

LASER PULSE

Long-term Assistance and Services for Research (LASER)
Partners for University-Led Solutions Engine (PULSE)

Reinstating Cultural Practices in Northern Iraq: Phase One Report

SUPPLEMENT TO AGREEMENT NO.AID-7200AA18CA00009

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JULY 2021

This publication was produced for review by the United States Agency International Development (USAID). It was produced for the LASER PULSE Project, managed by Purdue University. The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.



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LASER PULSE collaborates with USAID missions, bureaus, and independent offices and other local stakeholders to identify research needs for critical development challenges, and funds and strengthens capacity of researcher-practitioner teams to co-design solutions that translate into policy and practice.

Acknowledgements

The report was written by Dr Dylan O’Driscoll and Shivan Fazil from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI); Dr Stacey Giroux and Dr Sarah Osterhoudt from Indiana University; and Dr Nabaz Mohammed, Dr Nashwan Shawkat Mahmood, and Prof. Rund A. Hamoudi from the University of Duhok.

Special recognition is due to the University of Duhok data collection team: Dr. Remonda Armia, Dr. Hassan Najman Muhamed, Dr. Atheel Najib Yousef, Dr. Wafaa Sabah Khudr, Dr. Ban Hikmat, Mirna Raad Azzo, and Rayan Hilal Khalat.

This report would not have been possible without the support of USAID’s Innovation, Technology, and Research Hub in Washington DC who funded and, jointly with its Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Bureau and Iraq Mission, provided critical feedback for the final version of this document. In particular, we would like to acknowledge the former Agreement Officer Representative, Brian Bingham, and Technical Advisor Clint Hanna, who supported immeasurably in the dissemination of the initial draft of the report to USAID Staff, and in its review process.

Last but not least, we would also like to show our appreciation to all those who supported us throughout the process of writing this report, noting especially our colleagues from the LASER PULSE Program and University of Notre Dame’s Pulte Institute for Global Development, without whose drive and dedication for this project, this report would not have been possible.

Suggested citation: O’Driscoll, D., Fazil, S., Giroux, S., Osterhoudt, S., Mohammed, N., Mahmood, N.S., & Hamoudi, R.A. (2021). Reinstating Cultural Practices in Northern Iraq: Phase One Report. LASER PULSE: Long-term Assistance and Services for Research (LASER) Partners for University-Led Solutions Engine (PULSE).

Executive Summary

Between 2014 and 2017, hundreds of thousands of Iraqis were killed, and millions of individuals were displaced, due to the Islamic State's (IS) occupation and the subsequent military campaign to defeat its forces. IS particularly targeted minority communities living in Ninewa province in northern Iraq, including Christians, Yazidis, Shabaks, Turkmen, and Kaka'i. Members of these minority communities were executed, enslaved, or forcibly converted to IS's radical form of Sunni Islam. Regional livelihoods based on farming and animal husbandry were devastated. IS also destroyed many historical, religious, and cultural heritage sites, leading to a sense of spiritual loss and community estrangement.

This project foregrounds the linkages between cultural meaning and agricultural landscapes to examine the compounded social, cultural, agricultural, and economic effects of the IS occupation on ethnic and religious minority communities in the Ninewa province, with a particular focus on the districts of Hamdaniya and Tal Kayf and the sub district of Bashiqa. It takes a systematic, landscape approach that underscores the cultural importance of agrarian activities in promoting economic security, cultural identity, and a sense of belonging. We consider agricultural activities quite broadly, including market crop cultivation, home gardens, livestock production, and the collection of wild plants. We also incorporate the local manufacture of culturally important products including olive oil, cheese, tahini, and locally milled bulgur.

The overall project has four main research objectives. Phase I of the project focuses on the first, second, and fourth objectives:

- Identify culturally valuable agricultural resources for members of minority groups;
- Determine the impact of IS occupation on these resources;
- Assist groups in the target geographies in re-establishing the production or use of these resources; and
- Strengthen the institutional capacity of the University of Duhok (UoD) to administer and support high-quality, sustainable research and extension activities.

