

Climate Induced Tensions and Conflicts in Bashiq

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Climate Induced Tensions and Conflicts in Bashiqa

Introduction

This report provides a comprehensive analysis of the context in Bashiqa, Nineveh, Iraq, with a particular focus on climate-induced tensions and conflicts. The analysis draws from a focus group discussion facilitated by Mr. Nineb Lamassu from the Sustainable Peace Foundation (SPF) and in his capacity as the Technical Coordinator of the Peace and Reconciliation Working Group – Iraq (PRWG – Iraq) and as part of the working groups efforts to engage the very affected communities to provide key insights and recommendations for potential entry-points for future interventions.

The discussion involved a diverse group of community members – inclusive and representative of the sub-district's communities and social groups - who shared insights on inter- and intra-community dynamics and the impact of climate change on these relationships.

Ethnic and Religious Composition

Bashiqa is a microcosm of Iraq's broader ethnic and religious diversity, home to Christians, Muslims, Yazidis, Shabak (both Sunnis and Shiites), Arabs (Sunnis), and Turkmen (Shiites). As one participant, a school principal, noted, "The dominant ethnicities that are living in Bashiqa are Christians, Muslims, and Yazidis. Also, there are other ethnicities such as Shabak, Arab, and Turkman." This diversity generally results in peaceful coexistence, contrasting with more volatile regions in Iraq; however, underlying tensions persist, primarily driven by resource competition and political dynamics.

Post-ISIS Dynamics

Following liberation from ISIS, Bashiqa experienced a rapid return to normalcy. One participant highlighted that "People returned to Bashiqa within six months after its liberation from ISIS. At the same time, life was normal within the first eight months after the liberation from ISIS and the schools were post-hastily opened within this short period." Despite this swift recovery, the scars of conflict and latent tensions remain, necessitating ongoing peacebuilding efforts.

Climate-Induced Tensions

Water Scarcity and Resource Competition

Water scarcity is a significant issue in Bashiqa, contributing to tensions between different ethnic groups. A Shiite Shabak activist, pointed out, "The government is working on drilling wells in the mountain of Bahzani which leads to a water crisis in the villages that are close to this mountain. Also, it causes a conflict between the Yazidis and Shabak since the Yazidis form

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the majority in Bahzani and they have the right to the lands where these wells are being drilled yet these wells are drilled by the Shabak community.” This highlights how government actions can exacerbate existing conflicts by creating disparities in resource access.

Water is a vital resource, and its scarcity in Bashiqa has a direct impact on agriculture, domestic use, and overall community well-being. The drilling of wells, while intended to alleviate water shortages, has led to unequal distribution, fostering resentment and conflict. The Yazidis and Shabak, who primarily inhabit areas near Bahzani Mountain, find themselves at odds, each accusing the other of monopolising water resources.

The government's role in managing water resources is crucial; however, the lack of transparent and equitable distribution policies has resulted in communities feeling marginalised. This issue underscores the need for a comprehensive water management strategy that includes all stakeholders, ensuring fair access and addressing grievances that fuel ethnic tensions.

Impact on Agriculture

Agricultural practices, particularly olive farming, are central to Bashiqa's economy; however, climate change and conflict have severely impacted this sector. A Yazidi female activist, noted, "The olive crops in Bashiqa were not affected by the environmental change that much as these stayed the same even during the ISIS conflict; however, it was ISIS that burned the olive groves and the majority of the Yazidi community accuses the Sunni-Shabak community of Fadhiliya – who remained during ISIS occupation of the area – to have been behind this action since they had a stake in this because they competed with Bashiqa over dominating Mosul's olive market." The deliberate destruction of crops by ISIS has thus left lasting damage on the inter community relations between the Yazidi community and the Sunni Shabak community in the sub-district, this is further compounded by environmental changes and economic disparities.

Olive farming is not just an economic activity; it is a cultural cornerstone for many in Bashiqa. The burning of olive trees by ISIS was not only an economic blow but also a symbolic attack on the community's heritage. This has resulted in psychological trauma and a loss of livelihood for many farmers.

