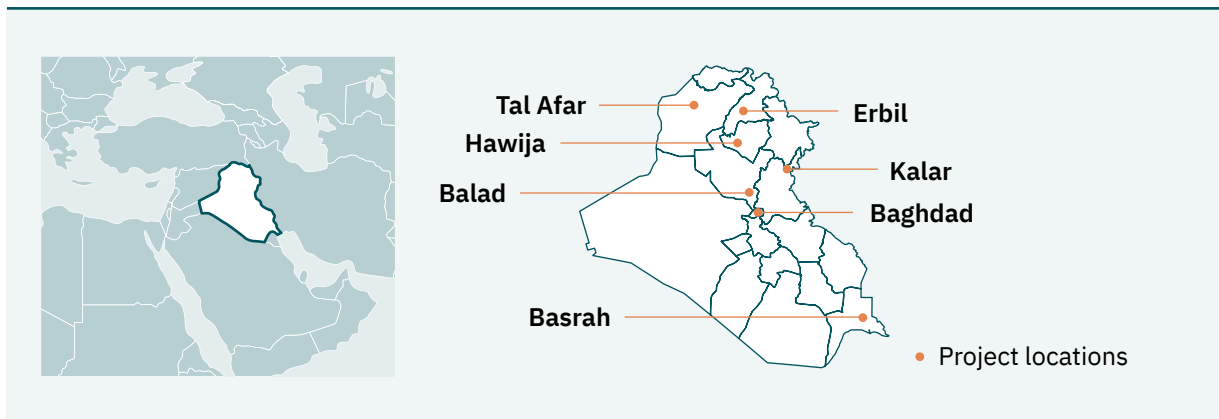


Evaluation Synthesis: Iraq Project

Strengthening Iraqi capacities to respond to climate risks and their impact on existing conflict dynamics



KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- **Raising awareness of the drivers of climate-related conflict**, combined with training in mediation and dialogue, has strengthened the capacity of and built trust between authorities and community representatives. This has enabled stakeholders to collaborate more effectively in addressing shared challenges.
- **Facilitating inclusive agreements through participatory dialogue and mediation** has led to more equitable water distribution, the establishment of conflict-prevention frameworks, stronger climate action and improved resource management in many districts.
- **Connecting local and national stakeholders**, informing international programmes, and supporting the joint identification of solutions have strengthened coordination and governance, resulting in more effective responses.



Engaged more than **250** **Track 1.5 and Track 2 stakeholders**, including civil society leaders, policymakers, security actors and international representatives.



Trained over **180** **community members** in dialogue facilitation and mediation of climate-related conflicts.



Improved **water access** for nearly **100** families in Kalar through the construction of new wells.



Established **3** major **agreements** and **2** additional **frameworks** that embed conflict-resolution mechanisms and climate action provisions across **5** **conflict- and climate-affected districts**.

Project Overview

Iraq is highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, including water scarcity, extreme heat, and increasingly frequent and intense dust storms. These challenges strain vital resources, fuel new tensions, and exacerbate existing conflicts over governance, resource distribution, social cohesion, migration and displacement. This significantly heightens the risk of increased and sustained conflict, particularly in already fragile regions such as Kalar (Sulaymaniyah) in the north and Al-Zubair (Basra) in the south. In these regions, trust between government authorities and communities is limited, deep intercommunal grievances persist, and resources, governance capacities and conflict-resolution mechanisms remain insufficient to address climate impacts and emerging disputes.

Against this background, the Berghof Foundation – in collaboration with its Iraqi partner Peace Paradigms Organisation (PPO) – has been implementing the dialogue and mediation project Strengthening Iraqi Capacities to Respond to Climate Risks and Their Impact on Existing Conflict Dynamics since mid-2022 (see map for project locations). Recognising the need to better understand climate-related risks, and strengthen the capacities of government authorities and communities at all levels to implement effective solutions, the project aims to address the root causes of conflict and promote sustainable peace.

