WEATHERING RISK
PEACE PILLAR

Impact Synthesis: Iraq Project

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

Updated October 2026 | Berghof Foundation

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- Conducting research, outreach and policy engagement on the climate-conflict nexus, combined with strengthening mediation and dialogue capacities, has equipped stakeholders with practical tools to address climate security risks, built trust and contributed to more collaborative and solution-oriented narratives between authorities and community representatives. This has enabled stakeholders to cooperate more effectively in addressing shared challenges.
- Facilitating dialogue and mediating inclusive agreements has contributed to more equitable water sharing, the establishment of conflict-prevention frameworks and resolution mechanisms, and stronger and more conflict-sensitive climate action.
- Connecting stakeholders across local, governorate and national levels has supported an enabling environment for the implementation of agreements. This multi-level engagement has scaled joint solutions, informed international programmes and strengthened coordination, producing more effective responses to climate security risks.

Established local-level agreements to address shared water and resource-management challenges and strengthen social cohesion that embed conflict-resolution mechanisms and climate action provisions across five 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.

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

Berghof Foundation

PEACE PARADIGMS

adelphi RESEARCH

Project Overview

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 strain vital resources, disrupt livelihoods and access to essential services, and can fuel tensions over resource distribution, exacerbate existing conflicts and grievances, undermine social cohesion and contribute to displacement. Climate-related pressures heighten the risk of increased and sustained conflict in areas already affected by weak governance, limited trust in public institutions, socio-economic marginalisation and unresolved inter-community grievances.

These climate-related pressures unfold in 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[1] 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 address shared challenges despite competing priorities. Thereby, 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 Peace Paradigm Organisation (PPO) pursue three overarching and reinforcing objectives that connect local conflict prevention with institutional change: 1) raising awareness and strengthen evidence of the climate-conflict nexus through research and trainings on analysing and addressing climate-related conflicts through mediation and dialogue; 2) Fostering locally led and inclusive dialogue and mediation processes between affected communities and relevant authorities that produce practical CEPS-related arrangements; 3) Supporting relevant authorities at district, governorate and national levels across the water, planning, agricultural, oil, education and security sectors to integrate climate-security and conflict-sensitivity considerations into planning, coordination and decision-making.

1 In 2026, these dynamics have become particularly salient as the United States winds down its military presence in Iraq while negotiations over the future role of U.S.-Iraq security cooperation and the status of Iran-aligned armed groups remain ongoing. Regional conflict has also increased the risk of attacks involving Iraqi armed groups and of wider tensions spilling into Iraq.

Kalar dialogue © Peace Paradigms Organisation

Key Outcomes and Insights[2]

BUILDING LOCAL CAPACITIES AND POLICY UPTAKE

The research, outreach campaigns, dialogues, roundtables and trainings implemented engaged community representatives, local and national authorities, and Iraqi civil society actors and international community of practice and organisations in selected districts. These activities contributed to a stronger understanding of how climate change interacts with existing conflict drivers, including resource competition, social inequalities, displacement, livelihoods and governance challenges.

At the local level, the approach supported community members, local authorities, tribal and community leaders, and civil society representatives in applying climate-security considerations to dialogue, mediation and conflict prevention and peacebuilding processes. Pre- and post-training surveys indicate increased self-reported confidence in mediation, dialogue facilitation and addressing climate-related and environmental issues. Many of the participants were able to put their new skills into practice through their participation in the dialogue and mediation processes

Iraq's updated Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC), published in September 2025, now includes a dedicated section on the climate-conflict nexus that draws on the 2023 climate security report by Berghof and PPO, providing evidence of national-level policy uptake.

FACILITATING INCLUSIVE AGREEMENTS TO ADDRESS CLIMATE SECURITY RISKS

The engagement facilitated five inclusive dialogue and mediation processes in Al-Zubair, Balad, Hawija, Kalar, and Tal Afar. These processes brought together community, religious 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

2 This synthesis report presents the key outcomes identified through the project's Theory of Change and outcome harvesting methodology, capturing both intended and unintended changes observed during implementation. The analysis covers the project period from July 2022 to August 2026 and draws on evidence of changes in behaviours, relationships and practices to assess the project's contribution to observed outcomes. A full outcome report provides further detail on the methodology, evidence and findings underlying this synthesis. Read the full outcome report here.

exacerbated by climate change. The dialogues addressed issues such as disputes over water access, resource allocation and climate-related displacement, providing opportunities for stakeholders with different perspectives and interests to engage in dialogue and explore practical solutions, as well as helping to build trust and cooperation among stakeholders with deep-seated grievances.

