided villages by addressing environmental challenges and facilitating climate security dialogues, and the establishment of the Water Users Association, as well as a synthesis evaluation, podcast content and lessons learned, were produced and shared with a wide range of governmental, community-level and international stakeholders.

Throughout its lifetime, the project continuously focused on capacity-building to support practitioners, tribal and community leaders, civil society representatives, mediators, local authorities and governmental representatives working on a field level through the provision of practical tools to analyse climate security risks, facilitate

climate-related dialogues and mediate CEPS-related agreements. Between 2023 and mid-September 2026, more than 320 persons participated in these activities.

- In 2023, a training-of-trainers (ToT) session was conducted for seven mediators and dialogue facilitators. The project team has continued to work and engage with these participants across the districts.

- Five climate-focused dialogue and mediation training sessions were conducted across Hawija, Kalar, Tal Afar, Zubair and Balad in 2024, equipping participants with the practical skills needed to apply climate-sensitive mediation and dialogue approaches — drawing directly on the project's toolkit.

- Using participatory tools from the toolkit to design climate-sensitive dialogue processes, two coaching and discussion sessions were held in 2025, bringing together dialogue participants from Hawija and Tal Afar, Al-Zubair and Kalar. They focused on enhancing practical skills in climate-related conflict risk analysis and facilitating discussion of best practices and lessons learned from participants' dialogue and mediation engagement in their respective districts.

- Two training sessions in Al-Zubair (2025) and Hawija (2026) on women's role in peacebuilding, climate change and conflict were conducted. The Al-Zubair training brought together women activists, community actors and community police to increase cooperation, improve protection and referral mechanisms, and address rising household tensions linked to climate stress. In Hawija, we brought together the local authorities, community police, civil society organisations, Kirkuk representatives from the National Network of Women Mediators and local women climate-conflict activists to explore the local impacts of climate change on livelihoods, displacement and migration, protection risks and community dynamics and identify practical ways to boost women's participation in mediation and peacebuilding.

- Additional training was provided for farmers and members of the Water Users Association in Balad (2025). It aimed to develop their skills in managing water-related conflicts through dialogue and mediation while promoting fair and sustainable water-sharing practices.

- A training programme for the Joint Crisis Coordination Centre (JCC)[8] field and senior-level staff was also conducted in 2026. For JCC field-level participants, the training focused on managing local tensions around resources, engaging communities, and preventing escalation during crisis response. For JCC senior-level participants, the emphasis is on strategic negotiation, inter-institutional coordination, and translating local realities into effective policy engagement at national and international levels. This training bridges the gap between local climate realities and high-level decision-making, ensuring that field insights inform policy while strategic decisions remain grounded in local experience.

- Other training in 2026 aims to build Environmental Protection and Improvement Council members' capacities in evidence-based decision-making, public communication and engagement around climate-related challenges. It also supports members by developing their skills in dialogue, mediation and managing potential tensions within the Council.

Key outcomes
Outreach and evidence of uptake

The project helped to raise awareness and understanding of the links between climate change, environmental stressors and conflict within a diverse group of stakeholders, including district, governorate and national-level government authorities, civil society organisations, community representatives, practitioners, academics and international organisations in Iraq. Through sustained engagement in participatory research, dialogues and consultations, stakeholders not only developed an understanding of climate security risks but also expressed strong interest in the project's findings and recommendations, creating a foundation for translating their increased awareness into policy discussions and programmatic actions.

The following graph provides an overview of how many stakeholders were reached through selected knowledge and outreach materials.

KEY NUMBERS

Three key metrics highlightning reach and engagement

3,237

Toolkit page views in English, Arabic and Kurdish

327,538

Views of the video "Drops of Hope" (Arabic and Kurdish)

1,145

Downloads of "Climate Security Challenges in Iraq: Entry Points for Local-Level Dialogue"

The knowledge, outreach materials and research publications produced within the project framework have been utilised actively beyond the initial stakeholder group and are now informing the work of government institutions and international organisations.

For example, the JCC and the Board of Environment of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) highlighted that they rely on the project publications to sensitise stakeholders to the challenges posed by climate-related conflict. They have also used the findings presented in several of our products, such as the climate security report, to prepare for meetings and conferences and inform decision-making.

The project's practical outputs, such as the toolkit, have also been used to build the capacities of community members and local authorities across Iraq and have provided practical guidance and support in progressing dialogue and mediation processes from theory to practice:

> The toolkit helped community members move from understanding climate-related dialogue and mediation concepts to applying them in practice. Through hands-on training and practical exercises, participants learned how to initiate, design, plan and lead dialogue and mediation processes in their communities.
>
> (TRAINER AND CLIMATE CONFLICT EXPERT KHADIJA AL-JABIRY)

Enhanced capacities

One of the project's key objectives was to build the capacity of community members, local authorities, tribal and community leaders and civil society representatives to mediate and facilitate dialogues on climate-related conflicts, enabling them to integrate the climate security dimension into broader peacebuilding and mediation processes. Across the project, participants were equipped with practical tools to connect environmental stressors with social tensions and to address climate-related conflict dynamics through dialogue and mediation.

Pre- and post-training perception surveys[9] conducted with participants in 2024 and 2025 provide evidence of increased self-reported confidence in addressing climate-related and environmental issues. Participants reported an improved understanding of the links between climate, conflict, migration, livelihoods and social cohesion, as well as more confidence in applying climate security concepts and analytical frameworks in practice. The surveys also indicate a positive change in confidence and skills in mediation, dialogue facilitation and moderation of discussions on climate-related and environmental issues. Participants were better able to articulate mediation approaches and identify practical solutions to climate-related conflict dynamics, suggesting that the training boosted not only their confidence but also their capacity to apply mediation and dialogue tools in practice in their communities.[10] This capacity-building is particularly important given that the training sessions were designed to support ongoing dialogue and mediation processes and equip community practitioners – such as community and tribal leaders, activists, youth representatives and mukhtars[11] – with the skills to integrate the climate security dimension into processes aimed at addressing tensions and climate security risks in their respective districts.

After participating in the training sessions, community members also began working together, based on the new relationships they had built, and progress their ideas beyond the scope of the project. For example, in Kalar, committee members worked with religious leaders to include the topics of water conservation and pollution prevention in Friday sermons. In Al-Zubair, community members developed radio programmes and podcasts to raise awareness of climate change and its implications.

These examples show how the training resulted in community-led outreach and joint activities among groups that had previously had little or no interaction.

At the community level, the capacity-building has led to more engagement by women in addressing climate-related tensions. In Al-Zubair, women activists, community actors and the police improved coordination around protection, referral and dialogue, resulting in safer responses to household disputes and climate-related pressures. Women participants reported greater confidence in raising climate-related concerns and engaging in mediation, and some initiated activities such as livelihood support for vulnerable groups. In Hawija, women also contributed to awareness-raising around the water-sharing agreement, assisting communities to gain a better understanding of the links between climate and conflict and promoting more cooperative water use. These activities also strengthened relationships between civil society organisations and community police, improving referral pathways and local responses to emerging concerns.

Institutional uptake

Beyond individual skills, the project has supported the uptake of mediation and dialogue approaches by local institutions and established community structures.

At the district level, government authorities across the five districts have improved their understanding of climate security risks and how to address them. This was supported by capacity-building workshops and coordination meetings involving representatives from municipalities and directorates from across the districts, as well as relevant authorities at the governorate level. This has translated into practical action: municipalities in Kalar, Tal Afar and Hawija, for example, have launched campaigns to protect water sources and address related conflicts.

In Al-Zubair, the Agriculture Department incorporated the principles of the social pact[12] into advice seminars for farmers from both host and displaced communities, introducing climate-sensitive peacebuilding approaches into an existing government function. The Education Directorate in Basra also issued guidance on integrating social pact principles into schools, thus extending these approaches beyond project participants and into the education system.

In Balad, members of the Water Users Association have applied climate-sensitive mediation tools, such as inclusive decision-making, joint monitoring, structured agreements and adapted dispute resolution, to improve cooperation in water management. Together, these examples signal a meaningful shift from individual capacity-building to collective institutional practice – an early but encouraging indicator of the kind of sustained, locally owned conflict transformation anticipated by the project's theory of change.