The project pursues three overarching objectives: 1) Raising awareness of the climate-conflict nexus through research and trainings on climate security, mediation and dialogue; 2) Fostering locally led, inclusive agreements between government authorities, and communities affected by climate and conflict risks by facilitating mediation and dialogue sessions; and 3) Supporting Iraqi authorities at district, governorate and national levels – across the water, planning, agricultural, oil, education and security sectors – to design and implement conflict-sensitive climate adaptation measures through consultations and roundtables.

Key Outcomes and Insights

An outcome evaluation of the project's first two phases (2022–24) highlighted the following key results and achievements.¹

ENHANCING AWARENESS AND BUILDING LOCAL CAPACITIES

The project's research, dialogue sessions, roundtables and trainings engaged community members, local and national authorities, and civil society representatives in selected districts.² Participant feedback confirmed that these activities increased understanding of how climate change exacerbates existing conflict drivers, including resource competition, social inequalities and governance challenges. Trainings and workshops developed capacities in climate-related mediation, dialogue facilitation and conflict-sensitive adaptation planning. This equipped stakeholders with the analytical tools and practical skills to recognise shared risks, address disputes constructively and collaboratively develop local solutions.

1 The evaluation used a mixed-methods approach centred on Outcome Harvesting, capturing both intended and unintended changes linked to the project. Data was gathered through interviews, focus groups, WhatsApp surveys and document reviews, ensuring a range of perspectives from local communities, government authorities and civil society actors.

2 One mediator training (seven participants: 12% female, 88% male), five community trainings (180 participants: 13% female, 87% male), 61 dialogue sessions (1,170 participants: 15% female, 85% male), seven roundtables (253 participants in total, the average share of women was about 36%, based on three roundtables considered representative).

FACILITATING INCLUSIVE AGREEMENTS TO ADDRESS CLIMATE SECURITY RISKS

The project facilitated five inclusive dialogue and mediation processes in Hawija, Tal Afar, Kalar, Al-Zubair and Balad. These processes brought together community and tribal leaders, local authorities, security actors, women, and young people, providing space to express concerns, discuss interests and develop locally driven solutions to conflicts exacerbated by climate change. The dialogues addressed issues such as disputes over water access, resource allocation and displacement, helping to build trust and cooperation among stakeholders with deep-seated grievances and differing perspectives.

Through multiple rounds of dialogue and mediation, the project produced three major agreements, an annex to an agreement and a pre-agreed framework linked to a legal platform. In Hawija, for example, recurring disputes over water access and illegal diversions along a key canal had fuelled tensions between upstream and downstream communities. A multi-stakeholder agreement established a fair water distribution system along the canal and introduced community-led monitoring. The agreement is reinforced by a cooperative dispute-resolution mechanism involving both community representatives and government officials, ensuring formal oversight and integration into local governance structures. If implemented effectively, the agreement is expected to reduce tensions over water access, and strengthen cooperation and trust between upstream and downstream communities, as well as local authorities.

Collectively, these agreements are both locally owned and institutionally supported, demonstrating the value of inclusive dialogue and local governance in addressing the root causes of conflict and building resilience to climate impacts across Iraq.

ESTABLISHING CONCRETE MECHANISMS FOR CONFLICT PREVENTION

The dialogue and mediation processes have established concrete mechanisms for conflict prevention through both formal agreements and broader community engagement. In Hawija, Kalar and Al-Zubair, agreements introduced practical tools – such as community-led monitoring systems, structured dispute-resolution processes and joint implementation committees – that involve both community representatives and government officials. These mechanisms are deliberately inclusive, bringing together community members – including women, young people and internally displaced persons – alongside tribal leaders and local authorities to ensure diverse perspectives are represented and solutions are collectively owned.



Kalar dialogue © Peace Paradigms Organisation

For example, the Al-Zubair agreement created the area's first-ever social pact between internally displaced persons and host communities, outlining principles for peaceful coexistence, equal access to services and institutionalised conflict management, with local authorities playing a central role in oversight and enforcement. These mechanisms not only help prevent and manage disputes as they arise but also build trust and cooperation between communities and authorities. As climate change continues to affect resource availability, such sustainable, locally owned conflict-prevention mechanisms will be essential for long-term resilience.