Climate change exacerbates these challenges by altering weather patterns, affecting crop yields, and increasing the frequency of extreme weather events. These changes make it difficult for farmers to predict and plan their agricultural activities. As a result, many farmers are abandoning their fields, leading to a decline in agricultural productivity and an increase in economic instability. Consequently, the Yazidi community of Bashiqa fears a demographic change that would alter the current composition of Bashiqa since many owners are selling their abandoned fields to the highest bidders, which are often non-Yazidis.

Another resulting effect of the olive groves being abandoned is the urbanisation of the area since many are exploiting the land of their abandoned olive groves by building housing projects on them. This is of course after they have completely given up on farming these groves due to

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climate change and the high costs of starting anew after their groves were burned during ISIS occupation of the area.

Addressing economic disparities requires a multi-faceted approach. This includes economic development initiatives, access to credit and financial services, and support for small businesses and farmers. Promoting economic cooperation and collaboration among different ethnic groups can help to reduce competition and build mutual trust and understanding.

Pollution from Petrol Wells

Environmental pollution, particularly from petrol wells, has also been a source of tension. One key community leader mentioned, "Having these petrol wells is one of the issues that is mostly affecting the environment because the smoke that comes out from them has almost completely annihilated the bees in the area." This pollution not only affects agriculture but also has broader implications for community health and sustainability.

The presence of petrol wells near agricultural areas poses a significant threat to both the environment and the health of local residents. The emissions from these wells pollute the air, soil, and water, leading to a decline in crop yields and the death of pollinators like bees. This not only affects immediate agricultural output but also has long-term implications for food security and biodiversity.

The health impact on the local population includes respiratory problems, skin diseases, and other pollution-related illnesses. This environmental degradation contributes to the overall sense of neglect and marginalisation felt by the community, further fuelling tensions and conflicts.

Governance and Political Influence

The allocation of governmental positions often fuels ethnic tensions in Bashiqra. A young male activist, explained, "For instance in Alqosh the Yezidis are the majority in the sub-district whereas the Christians are merely the majority in the sub-district centre but the position of the sub-district mayor is always given to the Christians. Conversely, the Yazidis form the majority in Bashiqra's sub-district centre yet the position of the sub-district mayor is always given to a Shabak. This unequitable appointment of administrative officials is perceived as disfranchisement and marginalisation of the community." The perception of ethnic bias in political appointments undermines trust in governance and exacerbates community divisions.

Political representation and the distribution of power are critical issues in multi-ethnic communities. In Bashiqra, the allocation of governmental positions is seen as a zero-sum game, where one group's gain is perceived as another's loss. This creates a breeding ground for resentment and conflict, as ethnic groups vie for political influence to protect their interests.

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The lack of transparent and inclusive decision-making processes exacerbates these tensions. When appointments and policy decisions are made without consulting all stakeholders, it leads to feelings of disenfranchisement and marginalisation. This situation is further complicated by the involvement of external actors and political factions, which often have their own agendas and interests.

To address these issues, it is essential to promote inclusive governance and ensure that all ethnic groups have a voice in political processes. This includes creating mechanisms for regular dialogue and consultation, as well as ensuring fair and transparent electoral processes. Thus, promoting inclusive governance is essential for addressing these issues. This includes ensuring that all ethnic groups have a voice in political processes and creating mechanisms for regular dialogue and consultation. Transparent and fair electoral processes, as well as policies that reflect the diversity of the community, are crucial for building trust and ensuring political stability.

Social and Economic Challenges

Economic disparities and competition over resources have deep historical roots and continue to influence current dynamics. One key female community leaders highlighted that "There was competition in trade over dominating Mosul's olive market – going back as early as 1970s - between Bashiqa's Yazidi community and the Sunni Shabak community of Al-Fadhiliya, which led to conflicts in the past between these two areas." The economic impact of ISIS and environmental changes has deepened these disparities, contributing to ongoing tensions.

Economic inequality is a significant driver of conflict in Bashiqa. The competition for resources, jobs, and market access creates a zero-sum situation where the success of one group is seen as the loss of another. This dynamic is particularly pronounced in the agricultural sector, where access to land, water, and other resources is often contested.