Through multiple rounds of dialogue sessions, five local agreements were developed and signed. Following their signing, the implementation phase began through continued cooperation with local directorates and the integration of agreed measures into local systems and practices. In several contexts, this extended the dialogue processes beyond the formal agreements and provided opportunities for continued coordination and follow-up.

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.

ESTABLISHING AND STRENGTHENING MECHANISMS FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND PREVENTION

The dialogue and mediation processes have established concrete conflict prevention mechanisms, including formal mechanisms, such as the Water Users Association, as well as social pacts, joint committees and mediation arrangements, that involve both community representatives and government officials.[3] Across both formal and informal mechanisms, inclusive participation - including women, young people and internally displaced persons alongside tribal leaders and local authorities – strengthened collective ownership and implementation.

For example, the Al-Zubair agreement established a social pact between internally displaced persons and host communities in the participating neighbourhoods, outlining principles for peaceful coexistence, equal access to services and joint approaches to conflict management. Local authorities supported follow-up and implementation efforts. These mechanisms not only help prevent and resolve disputes as they arise but also build trust and cooperation between communities and authorities.

In Balad, dialogue outcomes were transformed into an inclusive mechanism for water governance. Through the activation of the Hatamiyah Water Users Association, farmers, tribal leaders and local authorities now have a structured platform for coordinating water management and addressing disputes. By the end of 2025, the association had grown to 975 members, making it Iraq's largest Water Users Association by participation and water users. Importantly, the Water Users Association was established with existing tribal inequalities in mind, ensuring participation from both larger tribes and historically marginalised groups, helping reduce fragmentation and inter-tribal tensions. The Water Users Association is also beginning to complement traditional dispute-resolution mechanisms with more structured mediation and coordination, supported by closer engagement with the Ministry of Water Resources and the Dujail Directorate.[4]

BUILDING TRUST BETWEEN COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL AUTHORITIES

Beyond the formal agreements, the dialogue and mediation processes fostered greater trust between communities and local authorities. In Hawija, sustained engagement with communities and local authorities 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." Implementation of the agreement has shown strong progress despite continued water scarcity: water has been distributed according to agreed allocations, local authorities have actively supported follow-up and coordination, and the committee has helped identify and advocated for complementary solutions, including construction of wells and a water pipeline project that now provides water access to 28 villages. The removal of illegal water diversions and technical support provided by the Water Directorate have demonstrated greater institutional responsiveness, strengthening communities' confidence in local institutions.

3 The mechanisms established take different forms depending on the local context, with variations in mandate, composition and follow-up arrangements. Some are formally anchored within existing institutions, while others rely on locally agreed commitments and continued engagement to sustain cooperation.

4 For more information see: How communities are building climate resilience through shared water governance in Balad, Iraq.

INCLUSIVE RESOURCE ALLOCATION AND MANAGEMENT

A key achievement 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 in Kalar most in need of new wells. This inclusive, conflict-sensitive and participatory process produced a water-sharing agreement that ensured resource allocation reflected community priorities and eased tensions over water resources. The approach 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, local authorities, 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.[5] These engagements improved communication and coordination on climate security across government institutions and administrative levels, while creating spaces for ministries, local authorities, civil society and communities to exchange information, identify shared climate security concerns and jointly develop recommendations. They opened communication channels between actors who rarely engage directly, including between federal and governorate authorities and between government institutions and local communities.

In Dhi Qar, for example, facilitated engagement strengthened communication between local communities and the Ministry of Migration and Displacement, helping bring greater attention to climate-induced displacement and its impacts on livelihoods, basic services and social cohesion. Beyond improving coordination and coherence in government action, these exchanges generated interest in adapting locally tested approaches. For example, the Ministry of Water Resources is exploring the establishment of a Water Users' Association in Saqlawiyah/Fallujah, drawing on the experience of the successful activation of the Water Users Association in Balad. These developments demonstrate how dialogue can move beyond information exchange to create emerging institutional linkages, strengthen conflict-sensitive approaches and support more coherent, context-specific climate security responses.