Influence on national policy and programming

The project's influence also extends to the national level. The links between climate change, peace and security are increasingly recognised by government authorities, including the ministries and directorates responsible for the environment, planning,

water and agriculture, and the Council of Ministers Secretariat (COMSEC), whose representatives participated in round tables and bilateral discussions and directly benefited from the dissemination of project findings.

A particularly important indicator of the project's influence on national climate policy is the inclusion of a section dedicated to the climate-conflict nexus in Iraq's updated Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) in September 2025,[13] which directly references the climate security report produced by the project in 2023. The NDC is one of the key documents that governments prepare as part of the COP process. The participatory approach to the drafting of the report and the discussion of the results at multiple round tables supported engagement with decision-makers and may have contributed to increased understanding of the climate-conflict nexus and its inclusion in the NDC.

The project has also informed the work of international organisations. Through coordination with organisations such as IOM and GIZ and the systematic sharing of project reports, analyses and stakeholder mappings, the project informed their programming, including the selection of locations for implementation, particularly in relation to the interconnected challenges of migration, displacement, climate change and conflict.

Key lessons learned and recommendations

Over the project lifespan, the project team has developed two learning questions related to the assumptions underpinning the theory of change for workstream 1:

1. To what extent has the dissemination of research results and recommendations increased local and international stakeholders' understanding and awareness of climate-related conflict dynamics?

2. To what extent are capacity-building and awareness sufficient to prompt stakeholders to take practical action and develop solutions, and which additional factors or interventions are necessary to bridge the gap between learning and action?

The project demonstrated that people develop a good understanding of how climate change affects conflict when they are actively involved in a variety of activities, including research, dialogues, training sessions and consultations, over longer periods of time. Participatory engagement methods — including training, dialogues and round tables — proved to be a meaningful driver of stakeholder awareness and understanding, underscoring the importance of process design alongside product dissemination. Stakeholders who participated directly in these activities gained deeper insights into climate conflict dynamics, while the impact of formal dissemination efforts, such as reports shared online or at round tables, is less clearly traceable. This highlights that awareness-raising is most effective when combined with active involvement rather than passive receipt of information. At the same time, the dissemination of reports and findings proved most effective when built on pre-existing, trusted relationships. As pointed out above, stakeholders involved in the research development process actively shared and applied the research findings. Additionally, the use of formats tailored to different audiences, combined with structured follow-up

mechanisms, helped to ensure that stakeholders could apply the research findings to inform policy and programming.

The second question relates to the assumption that increased awareness, understanding and skills will lead to action. However, there is extensive evidence showing that improvements in knowledge and capacity alone are often insufficient to drive behavioural change. According to the COM-B model,[14] behavioural change is shaped by the interaction between capability, opportunity and motivation. The training sessions and manuals provided the participants with practical climate-sensitive mediation and dialogue tools and, as shown by the survey results, increased their confidence in analysing climate-related conflicts and tensions and facilitating dialogues. In addition, the design of the project and the training sessions specifically contributed to two more crucial aspects that promoted action. The training sessions took place in locations directly affected by climate-related conflicts, which meant that the topic was highly relevant at the local level and stakeholders were well-motivated to address the issue. In addition, the training created opportunities to strengthen relationships and build trust among participants, including local authorities and community members. This trust was essential for enabling future cooperation among the training participants and provided them with additional motivation and opportunities to take action, as evidenced in the outcome section above. Importantly, the findings also suggest that training sessions were most effective when directly linked to ongoing processes and practical areas of intervention, rather than when delivered as stand-alone activities. Embedding capacity-building within existing structures – such as water users associations – or linking it to emerging needs appears to have increased both relevance and opportunities for application. This indicates that training should be understood less as a separate workstream and more as a supportive element reinforcing other programme components. Finally, the opportunity to apply skills is a crucial element in moving from understanding to action. Activities linked to existing structures resulted in more sustainable change, while areas without formal platforms showed more limited follow-up.

The next section will focus on the outcomes generated under objective 2, which deals with the development and implementation of effective solutions to climate security risks. As outlined in Section 2.3, the outcomes under objective 2 built directly on the progress achieved under objective 1.

4.2 Workstream 2: Establishing inclusive dialogues and identifying consensus-based local solutions to climate security risks

Workstream 2 set out to strengthen inclusive dialogue and mediation processes among community representatives and local authorities while supporting the implementation and sustainability of locally owned solutions to climate security risks. The underlying theory of change holds that structured dialogue, trust-building and facilitated solution-finding enable local stakeholders to build cooperation and develop inclusive, conflict-sensitive responses to climate-related challenges. Capacity-building, coaching and peer networking further equip stakeholders to sustain these solutions over time. This approach is grounded in healthy relationships and connections theory, which emphasises the importance of trust, strong relationships and meaningful cooperation for sustainable peacebuilding.

ENGAGING YOUTH IN DECISION-MAKING, IRAQ, 2024.

Overview of key activities and key intervention logic

Between 2022 and the end of August 2026, more than 80 dialogue sessions were conducted across the five districts of Al-Zubair, Kalar/Garmiyan, Tal Afar, Balad and Hawija, including district-level dialogues and governorate-level consultation sessions with the Environmental Protection and Improvement Council in Basra. These activities recorded around 1,400 attendances in total, reflecting cumulative rather than individual participation across sessions, as many participants attended multiple dialogues over the course of the project. More than 210 attendances (15 per cent) were by women, a proportion that reflects the broader challenges of women's participation in formal decision-making, community leadership and mediation processes. Many local governance and community representative structures remain largely male-dominated, limiting women's direct engagement in conflict mediation and climate-related decision-making. At the same time, the project worked actively to broaden opportunities for more meaningful inclusion of women's perspectives, needs and experiences. This included sensitising male community leaders and representatives to the importance of women's participation, building trust with communities to identify context-specific inclusion mechanisms, and conducting an inclusion-conflict-climate change analysis with recommendations on how to boost women's engagement and their role in local decision-making and conflict resolution. Recognising that increasing women's

participation and role requires trust and gradual shifts in social norms, the project adopts a context-sensitive approach. Rather than seeking to replace prevailing norms from the outset, it builds on existing community and social dynamics to gradually foster acceptance and support for women's participation through continued engagement, capacity- and trust-building. While this approach may result in slower progress, it is more likely to secure broad community buy-in and contribute to more sustainable, locally owned approaches to women's inclusion.

The dialogues were designed to:

- Address specific climate-related conflict issues, such as disputes over water access, resource allocation and migration.
- Ensure inclusivity by bringing together a wide range of stakeholders, including community leaders, local authorities, security actors, women and young people.
- Foster trust and cooperation between stakeholders who often have deep-seated grievances and differing perspectives.
- Move from problem identification to practical solutions, ensuring that discussions lead to tangible agreements and actions.

In total, five agreements were achieved: two water-sharing agreements, one social pact, one annex to an existing community agreement,[15] and one framework agreement on the establishment of a water users association. An important feature of the dialogue and mediation processes was their ability to foster cooperation among groups that rarely meet and would otherwise have had little opportunity to work together, including dozens of villages, displaced and host communities, and local authorities and communities. The dialogue processes were designed to provide continuous guidance and support, with individual sessions building on one another over time to allow stakeholders to revisit issues, refine ideas and gradually move toward solutions. While some participants attended regularly to ensure continuity, others joined at different stages to provide specific expertise or perspectives. By creating an inclusive dialogue space for a diverse group of participants, including community representatives, young people, women, tribal and religious leaders and local authorities, the processes fostered a shared understanding of the key challenges, such as climate-related risks, inter-community relations and cooperation with local institutions, and identified solutions that reflect different needs and experiences. This made the resulting agreements and frameworks more relevant and, ultimately, more sustainable as participants had shaped them from the outset. The processes also facilitated trust-building between communities and local authorities. In contexts where mistrust and limited cooperation are common, regular and structured engagement created opportunities for open communication and joint problem-solving. Over time, this alleviated some of the initial scepticism, particularly among communities with low trust in institutions, and created a stronger basis for cooperation. The support and guidance provided for the communities also continued after the agreements were signed, providing a space for community members and local authorities to review progress and address emerging challenges. This was particularly important as climate-related pressures such as water scarcity and agricultural stress increased, requiring stakeholders to revisit and adjust agreed actions to ensure they remained relevant and applicable. The ongoing support that was provided for local directorates also offered

scope to integrate these actions into local systems and practices. In this way, the dialogue process extended beyond the signing of the agreements and contributed to their ongoing implementation over time.