The economic impact of past conflicts, such as the destruction of olive crops by ISIS, has exacerbated these disparities. Many farmers and small business owners have been unable to recover from the losses incurred during the conflict, leading to increased poverty and economic instability. This situation is further complicated by environmental changes, which affect agricultural productivity and create additional economic pressures.

Addressing these economic challenges requires a multi-faceted approach that includes economic development initiatives, access to credit and financial services, and support for small businesses and farmers. Additionally, promoting economic cooperation and collaboration among different ethnic groups can help to reduce competition and build mutual trust and understanding.

Community Cohesion and Isolation

Ethnic groups in Bashiqra tend to live in isolated silos, with limited interaction outside of crises. One participant noted, "In recent years the ethnicities have isolated themselves since they are not communicating with each other. They are living in separate silos. The ethnicities are working together only during an emergency crisis." This lack of regular interaction perpetuates misunderstandings and latent conflicts, highlighting the need for initiatives that foster ongoing dialogue and collaboration.

Community cohesion is critical for peace and stability. In Bashiqra, the lack of regular interaction among ethnic groups has created a sense of isolation and division. This isolation is reinforced by physical and social barriers, such as segregated neighbourhoods and separate social and cultural activities.

The lack of regular interaction creates fertile ground for misunderstandings, stereotypes, and prejudices. When ethnic groups only come together during crises, it limits opportunities for building trust and mutual understanding. This situation is further exacerbated by the legacy of past conflicts, which have left deep scars and unresolved grievances.

To promote community cohesion, it is essential to create spaces and opportunities for regular interaction and collaboration among different ethnic groups. This can include community dialogues, joint cultural and social activities, and collaborative projects that address common challenges. Additionally, promoting inclusive and participatory decision-making processes can help to build trust and ensure that all voices are heard.

Recommendations

Restitution and Government Intervention

Addressing the damage from past conflicts, such as the burning of olive crops, through government restitution and support for affected farmers is crucial. This includes financial compensation, technical support, and access to resources to help farmers rebuild their livelihoods.

Fostering Regular Interaction

Initiatives that promote regular interaction and collaboration among ethnic groups can reduce isolation and build trust. Community dialogues, joint cultural and social activities, and collaborative projects can serve as platforms for such interactions. These initiatives should be inclusive and participatory, ensuring that all voices are heard and respected.

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Sustainable Environmental Practices

Addressing environmental challenges, like water scarcity and pollution, through sustainable practices is essential. This includes implementing water management strategies that ensure equitable distribution, promoting sustainable agricultural practices, and addressing pollution from petrol wells. Environmental education and awareness campaigns can also help build community resilience and promote sustainable practices.

Political Inclusivity and Transparency

Improving political inclusivity and transparency in governmental appointments can help reduce perceptions of ethnic bias and marginalisation. This involves establishing mechanisms for regular dialogue and consultation, ensuring fair and transparent electoral processes, and promoting policies that reflect the community's diversity.

Economic Development Initiatives

To tackle economic disparities effectively, a comprehensive strategy is necessary. This should encompass economic development programmes, improved access to credit and financial services, and robust support for small businesses and farmers. Encouraging economic cooperation and collaboration among various ethnic groups can also reduce competition and foster mutual trust and understanding.

Community Cohesion and Capacity Building

Fostering community cohesion requires the creation of spaces and opportunities for regular interaction and collaboration among diverse ethnic groups. This can be achieved through community dialogues, joint cultural and social activities, and collaborative projects that tackle shared challenges. Additionally, capacity building initiatives, including training programmes and leadership development, can enhance community resilience and promote sustainable peace.

Conclusion

The focus group discussion in Bashiq reveals a complex interplay of ethnic relations, climate-induced tensions, and socio-political challenges. While the community demonstrates a facade of peace, underlying conflicts and resentments persist. Addressing these issues requires a multi-faceted approach, including government intervention, community engagement, and sustainable environmental practices, to build a resilient and cohesive community in Bashiq. Promoting inclusive governance, economic development, and community cohesion are critical steps towards achieving long-term peace and stability in the sub-district.