Moving forward, these relationships and emerging practices can help embed climate security considerations more systematically into government policies and institutional frameworks.

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

Lessons and Recommendations

Continuous learning has been essential for improving implementation and generating insights relevant to the broader field, identifying the following key lessons on integrated programming:

LESSON 1:

SHARED CLIMATE SECURITY CONCERNS CAN HELP BRIDGE DIVISIONS AND ENABLE JOINT ACTION

The engagement was based on the premise that climate security risks can provide a practical entry point for dialogue, 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 provide common ground for dialogue, while also reflecting underlying political, social and governance challenges. This proved effective in practice. Communities long divided by historical grievances, competing interests and social tensions engaged constructively around shared challenges and reached consensus on locally owned agreements and action plans. Addressing tangible, climate-related issues – such as improving water distribution or restoring agricultural land – gave stakeholders concrete areas for cooperation and delivered immediate, visible benefits, strengthening confidence in the dialogue process. The mediated agreements also frame climate change as an external contributor to local pressures. This reduces blame, defusing pre-existing tensions, and allows stakeholders to focus on practical solutions rather than attributing problems to particular groups, encouraging more constructive, less confrontational dialogue.

Recommendations for Iraqi policymakers and international community

- Develop and support adaptive, context-specific mediation approaches for climate-related conflicts, framing climate risks as shared challenges while recognising their links to wider political, social and governance issues.
- Support the implementation of resulting agreements and locally led climate adaptation initiatives, with processes 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.

Recommendations for practitioners

- Address context-specific barriers to joint and sustainable solutions, particularly limited access to decision-making and governance processes for displaced people, young people, women and people living in remote areas.
- Facilitate inclusive climate-security dialogues that enable affected groups to shape conflict-sensitive climate adaptation measures and locally owned solutions.

LESSON 2:

SMALL-SCALE INITIATIVES WORK BEST WHEN THEY TURN DIALOGUE INTO VISIBLE, EQUITABLE ACTION

Small-scale climate initiatives[6] that support the implementation of agreements and dialogue outcomes can either reinforce existing divisions or strengthen connections, depending on how they are designed and implemented. A key lesson is that funding concrete measures in some districts, but not in others, risks creating perceptions of unequal treatment. Therefore, transparent selection criteria and clear communication about resource allocation are therefore essential. Initiatives are more likely to serve as positive factors when communities and authorities are involved in their design and implementation, with realistic expectations, accessible grievance channels, clear operation and maintenance arrangements and coordination with relevant development actors. Small initiatives are most useful when they are timely, equitable and matched by the capacity to sustain implementation. In particular, targeted investments, including repairs or adjustments in water infrastructure, can turn agreed solutions into visible action and strengthen commitment to the agreements.

6 These initiatives comprised small-scale, practical measures implemented alongside dialogue and mediation processes, including the rehabilitation and maintenance of water infrastructure, construction of water wells and pumps, and related training and awareness activities. They helped build trust between communities and authorities, enable mediated agreements to function in practice, and provide tangible incentives for continued engagement and cooperation.

Recommendations for Iraqi policymakers and international community

- Provide flexible, longer-term support for locally agreed climate actions and strengthen sustainable financing and implementation mechanisms, so that initiatives can be integrated into longer-term climate adaptation and resilience planning and maintained beyond individual projects.
- Strengthen the capacity, mandates and resources of local authorities to implement and maintain small-scale investments linked to mediation and dialogue processes, including through appropriate budget allocations, technical support and clear arrangements for operation and maintenance.
- Improve coordination across climate, peacebuilding and development efforts, so that investments linked to dialogue complement longer-term resilience and development priorities and contribute to a more coherent approach.

Recommendations for practitioners

- Link dialogue and mediation processes to practical actions that respond to locally identified climate and resource concerns, using small-scale initiatives to translate agreements into visible results.
- Apply conflict-sensitive criteria when selecting and implementing small-scale initiatives, considering who benefits, who may be excluded and how resource allocation could affect existing tensions.
- Involve communities and relevant authorities in the design, implementation and monitoring of initiatives, and establish accessible channels for raising concerns or addressing disputes around implementation.
- Coordinate small-scale investments with wider development and climate programming to avoid duplication and strengthen the sustainability of locally agreed solutions.