Alongside the dialogue and mediation processes, the project enabled participants to collaborate on practical initiatives that addressed local climate-related risks and responded to needs identified through the processes. The initiatives complemented the dialogue and mediation processes by providing opportunities for communities and authorities to continue working together beyond the dialogue sessions so that agreed outcomes were actioned. A total of 11 initiatives were implemented.[16] They included community advocacy training in Tal Afar to promote the use of water-sharing mechanisms, as well as school-based activities in Al-Zubair to raise conflict prevention and climate awareness. Small-scale infrastructure initiatives included the construction of two wells in Dara and Fath Allah villages in Kalar, and the rehabilitation of the Al-Khan water station in Hawija.

In 2025, the project started to support the reactivation of the Environmental Protection and Improvement Council[17] in Basra through continued engagement with relevant actors at both governorate and national level. The Council had existed as a formal coordination mechanism at governorate level but had not been meeting regularly and remained largely inactive. At the same time, the response to climate-induced migration and related environmental pressures was fragmented, with responsibilities spread across different government entities. A BF-PPO study identified these gaps and pointed to the need for better coordination between the relevant authorities and for a functioning mechanism that connects the national-level policies with local-level needs and insights.

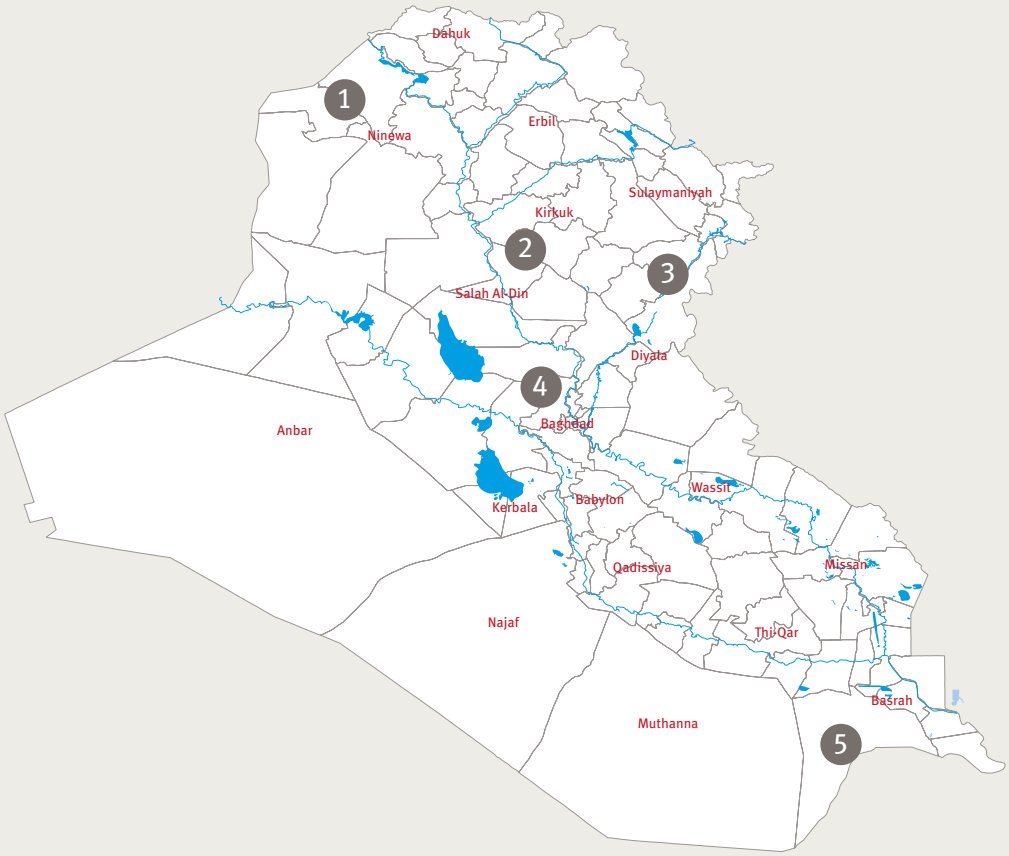
Having identified the Environmental Protection and Improvement Council as an existing but dormant mechanism, the project worked with the Deputy Governor, relevant directorates, the Ministry of Environment and the Council's representatives to explore how to support the Council by improving the coordination between directorates and between the district governorate and national level on environmental and climate security challenges. As part of this process, the project facilitated preparatory dialogue sessions with the Council's members in 2025 in order to develop a shared understanding of the key environmental challenges facing communities across the governorate, including climate-related migration, and the need for a multi-sectoral response. The project also supported the preparation and convening of the first formal meeting in 2026 and continued to engage, through various consultation meetings, with government actors involved in the reactivation process. This included national-level discussions with the Ministry of Environment and technical actors on the Council's role and future work.

Key outcomes

The project facilitated three formal agreements, one annex to an existing agreement and the establishment of a water users association and supported their implementation. Resulting from the implementation of the agreements, we observed the emergence of four types of outcomes across the districts. First, the processes facilitated trust-building and more constructive engagement between communities and local authorities. Second, they supported a shift in conflict narratives, with

stakeholders increasingly recognising shared challenges rather than attributing blame to other groups. Third, due to the increased local ownership of the dialogue processes, communities moved from participation in discussions to actively implementing agreed solutions, resulting in direct climate- and peacebuilding-related improvements for the communities. Finally, the processes contributed to the institutionalisation of conflict management mechanisms by establishing more structured approaches for addressing disputes.

The following section provides a more nuanced overview of how these outcomes materialised in each location and the specific mechanisms through which communities and authorities put the results of dialogue and mediation into practice.



1 The Tal Afar water agreement improves distribution through a formal committee of 33 villages, preventing violations and resolving disputes between communities and authorities.

2 The Hawija agreement covers 22 villages, using community-led monitoring and dispute resolution to ensure fair water distribution, supported by local authorities and alternative solutions such as wells.

3 The Bala Jo Canal agreement in Kalar unites authorities, farmers and community leaders to regulate water across 35 villages, ensuring equitable access and joint dispute resolution.

4 The Hatamiyah Water Users Association coordinates water distribution for 975 farmers, strengthening trust, cooperation, and inter-tribal dialogue through community-led governance.

5 The Al-Zubair social pact between IDPs, host communities and authorities promotes peaceful coexistence. Backed by conflict resolution, joint initiatives and an MoU for the shared use of a community centre, it strengthens state-citizen trust.

The **agreement**[18] **in Tal Afar (Nineveh governorate)** improves water distribution through a formal committee representing 33 villages, aimed at preventing violations of water resources and resolving disputes between communities and local authorities. The engagement also supported the establishment of village-level committees, each comprising three representatives – including the mukhtar, an imam and an elder – responsible for reporting water violations. The main committee serves as the formal coordination mechanism, working with the mayor and providing a link between the village-level committees, communities and local authorities. Community members in Tal Afar actively use the complaint and reporting mechanisms established through the agreement, thus improving accountability and follow-up. The agreement has also led to practical action on water problems. The committee raised concerns about two damaged pumps and a 500-metre section of pipeline with the relevant authorities. With approval from the Department of Projects, both the pumps and the pipeline were repaired. This has improved water access for affected communities and shows that the committee can raise community concerns and work with local authorities to address them.

The committee is also becoming more structured in how it works. Following the appointment of a new mayor in Ayadhiyah, it maintained its role and re-established regular contact with the local government. The new mayor endorsed the committee's agreements, recognised its role and agreed to hold monthly meetings with the committee and the Water Department. This maintained the continuity of the committee's work despite the change in leadership and provides a regular channel for community water priorities to reach local government.

The committee is also moving beyond responding to immediate water problems towards longer-term planning. It has agreed on liaison roles with the 33 village sub-committees, developed a work plan and identified advocacy, environmental activities, awareness-raising and wider community participation as priorities. These arrangements are still being put into practice, but they show growing local ownership of the committee's role and a move towards more regular and locally led water governance. The agreement is also an example of a more structured approach to conflict resolution. Local committees now have clearer responsibilities for addressing water-related disputes, following agreed procedures and referring cases when necessary. This has facilitated more consistent responses and increased confidence that concerns will be handled through predictable and transparent processes, rather than solely through informal or ad hoc solutions.