BUILDING TRUST, SHIFTING NARRATIVES AND EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES THROUGH DIALOGUE

Beyond the formal agreements, the dialogue and mediation processes fostered greater trust between communities and local authorities. In Hawija, sustained engagement helped overcome initial scepticism toward government service delivery. A subsequent local authority campaign to remove illegal water diversions and reduce disputes demonstrated a visible commitment to cooperation and accountability, strengthening community confidence. These processes also shifted narratives from conflict to cooperation. Community representatives and local authorities reported that inclusive dialogue transformed relationships and promoted equitable resource sharing. As Fadhil Abbas, mukhtar of Mulla Rahman village, noted: "Water is a shared responsibility. We all need to work together to preserve it by not damaging the canal, and trying to eliminate excessive use of water and keeping the water of the canal clean." These changes lay the ground-

work for sustained cooperation, and more resilient, peaceful responses to ongoing and future climate-exacerbated conflicts. By fostering community ownership and empowering local actors to manage resources responsibly, the project ensures that solutions are rooted in local priorities and more likely to endure.

“

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

– Fadhil Abbas , mukhtar
of Mulla Rahman village

FROM JOINT PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION TO INCLUSIVE RESOURCE ALLOCATION

“

We witnessed a change in the people after the wells were constructed because they saw that we are serious and that what we do has an impact. It was really much needed.

– Dialogue facilitator

A key achievement of the project has been translating inclusive dialogue into concrete, community-driven solutions for managing scarce resources and preventing conflict. In Kalar, local authorities and community representatives collaboratively assessed water shortages and prioritised needs across villages. By integrating local knowledge and input from various groups, they reached a transparent consensus, identifying Dara and Fath Allah as the villages most in need of new wells. This inclusive, conflict-sensitive and participatory process produced a water-sharing agreement that ensured resource allocation reflected genuine community priorities. The project helped mobilise resources, and coordinate between local communities, mukhtars and international partners such as IOM to fund and construct the wells, with community members also contributing financially. As a result, nearly 100 families gained improved access to water. Reflecting on the process, the dialogue facilitator observed:

"We witnessed a change in the people after the wells were constructed because they saw that we are serious and that what we do has an impact. It was really much needed." This outcome not only addressed immediate needs but also strengthened the community's trust in the dialogue process, and demonstrated the value of joint decision-making and sustainable solutions.

STRENGTHENING COORDINATION AND GOVERNANCE ON CLIMATE SECURITY

Consultation meetings and higher-level roundtables brought together diverse Iraqi stakeholders and international partners.³ These efforts improved coordination and coherence in government action on climate security. Moreover, these engagements established linkages across governance levels, opened communication channels and initiated independent meetings that had previously been lacking between governmental actors at different levels. Moving forward, this improved collaboration can support the integration of climate security approaches into government policies and institutional frameworks.

International organisations such as IOM drew on the project's conflict analyses, stakeholder mappings and local-level dialogues to inform their own programming decisions. Similarly, selected outcomes from dialogues in Al-Zubair and Balad were implemented in coordination with a GIZ-funded project, demonstrating effective coordination and complementarity.

Lessons and Recommendations

Continuous learning has been essential for improving implementation and generating insights relevant to the broader field. The project has identified the following key lessons on integrated programming:

LESSON 1:

REFRAMING CLIMATE-RELATED SECURITY RISKS AS SHARED CHALLENGES CAN FACILITATE DIALOGUE AND MEDIATION

By framing climate change as an external factor, integrated agreements reduced blame and defused pre-existing tensions, creating a positive environment for dialogue. The inclusive participation of authorities and community representatives ensured that the agreements were grounded in local realities, while tailored monitoring and implementation fostered ownership and accountability, enhancing the durability and legitimacy of outcomes. This approach also created opportunities to engage environmental, scientific and academic institutions, providing evidence-based perspectives that further enhanced legitimacy, and promoted shared responsibility and joint action.