LESSON 3:

MEANINGFUL INCLUSIVE PARTICIPATION STRENGTHENS LEGITIMACY AND EFFECTIVENESS

Inclusive participation can strengthen the legitimacy and effectiveness of dialogue when different groups are able to meaningfully shape priorities, decisions and implementation, rather than being included only for representation. Bringing together community leaders, government authorities, civil society, youth and women helped bring different experiences and perspectives into the process and shape priorities, decision and implementation, Long-term engagement and trusted relationships can create the space for women to build on roles they already play in resolving everyday disputes, including around water and household resources, and in addressing pressures such as family tensions and access to basic services. These existing roles can become more relevant to climate security as resource scarcity and climate-induced internal migration and displacement intensify pressures on communities. However, barriers to participation remained, including social norms, unequal access to decision-making spaces and the risk that some groups, including IDPs and marginalised communities, are represented without having substantive influence. Going forward, context-specific approaches should include transparent selection criteria, separate consultations where needed, safe spaces for participation, and representation of women, youth, IDPs and marginalised groups in implementation and decision-making bodies. Regular channels for sharing concerns and recommendations can help ensure that issues such as water access, sanitation and displacement inform wider climate and resource decisions.

Recommendations for Iraqi policymakers and international community

- Create and support context-sensitive opportunities for women and men, youth, IDPs and marginalised communities to participate meaningfully in climate- and resource-related decision-making, including through representation in relevant implementation and decision-making bodies.
- Strengthen links between community engagement and formal decision-making processes, so concerns raised locally, such as water access, sanitation and displacement, can inform wider climate, resource and development policies and programmes.

Recommendations for practitioners

- Invest in long-term engagement and trusted relationships with communities, recognising and building on roles that women, youth, IDPs and marginalised groups already play in resolving everyday disputes, resolving conflicts or managing resource-related pressures. Use these existing community capacities and networks as entry points for climate-security engagement.
- Design participation around meaningful influence rather than attendance through separate consultations, safe spaces and accessible feedback mechanisms.

LESSON 4:

LOCAL EXPERIENCE IS MORE LIKELY TO INFORM NATIONAL POLICY WHEN ENGAGEMENT STARTS EARLY AND IS SUSTAINED

Local experiences and good practices are more likely to influence national policy when stakeholders are engaged from the beginning and remain involved throughout the process, through research, dialogues, trainings and consultations. Training was particularly important in building stronger understanding of government stakeholders of how climate change affects conflicts and equipping them with practical skills to apply conflict sensitive and climate sensitive tools in their own work. Consultations and roundtables helped connect local concerns with wider policy discussions. Small-scale initiatives can play a complementary role by providing concrete investments that demonstrate the practical benefits of locally agreed solutions. At the same time, translating local experience into wider policy and programming requires sustained engagement, coordination and clear links between local lessons and decision-making processes.

Trust and continued engagement are important for policy uptake, but it can be constrained by unclear mandates, limited budgets, staff turnover and changing political priorities. Early engagement of policy owners, alignment of evidence with decision-making cycles and follow-up on practical recommendations can help maintain links between local experiences and policy processes. Better coordination among international and development actors can also help ensure complementary programming and a more coherent approach linking peacebuilding with longer-term development efforts.

Recommendations for Iraqi policymakers and international community

- Strengthen institutional pathways for local experiences and lessons to inform national climate, adaptation, peacebuilding and development policies and programmes by aligning evidence and recommendations with policy and decision-making cycles.
- Support institutional capacity and continuity within relevant institutions, so climate-security approaches and locally generated lessons are embedded in policies and structures rather than depending primarily on individual officials, projects or funding cycles.
- Enhance coordination across government, development, climate and peacebuilding actors, helping to connect local initiatives with wider policy priorities and ensure that complementary programmes build on rather than duplicate locally generated experience.

Recommendations for practitioners

- Engage policy stakeholders from the beginning of local processes and maintain regular channels for exchange, allowing local experience to inform policy while enabling local actors to understand wider policy priorities and constraints.
- Strengthen monitoring, documentation and peer learning across local initiatives and processes, so lessons and evidence can be identified, shared and adapted across governorates and levels of government.

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 2026

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 licenses 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, 2026

SUGGESTED CITATION
Löble, N., Viehoff, A., Steinkraus, A., Schädel, A., Whitaker, E. (2026). 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