The committee has also started discussing how women and young people can play a more active part in water governance. Committee members recognised the importance of having women leaders involved and asked for support in exploring practical ways to do this. On the issue of youth participation, mukhtars discussed ways to involve young people in putting the agreement into practice. This is still at an early stage, and it is too soon to say whether women and young people will have a meaningful role in decision-making, but the discussion marks a shift towards making the committee more inclusive. In communities where decision-making has traditionally been strongly male-dominated, even opening this discussion is an important first step and it shows the value of longer-term engagement and gradual trust-building. Rather than expecting changes in participation immediately, continued dialogue created space for committee members to raise these issues themselves and become more open to discussing practical ways of involving women and young people.

In **Hawija (Kirkuk governorate)**, 22 representatives across different villages, including tribal leaders, mukhtars and local authorities, signed a water allocation agreement on 11 December 2023. The agreement establishes a framework for the fair distribution of water along Canal #10, with a particular focus on ensuring that downstream communities receive their allocated share. To support implementation, the agreement introduced a community-led monitoring mechanism, which is jointly overseen by tribal leaders and local authorities to prevent illegal water diversions. It also established a structured process for resolving future disputes over water access.

Despite continued challenges related to reduced water availability, implementation of the agreements has progressed well over time. Water has been distributed in line with agreed allocations, demonstrating the effectiveness of the management system. Local authorities, including the mayor and relevant municipal departments, have actively supported implementation through regular follow-up, coordination and documentation. The committee established through the agreement has also supported the identification of complementary solutions, including the construction of wells in areas without access to canal water and awareness-raising campaigns in schools to support more responsible water use in the face of limited water availability. Communities also successfully advocated for a water pipeline project that was included in the agreement. Local authorities prioritised and implemented the project, which now provides water access to 28 villages.[19] This is a tangible example of how a commitment made through the agreement has been taken forward and improved access to water.

In addition, cooperation between water management committees across districts has increased, with Hawija representatives sharing their experience and supporting similar dialogue processes in other locations, including Tal Afar.

The implementation process also built trust and confidence between communities and local authorities. At the start of the dialogue process, many community members expressed doubt as to whether the authorities would respond to their concerns and address unequal water access. Subsequent actions by local institutions, including technical support from the water directorate to maintain pumps at the Al-Khan water station and a campaign to remove illegal water diversions, demonstrated increased responsiveness and commitment to the agreement. The water directorate also prepared a well for use by installing a submersible pump and connecting it to the existing water network, which was a solution identified through the dialogue process. As a result of these combined efforts, approximately 7,000 people have improved access to water and villages whose supply was previously unreliable due to weak water flow and maintenance challenges are now connected to the network. The experience from Hawija demonstrates how community-led agreements, when supported by responsive local institutions, can increase cooperation and create practical mechanisms for managing shared climate-related challenges.

In **Kalar/Garmiyan (Sulaymaniyah governorate)**, a water-sharing agreement for the Bala Jo Canal was signed on 27 December 2023 by local government representatives, farmers, mukhtars, security officials and community leaders from upstream and downstream villages. The agreement established clear rules for water distribution along the canal, including measures to prevent excessive extraction by upstream users and ensure more equitable access for downstream communities. It also introduced a joint dispute resolution mechanism involving both community representatives and government actors.

The implementation of the agreement has done much to improve water access across 35 villages. Dialogue between farmers and authorities played a key role in clarifying water use regulations, including the temporary nature of restrictions on water-intensive crops, while also encouraging more sustainable agricultural practices. The Bala Jo Canal Committee became a central coordination mechanism between farmers, communities and the Department of Agriculture. Through sustained stakeholder engagement, the committee and local authorities are taking various steps to strengthen institutional structures, including monthly meetings, a reporting channel for water disputes, and clearer roles for documenting and following up on issues, thus closing the gap between the agreement and its implementation. Practical measures, including reorganising water gates, addressing violations and identifying alternative water solutions, are indicators of improved cooperation and communication between stakeholders. The committee has also started to look beyond immediate water disputes and agreed to explore practical measures such as small-scale water storage and crop diversification. These steps link the management of the canal with longer-term adaptation to changing water conditions. The committee is still developing these practices, but they provide a basis for more regular cooperation and decision-making around both water management and climate-related challenges.

In addition, the process brought about a shift in how communities understood water-related tensions. Villages that had previously viewed water shortages primarily through the lens of competition and blame are now increasingly recognising climate change and water scarcity as shared challenges requiring collective responses. As one participant explained:

> “Water is a shared responsibility. We all need to work together to preserve it by not damaging the canal and by trying to eliminate excessive use of water and keeping the water in the canal clean.”

This change in perspective has created space for more cooperative approaches to water management.

Local ownership was further demonstrated through community-led decisions on follow-up interventions. Communities jointly identified priority locations for well construction based on shared assessments of need, resulting in the selection of Dara and Fath Allah villages. The new wells improved water access for nearly 100 families. Because the decision-making process was collective and transparent, the intervention was widely accepted and perceived as fair by participating communities.

In **Balad (Salah Al-Din governorate)**, the project supported the establishment of the Hatamiyah Water Users Association, a community-led platform to support coordinated water management and address related conflicts between tribal leaders, farmers and local authorities. The association covers several canals and sections of the Tigris River and provides a formal mechanism for stakeholder coordination, dispute resolution and collective decision-making.

The establishment of the Water Users Association consolidated previous dialogue outcomes into a functioning local institution. A 17-member board was elected in late July 2025, and by the end of 2025 the association had grown to 975 members, making it Iraq's largest water users association in terms of participants and water users. Since then, board members have started putting the agreed ways of working into practice by assigning roles, holding regular meetings and keeping records of disputes. The board has also begun organising its own monthly meetings and engaging with government counterparts.

Through these activities, the Water Users Association now provides a more structured platform for stakeholders to discuss and develop joint solutions to water-related challenges and to coordinate resource management. The broad participation of farmers, tribal representatives and local authorities provides a basis for bringing diverse stakeholders together around shared resource management challenges. Hatamiyah is characterised by diverse tribal dynamics, including differences in representation and influence among tribal groups. From the outset, the Water Users Association was designed with these dynamics in mind, serving as an inclusive coordination mechanism with representation from different tribal groups in the association and its elected board. This has supported broader participation in water governance and collective engagement around water management challenges. The Water Users Association is also beginning to complement existing tribal ways of resolving disputes with more structured mediation within the association. This provides another way for community members to discuss and address water disputes before they escalate, while keeping the process connected to local relationships and realities. By creating a space where different groups can work together, the Water Users Association has contributed to rebuilding trust and strengthening cooperation among tribes in a community facing additional pressure from climate change.

The establishment of the Water Users Association marks a move towards complementing informal, traditional conflict resolution mechanisms with more structured forms of coordination and governance. Through close collaboration between the Water Users Association and officials from the Ministry of Water Resources at both provincial and national level, registration challenges were resolved and links strengthened between the Water Users Association, the directorate and government institutions. Government officials are also increasingly seeing the Water Users Association as a useful body for local water management and conflict resolution, complementing existing community-based mechanisms. The Ministry of Water Resources has also developed a training package which it plans to make available to the Water Users Association as a next step. When implemented, this would provide further institutional support and strengthen the link between the Water Users Association and government water authorities. The project contributed to this progress by facilitating governance dialogues, assisting board members to develop a clearer understanding of their roles and of mediation and coordination approaches, and supporting the establishment of reporting and meeting schedules. It also helped connect the Water Users Association with the Ministry of Water Resources and the Directorate, thus improving coordination and opening the way for further technical support. The Water Users Association is increasingly managing these processes itself, although its longer-term sustainability will depend on whether these practices continue beyond the project.

ELECTION OF BOARD OF WATER USERS ASSOCIATION, BALAD, IRAQ, 2025.

Today, the Water Users Association in Balad stands as a living example of how tribal, legal and governance frameworks can align to address climate security risks. It offers a locally driven model for managing scarce resources, preventing conflict and building resilience. This can inform future policy engagement and replication in other climate-affected areas in Iraq.