Recommendations for Iraqi Policymakers

Develop and institutionalise adaptive, context-specific mediation models for climate-related conflicts by reframing them as shared national challenges. Embed principles of environmental justice and accountability into dialogue processes to ensure the fair engagement of actors who contribute to or are affected by local climate and environmental risks, including upstream water users and industrial stakeholders.

Recommendations for Practitioners

Tackle context-specific barriers to joint and sustainable solutions for climate security risks in order to effectively address the needs and priorities of those most affected. These barriers include limited access to decision-making spaces and governance processes, which often prevent marginalised groups – such as displaced persons, young people, women and people living in remote areas – from actively participating in climate security dialogues and shaping conflict-sensitive climate adaptation measures.

3 Participants included representatives of the Government of Iraq and Kurdistan Regional Government, representatives of different ministries across various sectors, provincial and district-level government officials, civil society representatives, representatives from the security and defence sector, academia and research institutions, and religious leaders.

Recommendations for the International Community

Support inclusive mediation processes that frame climate risks as shared drivers of conflict as well as the implementation of the resulting agreements, such as community- and government-led climate adaptation initiatives. Processes should be co-designed and co-facilitated by Iraqi policymakers, scientific and environmental institutions, and implementing partners, and underpinned by robust data, inclusive participation, and clear monitoring and accountability.

LESSON 2:

DIALOGUE AND ACTION MUST REINFORCE EACH OTHER

Addressing climate-related security risks provides effective, less politicised entry points for dialogue and mediation, especially when compared to more entrenched issues such as sectarian or governance-related conflicts. Shared challenges such as water scarcity can foster constructive engagement and trust more rapidly. Importantly, linking dialogue to tangible actions, such as improving water distribution or constructing new wells, demonstrates commitment and builds confidence. In turn, tangible results reinforce the value of dialogue and motivate continued cooperation. This cycle of dialogue and action strengthens both, laying the groundwork for lasting collaboration and resilience.

Recommendations for Iraqi Policymakers

Prioritise long-term strategies that address the systemic drivers of climate-related conflicts and build resilience, grounded in a comprehensive and localised understanding, rather than relying solely on short-term solutions or infrastructure. Develop accessible, sustainable funding mechanisms for governorate- and district-level climate security initiatives to support multi-level dialogue, participatory processes and immediate climate action on the ground.

Recommendations for Practitioners

Prioritise understanding how communities experience climate change, and use this knowledge to foster informed and engaged discussions that catalyse community mobilisation and support advocacy for policy change. Facilitate forward-looking, multi-party environmental mediation approaches that emphasise collaborative governance and shared interests, rather than limit engagement to bilateral negotiations between conflicting sides. This would make processes more conflict sensitive and inclusive of groups affected by actions on the ground who may not be directly involved in the conflict.

LESSON 3:

INCLUSIVE AND COORDINATED GOVERNANCE IS KEY

When local authorities, community representatives and civil society collaborate across governance levels, practical and participatory solutions can emerge. Coordinated action – such as joint water-sharing agreements or social pacts – demonstrates commitment, and builds trust between communities and institutions. As these agreements are implemented and monitored, visible results reinforce confidence in collective governance. This strengthens ownership and accountability, encourages further cooperation, and ultimately lays the foundation for sustained resilience and more peaceful community relations.

Recommendations for Iraqi Policymakers

Strengthen the integration of conflict sensitivity in the implementation of national and local adaptation plans, and nationally determined contributions. Ensure both vertical and horizontal inclusion in climate- and environment-related dialogues and decision-making by involving civil society, women, young people, key tribal leaders and religious leaders – enhancing legitimacy, trust and policy sustainability. The national government should also improve intergovernmental coordination, linking districts, governorate and federal levels to ensure climate- and conflict-related policies are better aligned and responsive to local needs.