In **Al-Zubair (Basra governorate)**, representatives of IDPs, host communities and local government signed a social pact on 14 December 2023 to address tensions and foster inter-group relations. The pact established shared principles related to non-discrimination, equal access to services and peaceful coexistence. It also introduced a formal conflict resolution mechanism led by local authorities, providing a more structured approach to the management of disputes alongside existing community-based practices.

Implementation of the social pact has been supported by a 17-member committee representing different community groups, as well as a Youth Advisory Group. These structures offer clearly defined routes for the committee's expansion and provide platforms for monitoring progress, addressing emerging tensions and maintaining communication between communities and authorities, e.g. through regular liaison between the committee and the Youth Advisory Group and closer links with existing community activities. This has created a space for host and IDP communities to engage

with each other more regularly. The follow-up has also been largely self-driven: committee and Youth Advisory Group members brought in another organisation working with women IDPs and involved local leaders and influencers. Early results indicate that disputes and concerns that previously risked escalating are increasingly being brought to these mechanisms for discussion and resolution. Community groups that had previously engaged separately have started coordinating joint activities, while local authorities have become more actively involved in facilitating dialogue and follow-up. The establishment of the social pact is also an important step towards more structured conflict management. By clarifying responsibilities, creating joint mechanisms and strengthening the role of local authorities in dispute resolution, the agreement provides a more predictable framework for managing tensions and supporting longer-term coexistence.

The process has changed how IDP and host communities relate to one another and to local authorities. Previously, tensions over resources, services and security were often associated with perceived competition between different groups. Through dialogue, communities increasingly identified shared concerns and worked collectively with authorities to address them, including advocating for improved police patrols around schools. Participants also developed a broader understanding of climate change as one of the factors driving migration and vulnerability, shifting discussions away from individual grievances towards shared challenges.

Community members also developed initiatives beyond the formal dialogue process, demonstrating increased local ownership. They included advocacy efforts to improve security, awareness sessions led by women on climate change and violence prevention, and community-led radio programmes and podcasts on climate-related challenges. These activities demonstrate how participants moved from engaging in dialogue to initiating their own responses to issues affecting their communities.

Across the five agreements and frameworks, some common patterns can be identified between the shared objectives – the “what” – and the ways in which these objectives are realised – the “how”. Shared objectives include strengthening cooperation, improving local governance and preventing conflict. They are often accompanied by practical arrangements for participation, coordination and follow-up, which offer scope for stakeholders to work together and support implementation of agreements over time. Trust-building and continued stakeholder engagement are also recurring topics, suggesting that the effectiveness of an agreement depends not only on what is agreed, but also on how stakeholders remain involved in putting it into practice. At the same time, the agreements differ depending on the local context, and not all objectives or approaches are relevant or necessary in every case. The identification of patterns within the agreements therefore does not suggest that there is one set of elements required for successful agreements and their implementation. Rather, it shows that with clear shared objectives and appropriate ways of working together, formal agreements can generate practical and lasting results.

FROM AGREEMENTS TO SUSTAINABLE OUTCOMES: THE "**WHAT**" AND "**HOW**" CONNECTION

WHAT?
SHARED OBJECTIVES

- Strengthen cooperation & collaboration
- Improve governance & institutionalisation
- Prevent conflict & resolve disputes
- Prevent resource competition & violations
- Enhance accountability

HOW?
IMPLEMENTATION MECHANISMS

- Participatory structures & trust-building mechanisms (e.g., committees, associations)
- Resource management systems
- Complaints & monitoring mechanisms
- Conflict resolution procedures
- Communication channels with authorities

SUSTAINABLE OUTCOMES
(WHY IT MATTERS)

- Stronger cooperation & social cohesion
- Reduced disputes over scarce resources
- More effective local governance
- Greater trust & stakeholder engagement
- Increased accountability & transparency

Agreements are most effective when clear objectives ("what") are matched with concrete, locally grounded mechanisms ("how") that enable implementation, enforcement and long-term sustainability

Governorate-level mechanism to address climate security risks in Basra

The reactivation of the Environmental Protection and Improvement Council marks a potential step towards more coordinated environmental and climate-related governance in Basra. On 23 February 2026, the Basra Governor chaired a Council meeting for the first time, providing visible political support for the Council after a period in which it had been largely inactive. This provides an opening for the Council to bring together the different directorates responsible for issues that are closely connected but often addressed separately. The involvement of the Governor is not the only change. Throughout the engagement, it became clear that Council members now also have a clearer understanding of the issues the Council can address, their respective responsibilities, and how they can contribute. The more focused agenda and clearer roles also respond to some of the factors that had previously limited the Council's effectiveness. This creates a more practical basis for the Council to function as a coordination mechanism rather than remaining a largely formal, but dormant, structure only.[20] The outcome is particularly relevant in the context of climate-induced migration, where environmental pressures affect water, services, livelihoods, security and social stability across different areas of government. The project helped to lay the foundation for the Council – as an existing government mechanism rather than a parallel structure – to be reactivated and used more effectively. While fully realising this potential is a longer-term aspiration, government actors can build on these efforts to further establish a more functioning mechanism through which to address these issues, identify shared challenges and develop more coordinated responses over time. At the same time, continued engagement across national and governorate levels has helped to maintain links between policy-level discussions and practical coordination needs in Basra, while supporting the next steps in the Council's work. At the time of writing, however, it remains to be seen whether the Council will continue to meet regularly, utilise its agreed structures and responsibilities, and progress from being a discussion forum towards joint decision-making and action. The project's efforts are therefore an important and initial step in institutionalising climate security issues within existing provincial governance structures, but it is still too early to assess whether these changes will be sustained.

Key lessons learned and recommendations

The project provides several important lessons on how inclusive and community-driven dialogue and mediation processes can be helpful in addressing climate-related conflicts and how climate and environmental issues can serve as an entry point for building trust, cooperation, social cohesion and sustainable, locally owned conflict resolution mechanisms.

Climate as an entry point for dialogue and mediation engagement

The project started with the assumption that climate security risks could provide a practical entry point for dialogue under certain conditions, particularly where communities share concerns around resource and environmental pressures. Unlike deeply entrenched sectarian, tribal or governance-related conflicts, climate security issues – such as water scarcity and land degradation – can sometimes provide a common basis for dialogue, while also reflecting underlying political, social and governance challenges. The project's implementation provides strong evidence in support of this assumption, establishing a successful precedent for constructive engagement. Throughout the processes, communities that had long been divided by historical grievances, competing interests and social tensions were able to engage constructively around shared challenges and, ultimately, reach consensus on locally owned agreements and action plans. This common ground created opportunities for stakeholders to engage in constructive discussions and, in some cases, strengthen trust and cooperation. Additionally, addressing tangible, climate-related issues – such as improving water distribution or restoring agricultural land – offered concrete areas for cooperation as well as immediate and visible benefits, boosting confidence in the dialogue process. In contrast, other security challenges often involve more abstract or long-term political negotiations, where trust-building can be slower and more fragile.

In addition, the mediated agreements frame climate change as an external contributor to certain challenges, thereby reducing blame and defusing pre-existing tensions, while also addressing climate-related pressures alongside questions of resource management and local governance. This provides a basis for stakeholders to focus on practical challenges and potential solutions without attributing them solely to individual groups and can encourage more constructive and less confrontational dialogue among stakeholders.

Translating dialogue outcomes into visible changes

Small-scale climate initiatives linked to dialogue and mediation can act as both dividers and connectors. When resources or support are perceived as unevenly distributed, this can initially reinforce existing tensions. If higher levels of financial support are provided to some stakeholders and not others, these perceptions can become further entrenched, highlighting the importance of managing expectations and communicating clearly about how resources are allocated. However, when communities and authorities are involved in decisions on the design and implementation of these initiatives, these tensions can be reduced over time. In this way, climate initiatives can become a practical expression of cooperation, building trust and demonstrating the benefits of working together. This is particularly relevant for small-scale initiatives that respond to immediate climate-related needs, such as water infrastructure, as they can turn agreed solutions into visible action and strengthen commitment to the agreements.

Role of institutionalised structures

Institutionalised structures emerged as critical for sustaining dialogue outcomes and embedding cooperation beyond the project cycle. The Water Users Association in Balad illustrates the potential of community-led governance mechanisms to manage shared resources effectively and serve as replicable models. At the same time, our experience shows that such structures take time and require sustained investment and a clear commitment to ensure their long-term functionality. Measures to strengthen governance frameworks, adapt bylaws in agreement with authorities when relevant, and create feedback loops are essential if these structures are to remain effective. The project has also laid the groundwork for mechanisms at higher levels, such as the Environmental Protection and Improvement Council at the governorate level, which could, over the longer term, provide institutional platforms for translating local agreements into broader policy impact, provided that coordination challenges are addressed. These examples also show that institutionalisation is less about creating entirely new systems and more about building on existing institutional frameworks while taking into account informal roles, relationships and conflict resolution mechanisms. In practice, recognising local dynamics – such as tribal conflict resolution practices in Hatamiyah and the political environment and key stakeholders surrounding the Environmental Protection and Improvement Council in Basra – can strengthen the relevance and effectiveness of these structures. Conversely, overlooking these dynamics can limit their ability to function effectively and remain relevant beyond the lifetime of the project.

Trust-building: a precondition for and an intermediate outcome of sustained engagement

Trust-building is both a precondition for and an important intermediate outcome of dialogue and mediation. It influences whether agreements are reached, implemented and sustained, and whether they lead to longer-term changes in behaviour and relationships. Across the project locations, trust-building was shown to be most effective within and between communities and, to a slightly lesser extent, between communities and local authorities. Where trust and relationships between certain groups, e.g. between committees, youth advisory groups, religious leaders and community institutions, were established, it improved cooperation, service delivery, community mobilisation and implementation of agreements while reducing fragmentation.

It is important to note that trust and cooperation do not develop in a linear way. In some cases, dialogue was helpful in enabling stakeholders to identify shared challenges and develop joint solutions whose implementation then led to further trust-building. In others, tangible action by authorities – such as addressing community concerns or removing illegal water breaches – played a role in establishing trust as a basis for subsequent dialogue.

The project also demonstrated the importance of institutionalising trusted relationships rather than relying solely on individual connections. Embedding cooperative approaches in structures, processes and agreements can help sustain progress beyond individual actors and project cycles. At the same time, long-term and

consistent engagement is essential to get to this point, particularly where stakeholders are in conflict with each other and are sceptical about external actors or local authorities. Transparency, responsiveness and continuity of engagement can foster the credibility that is essential for trust-building.

Inclusive participation for legitimacy and effectiveness

The findings also reinforce the importance of inclusive participation for the legitimacy and effectiveness of dialogue and mediation. The involvement of diverse actors, including community leaders, government authorities, civil society, young people and women, ensured that solutions reflect different experiences, interests and positions and are more widely accepted and implemented. This is particularly important in contexts where communities are affected in different ways by conflict dynamics and restrictions on access to natural resources.

At the same time, barriers to participation persist, particularly for women, due to social norms and logistical and structural constraints. While efforts to increase women's participation improved over time, continued attention is needed to create safe and enabling spaces for meaningful engagement.

Inclusive dialogue is also helpful in developing and implementing practical, locally driven solutions to climate security risks. Involving communities and local authorities, together with participatory monitoring, can strengthen ownership, acceptance and the sustainability of climate-related agreements.

Importance of local ownership

Local ownership and active community-based change agents are critical for sustaining outcomes beyond the project. Across the districts, community members were engaged in mobilising participation, maintaining momentum and implementing agreements. The experience in Kalar illustrates this well. The conflict resolution mechanism is increasingly recognised as a legitimate and independent mechanism, reflected in the growing number of stakeholders approaching it, referrals of disputes and acknowledgment of its role. There is also interest in expanding the mechanism to neighbouring areas.

With local ownership, stakeholders who understand local sensitivities can make decisions that reflect community needs and avoid actions that could create additional risks. At the same time, ownership needs to be inclusive. The climate-conflict-inclusivity analysis and recommendations therefore have an important role to play, e.g. in promoting women's participation in decision-making and local conflict resolution structures, while recommendations remain context-specific.

The project also found that locally adapted monitoring and implementation mechanisms increase the durability of climate-related agreements. The inclusion of provisions on locally identified risks, adaptive measures and regular review in these agreements is helpful in ensuring that they remain relevant and deliverable. However, if local leadership, organisational structures or resources are weak, community-led action and advocacy are less likely to be sustained. Strengthening these capacities is

therefore essential for turning dialogue outcomes into longer-term engagement and action.

Linking community-level processes with higher-level governance structures and other processes

A further lesson is the importance of linking community-level processes with higher-level governance structures. Strengthening the connections with governorate-level institutions has a key role to play in ensuring that local solutions are reflected in wider policy and decision-making and provide a basis for scaling and sustaining results.

When there is well-functioning cooperation between communities and local authorities, tangible improvements can follow. In some areas, for example, more transparent communication of water allocation processes, clearer schedules and consistent implementation have improved the reliability of water access. These visible results reinforce trust and demonstrate the value of cooperation. In Hawija, the strong working relationship with local authorities has supported the implementation of agreements even under challenging conditions.

The project also highlights the value of bringing together a diverse range of expertise. The involvement of climate and environmental experts, conflict specialists, mediators and dialogue facilitators in discussions makes it more likely that agreements will address both the technical and the conflict-related dimensions of climate security risks. This can improve the quality and feasibility of solutions while also increasing stakeholder ownership. Inclusive and transparent agreements, in turn, make it easier for communities to participate in implementation and monitoring.

4.3 Workstream 3: Integrating the climate security dimension into peacebuilding and adaptation measures

Workstream 3 set out to strengthen coordination and cooperation among Iraqi government stakeholders across national, governorate and local levels, while supporting more coherent and strategic government-led responses to climate security risks. The underlying theory of change holds that structured dialogue, exchange of views and relationship-building enable government stakeholders to share perspectives, identify common priorities and gaps, and better align local and national efforts. This approach is grounded in adaptive governance[21] and institutional development[22] theories, which emphasise the importance of flexible, learning-oriented governance systems and strong, inclusive institutions for effective and sustainable responses to climate-related security risks.

Overview of key activities and key intervention logic

The project team conducted regular consultations with national and sub-national governmental authorities in Iraq, aiming to secure support, identify coordination and governance needs, and explore ways to integrate climate security into peacebuilding and adaptation measures. These individual consultations complemented formal round table settings by nurturing relationships and enabling more informal, ongoing advisory engagement with governmental actors in both Baghdad and Erbil. Among these stakeholders were representatives from ministries (water, planning, agriculture, environment), provincial councils and directorates (water, planning, agriculture, environment) in Erbil and Baghdad, as well as the Council of Ministers Secretariat (COMSEC), the National Operations Centre, the National Centre for Crisis and Disaster Response, Joint Crisis Coordination Centre (JCC), Office of the National Security Advisor (ONSA), Al-Nahrain Center for Strategic Studies, Al-Bayan Center for Planning and Studies, and the Prime Minister's Office. The consultations also included international partners, such as GIZ, Clingendael, SIPRI, Mercy Corps, NRC, IOM, WPS (IHE/HCSS), UNDP, UNEP, UNAMI, Oxfam, Nonviolent Peaceforce, PAX, the EU Delegation, EU Advisory Mission, NATO and several embassies, including the German embassy/consulate, and aimed to share knowledge, explore synergies and increase coordination. In addition, the project team regularly participated in key conferences, workshops and coordination meetings, including the Environmental Peacebuilding Conference, FriEnt workshops, the Berlin Climate Security Conference, the Climate Mobility Forum, UN-organised coordination mechanisms in Iraq, the GIZ National Coordination Group in Iraq, as well as the International Water Conference in Baghdad and the Sulaimani Forum. Alongside this, up to the end of August 2026, two governmental training sessions and a total of nine round tables in Baghdad, Erbil and Basra were central to the engagement strategy, bringing together more than 350 national and international stakeholders[23] to identify and discuss key priorities and governance challenges, develop practical recommendations for conflict-sensitive climate governance and improve coordination across the federal and governorate levels and across sectors. They also provided a platform for knowledge-sharing and helped to build trust and promote alignment among governmental and international stakeholders.

ROUNDTABLE ON CLIMATE GOVERNANCE, IRAQ, 2024.