Recommendations for Practitioners

Support national policymakers by translating locally grounded-conflict resolution frameworks into actionable, inclusive and conflict-sensitive interventions, while also contributing to the development of structured monitoring and accountability frameworks to track progress. Advance conflict-sensitive climate action by working with change agents and coalitions that drive long-term policy implementation, and foster peer learning and experience-sharing to ensure sustainable and locally rooted governance responses.

Recommendations for the International Community

Support the activation and operationalisation of multi-stakeholder climate security working groups and institutional coordination frameworks by providing resources, technical assistance, capacity-building and facilitation. These efforts can strengthen coordination between governments, civil society and international actors.

LESSON 4:

LOCALLY DRIVEN SOLUTIONS ARE VITAL FOR SUSTAINABLE PEACE AND CLIMATE ACTION

Inclusive, multi-stakeholder dialogue and mediation can foster practical, locally driven solutions to address climate security risks. Involving local authorities and communities throughout both development and implementation, along with participatory monitoring mechanisms, strengthens acceptance, commitment and the sustainability of climate-related agreements. Climate-sensitive peacebuilding and conflict-sensitive adaptation efforts often rely on individual officials rather than being embedded in government policies or structures, making progress vulnerable to election cycles and staff changes. This highlights the need to institutionalise these approaches to ensure sustainability and scalability.

Recommendations for Iraqi Policymakers

Currently, there is no formal mechanism for integrating climate security into governmental decision-making. Therefore, continuous engagement with stakeholders across all levels and sectors is essential to highlight the significance of addressing and preventing climate security risks and potential violence. Iraqi policymakers can further support this by empowering local governments to design and implement practical, locally tailored climate security solutions, and decentralising resources and decision-making to better respond to community needs.

Recommendations for the International Community and Practitioners

On the international level, international donors and partners can support Iraqi stakeholders – including civil society actors, women, young people and local leaders – by enhancing their access, visibility and capacity, ensuring their perspectives inform climate security agendas, actions and outcomes. Practitioners should invest in strengthening institutional capacities and broadening engagement to include wider community networks, promoting the sustainability and local ownership of climate-related mediation and dialogue processes.

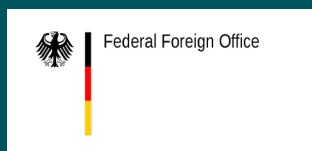
Outlook

Building on its achievements to date, the next phase of the project will emphasise government-led action and multi-level coordination. It will focus on scaling impact through deeper institutional engagement and expanded community ownership. Priorities include targeted training, peer learning and embedding climate-sensitive mediation within governance frameworks for long-term sustainability. Activities will enhance inclusivity – especially the participation of women and other marginalised groups – and foster trust between communities and government. By breaking down barriers and catalysing broader mobilisation, the project aims to influence policy and strengthen resilience to climate and environmental risks in Iraq, laying the foundation for lasting, systemic change.

AUTHORS

Nike Löble (Berghof Foundation), Alina Viehoff (adelphi research), Alexandra Steinkraus (adelphi research), Andreas Schädel (Berghof Foundation), Emma Whitaker (adelphi research)

SUPPORTED BY



PUBLISHED BY

adelphi research gemeinnützige GmbH
Alt-Moabit 91, 10559 Berlin, Germany
+49 (0) 8900068-0
office@adelphi-research.de
www.adelphi-research.de/en

LAYOUT

Odile Stabon

COPY EDITING

Jonathan West

DATE

October 2025

LICENSE

For texts in this publication, the publishers grant a license under the terms of Creative Commons Attribution No Derivatives 4.1 International. You may reproduce and share the license material if you name adelphi as follows: ‘© adelphi research CCBY ND 4.0.’ Photographs and graphics are not covered by this license. In case of doubt please contact adelphi research prior to reusing the material.

© adelphi research, 2025

SUGGESTED CITATION

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.

COVER PHOTO

© Berghof Foundation and Peace Paradigms Organisation