Key outcomes

Enhanced communication channels and multi-level engagement between governmental authorities and local communities

The project promoted communication and dialogue by creating spaces for consultations on CEPS between ministries, local authorities, civil society actors and communities. Through the round tables, actors who rarely engage directly were able to connect, improving the flow of information and access to decision-makers. Participants in the discussions identified shared climate security concerns, governance gaps and local CEPS-related challenges and developed recommendations on how to address climate security risks. This was particularly evident in a southern governorate, where engagement through the project fostered more direct communication between local communities and the Ministry of Migration and Displacement so that local CEPS challenges – such as climate-induced migration and displacement linked to prolonged drought and water scarcity and the resulting pressures on livelihoods, basic services and social cohesion – were understood and addressed more fully. By facilitating these spaces, the project enabled communities to raise these concerns directly with government counterparts, resulting in more informed and context-specific responses. Building on these exchanges, government stakeholders became more proactive in their engagement: a governorate advisor in Dhi Qar began arranging meetings with civil society organisations to discuss pressing issues such as climate security and drug abuse.

The sharing of experiences and good practices also generated interest in adapting successful approaches from one local context to another. For example, the Ministry of Water Resources is currently in discussion with departments in Fallujah about the potential establishment of a Water Users Association in Saqlawiyah/Canal 001. While these discussions are still ongoing, they illustrate the potential for locally tested approaches and conflict resolution mechanisms to inform similar initiatives in other contexts over the longer term and, at the time of writing this report, point to an emerging interest in adapting locally tested approaches rather than broader institutional adoption.

Enhanced coordination and coherence in government action

The project improved coordination within and across Iraqi government institutions and administrative levels, particularly between the federal and governorate levels, but also with local authorities, by creating spaces for dialogue, information-sharing and joint identification of climate security priorities. Round tables and consultations strengthened institutional linkages and encouraged more coherent approaches to climate-related risks across different levels of government and portfolios. One notable example is the integration of a representative from the Kurdistan Regional Government into the Joint Operations Command following the July 2023 round table, with a positive impact on communication and cooperation between Baghdad and Erbil and in Maysan

governorate, where coordination between local and national actors following a round table resulted in immediate flood response measures for the governorate.

In Dhi Qar governorate, the project also facilitated more intensive coordination between provincial and federal actors on climate-related migration. New linkages supported joint efforts on registration, documentation and operational responses, e.g. in Islah district (Dhi Qar governorate), while enabling the Ministry of Migration and Displacement to gain a better understanding of local challenges and improving communities' access to federal institutions. In addition, the Ministry of Migration and Displacement convened meetings with district mayors to address local security challenges and develop practical responses. This cooperation improved data collection and response mechanisms and was a contributory factor in the selection of Dhi Qar for further support under an IOM-funded initiative, illustrating how project-facilitated dialogue can lead to more coordinated institutional action and complementary programming.

Similarly, the JCC, the Kurdistan Regional Government's main agency with responsibility for coordinating crisis management, disaster response and humanitarian relief, is now working with government institutions to develop local adaptation plans. This reflects emerging cross-institutional collaboration and the integration of multiple dimensions into climate adaptation strategies, and points to the potential for more coherence between institutions and levels of government.

Increased capacity for conflict-sensitive approaches

Through targeted training and ongoing engagement, government officials improved their ability to apply conflict-sensitive approaches to climate-related challenges. Participants acquired practical skills in mediation, dialogue facilitation and inclusive consultation, enabling them to analyse and respond more effectively to local tensions. Following the training, local authorities are making initial efforts to engage communities more systematically in decision-making and to address underlying drivers of conflict linked to environmental stress. This is an encouraging sign and lays the foundation for more effective and sustainable climate governance.

Key lessons learned and recommendations

The project offers several important lessons on how knowledge-sharing between local, national and international stakeholders can build collective capacities to address climate security risks and how structured dialogue can be helpful in overcoming coordination challenges and promoting more coherent and institutionalised government responses.

Capacity-building and knowledge-sharing strengthen climate security responses

Capacity-building activities and knowledge-sharing enabled stakeholders to develop a common understanding of climate-related security risks and identify practical ways to address them within their existing mandates. Training, consultations and round tables provided opportunities to clarify responsibilities, articulate views and discuss possible responses across sectors and levels of government. Practical, context-specific examples were helpful in visualising the links between climate stressors and security challenges, while engagement with international organisations created opportunities to share experiences and learn from approaches used elsewhere.

At the same time, gaps in official government data and fragmented communication sometimes made it difficult to identify and discuss these links. Measures to increase access to relevant information, alongside opportunities for stakeholders to learn and work together, had a positive impact on coordination between local, governorate and national authorities and across national institutions. While the effects on policy are likely to emerge gradually, these processes can provide a foundation for more informed, sustained and coherent climate security responses.

Occasional high-level round tables provided a space to connect these discussions with broader policy priorities and bring political perspectives into the conversation. This is particularly important for climate security, which cuts across sectors and institutions and often requires action from a diverse range of stakeholders. Continued engagement at both the technical and the political level is therefore helpful in creating the conditions for climate security measures to move from discussion towards implementation.

Using climate as an entry point to support dialogue and engagement

Finding language that made sense in the local context was important for engaging stakeholders around climate security. Early on, the idea of delivering “peacebuilding interventions in a climate-sensitive way” was broad in scope and did not always clearly distinguish the approach from more conventional responses to conflict and governance challenges. Over time, discussions helped to sharpen the framing around using climate and environmental issues as an entry point for dialogue and peacebuilding. This made it easier to explore how issues such as water scarcity, migration and competition over resources could bring stakeholders together around concerns they already shared. Practical examples were particularly useful in making these connections clear. By discussing disputes over water or pressure on livelihoods, participants were able to relate the broader concept of climate security to challenges they were already familiar with. Engaging stakeholders around these less politically sensitive issues also helped to build relationships and trust, which created space to address more politically charged and sensitive topics that would have been harder to discuss at the outset. In this way, climate and environmental concerns provided a practical starting point for dialogue, while the relationships built through this engagement encouraged discussion of wider peacebuilding, governance and security challenges.

Embedding climate security in institutions remains a longer-term challenge

The integration of climate-sensitive peacebuilding into government practice has often depended on the engagement of individual officials rather than being part of established institutional processes. Mid-level officials were often well-placed to take discussions forward, but had limited authority to make broader changes or navigate responsibilities across sectors. At senior level, sustained engagement was more difficult due to competing priorities, staff turnover and current bureaucratic processes. High-level round tables and ongoing technical exchanges played a role in keeping climate security issues on the agenda and created opportunities to connect them with existing policy and governance processes. At the same time, experience suggests that lasting change is likely to depend less on creating new structures and more on making better use of those that already exist. Existing legal and policy frameworks related to environmental protection and water governance, including the Environmental Protection and Improvement Council framework and Water Users Association structures, offer potential entry points for integrating conflict-sensitive adaptation and climate security. In practice, however, these mechanisms are not always fully functional or easily accessible to the actors who could use them. Strengthening and operationalising existing frameworks may therefore be a more practical pathway to institutionalisation than introducing new mechanisms. Trusted relationships can support this process, but are unlikely to be sufficient where mandates, budgets, staff turnover or political incentives constrain uptake. This highlights the importance of engaging policy owners early, aligning evidence with relevant decision-making cycles, combining short, accessible products with follow-up engagement, and maintaining feedback routes to the local actors whose experience and evidence inform policy discussions. This points to the importance of working within existing mandates and processes while supporting the officials and institutions responsible for putting them into practice. Progress is likely to be gradual, but strengthening these foundations can lessen the reliance on individual champions and enable climate security issues to be integrated more consistently into government decision-making.

Local ownership is critical for sustained climate security responses

Experience suggests that climate security engagement is more effective when local stakeholders are involved in identifying priorities and project delivery. International organisations can play a useful supporting role, but the strongest momentum has come from Iraqi actors themselves, as they are able to connect the climate security agenda with their own policies and areas of work. At the same time, local engagement must be supported by effective coordination and institutional processes. Communication between different levels of government remains uneven, and policy recommendations are not always acted on. Continuous dialogue between national institutions, district and governorate authorities, communities, civil society and other relevant actors is essential to address and resolve this issue. Round tables and consultations have provided useful spaces for these discussions, but the longer-term challenge is to build on individual commitment and growing interest by embedding these ways of working in existing institutional processes. International support is therefore likely to be most useful when it nurtures the conditions for locally led action rather than taking the lead itself.

5 Conclusion

Iraq's institutions and communities are facing growing pressures as economic, environmental, climate and security challenges increasingly overlap. Water scarcity is particularly acute: Water reserves fell to a record low of five billion cubic metres at the end of 2025 and beginning of 2026, before recovering to 34 billion cubic metres following heavy rainfall. Despite this recovery, reserves remain well below the 60 billion cubic metres recorded in 2021, underscoring continued pressure on Iraq's water resources.[24] These pressures are closely connected to wider governance and security challenges, making multi-level cooperation across institutions, trust between communities and local authorities, and inclusive mechanisms to resolve conflicts around climate security risks increasingly important.

Against this backdrop, Berghof and PPO's experience in Iraq shows the value of integrating climate and environmental concerns into existing dialogue, mediation and governance processes. The approach has focused on locally led discussions, practical coordination across levels of government, and linking climate and environmental pressures to existing conflict dynamics and opportunities for cooperation. Rather than creating parallel processes, the work has sought to build on existing relationships, structures, institutions and local initiatives. Our experience suggests that responding to climate-related security risks is less about establishing a separate climate security system and more about strengthening the ways in which people and institutions work together — based on trust, regular coordination, shared understanding, and the ability to jointly identify and respond to emerging challenges.[25] Inclusivity is central to making these forms of cooperation effective and sustainable. Bringing together actors who do not usually meet or engage with one another – including government representatives, tribal and community leaders, civil society, women and young people – creates space for different experiences, interests and perspectives to inform discussions and ensure that locally developed solutions reflect the realities of those most affected. At the same time, connecting local processes with actors and institutions at different levels provides opportunities to share lessons learned and good practices beyond the immediate context. Engagement across local, provincial and national levels supports the replication of approaches that work and offers scope for local experience to inform broader policy processes while ensuring that they remain firmly grounded in local realities.

ENDNOTES

[1] https://gain.nd.edu/our-work/country-index/rankings/

[2] Löble, N., Viehoff, A., Steinkraus, A., Schädel, A., Whitaker, E. (2025). Evaluation Synthesis: Iraq Project: Strengthening Iraqi capacities to respond to climate risks and their impact on existing conflict dynamics. Weathering Risk Peace Pillar. Berlin: adelphi research. https://weatheringrisk.org/sites/default/files/document/WRPP_Iraq_Evaluation_Synthesis.pdf.

[3] This total includes outcomes of varying levels of significance. While the outcome analysis captured all identified outcomes, this report focuses on those considered most significant for understanding the programme's contributions and results. In total, the project achieved 27 outcomes under Outcome 1, 32 under Outcome 2, 27 under Outcome 3, and six unintended outcomes. These were achieved at district level (54), governorate level (11), national level (21), and international level (6).

[4] At a later stage, an additional district – Balad – was added to the mapping assessment but is not included in the publication.

[5] For more on adelphi and its approach, see https://adelphi.de/en and Rüttinger et al. (2015). A New Climate for Peace, and the Weather Risk methodology: Methodology | Weathering Risk.

[6] The five districts were selected based on the following criteria: a clear climate security pathway offering an entry point for mediation/dialogue engagement on relevant district, security and safety considerations, acceptance by key stakeholders, avoidance of duplication, and a geographical and political balance across the districts.

[7] Climate change and conflict in Iraq: Kalar (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ooZTYraKZfM); Hawija (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wrLZX7ZNHZM); Al-Zubair (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cfLBm_MV-hM); Overview (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tQLdeEiXnxU).

[8] The Joint Crisis Coordination Centre in the Kurdistan Regional Government serves as the central coordination body for crisis preparedness, response and recovery across the Kurdistan Region. It supports government institutions, humanitarian partners and local authorities in managing humanitarian, natural and man-made crises. It is headed by the Director General under the supervision and guidance of the Minister of Interior.

[9] Surveys were conducted for all community-level and government-level capacity-building exercises with all participants. In 2023-2024, we used Impaxio; in 2025-2026, we used Leonardo.

[10] The survey findings are based on participants' self-reported perceptions and confidence; survey results alone do not demonstrate changes in applied skills or capacity.

[11] Under Iraq's Mukhtars Law No. 13 of 2011, a mukhtar is a person legally entrusted with overseeing the affairs of a residential neighbourhood situated within municipal boundaries or of a designated village. The mukhtar serves as an administrative, security and social liaison between residents and government authorities.

[12] See workstream 2 for further information on the social pact.

[13] See page 25 in September 2025: https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/2026-01/NDC%20Report%20EN%20-%202025.pdf.

[14] The COM-B model proposes that behaviour is influenced by three interacting components: Capability, Opportunity, and Motivation, while PRIME Theory explains motivation through the interaction of Plans, Responses, Impulses, Motives, and Evaluations. Together, the models provide a framework for understanding how individual and contextual factors shape behaviour. For further reading, see West and Michie (2020): A brief introduction to the COM-B Model of behaviour and the PRIME Theory of motivation.

[15] The community agreement in Tal Afar was mediated as part of a separate project funded by Robert Bosch Stiftung, and an annex was subsequently required to account for new developments and ensure the effective implementation of the agreement. For more information see the project page: Enhancing understanding and supporting local-level dialogue to address climate security risks in Iraq.

[16] In 2023 and 2024, three initiatives per year were implemented. In 2026, five initiatives were implemented.

[17] The Council was established under Law No. 27 of 2009 in each province, chaired by the Governor and affiliated with the national Environmental Protection and Improvement Council. The mandate includes providing coordinated advice on environmental matters; reviewing the environmental dimensions of provincial plans and programmes before their approval; coordinating local programmes for nature protection; evaluating the work of relevant member directorates; and responding to environmental emergencies and disasters.

[18] An annex to the Al-Ayadhiyah water agreement, originally signed on 26 September 2023, was adopted on 19 September 2024 by the agreement committee in the presence of the mayor. The original agreement was mediated as part of another Robert Bosch-funded project. The annex, which strengthens the original agreement, was subsequently developed under the GFFO-funded project.

[19] The water project currently reaches 28 villages and is expected to be expanded to at least 32 villages.

[20] These developments provide a basis for the Council to function as a coordination mechanism. At the time of writing this report, it is too early to assess whether these developments will translate into regular meetings, joint decisions and follow-up action.

[21] Holling, C.S. (1978). Adaptive Environmental Assessment and Management. London: John Wiley & Sons; Dietz, T., Ostrom, E. and Stern, P.C. (2003). The Struggle to Govern the Commons. Science, 302(5652), 1907–1912; Folke, C., Hahn, T., Olsson, P. and Norberg, J. (2005). Adaptive Governance of Social-Ecological Systems. Annual Review of Environment and Resources, 30, 441–473.

[22] Ostrom, E. (1990). Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Acemoglu, D. and Robinson, J.A. (2012). Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity, and Poverty. New York: Crown Business.

[23] The round tables achieved notably better gender representation compared to local-level dialogue sessions. For example, in the three round tables held in Baghdad and Erbil in 2024, women comprised 32 per cent, 40 per cent and 36 per cent of participants. In 2025, out of 101 participants across the training and two round tables, 26 were women (26 per cent).

[24] +964 (2026). Iraq's water reserves recover to 34 billion cubic meters after historic lows. https://en.964media.com/49438/.

[25] Ammar Zakri (2026). Beyond Better Mediation: Peacebuilding Must Become Part of How We Govern. https://ammar-zakri.com/insights.

BERGHOF FOUNDATION OPERATIONS GGMBH
Lindenstraße 34
10969 Berlin
Germany

www.berghof-foundation.org
info@berghof-foundation.org

@berghoffnd.bsky.social
@BerghofFnd
/BerghofFoundation
/berghof-foundation
@berghoffnd

PEACE PARADIGMS ORGANISATION
Baghdad Palms Complex,
Business Center, Office No. 6,
Baghdad, Iraq

Park View, Building B1,
Floor 5, Apartment 14,
Erbil

www.ppo-iq.org

@peaceparadigms
/peaceparadigms
/peaceparadigms

© 2026. All rights reserved.