This report presents the results of three rounds of key informant interviews, with 97 community leaders, 107 farmers and villagers, and 15 internally displaced people, as well as survey data gathered from 892 farmers and villagers.

The data show key areas of consensus across respondents. The ability to practice culture has played an important role in the majority of individuals' sense of belonging in Iraq and, for many, in their decision to return home. Farmers now struggle to make a living from agriculture, due in part to a lack of support for local products and competition with cheaper imports. They also struggle to secure capital and to replace damaged agricultural supplies and equipment. Activities that formerly promoted community cohesion both within and between ethnosectarian groups, such as using shared mills for wheat, ritual animal sacrifice, and large celebratory gatherings, continue to be impacted because of the destruction wrought by IS. In a related way, as movement

across landscapes is restricted by multiple factors, people note a concurrent loss of community connection previously forged through shared gatherings.

As expected in a region of significant social, economic, and ecological diversity, there are also points of departure among respondents and differences across geographical regions. For example, community leaders more often discussed inter-community tensions and potential conflict, while farmers and villagers overwhelmingly expressed willingness to cooperate and a lack of concern over ethnosectarian differences. While climate change is affecting all respondents, those without access to irrigation struggle more, as do respondents living in Hamdaniya. Groups also differ in terms of the relative importance of crops and livestock to their livelihoods and cultural practices.

Based on this research and consultations with the project team, we have identified several avenues for Phase II project activities. These projects each have the potential to strengthen the generative connections between cultural meaning and agricultural landscapes, and to support community resilience, recovery, and healing over the long term. These activities include:

- Advocacy efforts to include cultural components and other important research findings in the activities of other actors carrying out interventions in Ninewa.
- A focus on wild plants, including information gathering; community exchange through cooperative workshops on planting, cooking, and storytelling; and skill-building through resource mapping.
- Diversification of markets and market linkages, including livestock and value-added products that draw from existing cultural and agricultural strengths and knowledge.
- Extension efforts, including local and regional farmer association development that may include the sharing of equipment, market access, and knowledge among members.
- Cultural awareness: launching a social media campaign and providing cultural awareness meetings to community leaders.
- Knowledge production: turning the data collected into knowledge through reports, academic articles, and op-eds.
- Continued capacity building and enhancing the partnership with the University of Duhok.

All activities should be guided, above all, by the “do no harm” principle and should not exasperate community inequities, tensions, or vulnerabilities. Scale is another important consideration. Many of the underlying issues people face in the region, including landmine removal, replacement of expensive agricultural equipment, and rebuilding of infrastructure, are large-scale in nature and likely beyond the scope of the project. The project can, however, work with communities to help identify and form linkages with other programs addressing these important issues.

List of Acronyms

| | |
|-------------|--|
| GoI | Government of Iraq |
| IDPs | Internally Displaced Persons |
| IED | Improvised Explosive Device |
| INGO | International Non-Governmental Organization |
| INSO | International NGO Safety Organization |
| IOM | International Organization for Migration |
| IQD | Iraqi Dinar |
| IS | Islamic State |
| IU | Indiana University |
| KII | Key Informant Interview |
| KRG | Kurdistan Regional Government |
| KRI | Kurdistan Region of Iraq |
| LASER-PULSE | Long-Term Assistance and Services for Research-Partners for University Led Solutions Engine |
| NGO | Non-Governmental Organization |
| SIPRI | Stockholm International Peace Research Institute |
| UoD | University of Duhok |
| USAID | U.S. Agency for International Development |

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1. Introduction

The scars left by the Islamic State's (IS) three-and-a-half-year occupation in northern Iraq are deep. Between 2014 and 2017, hundreds of thousands of Iraqis were killed and millions more were displaced or succumbed to starvation or disease as a result of IS's occupation and the military campaign to defeat it. Atrocities committed by the group included the genocide of the Yezidi minority in their ancestral lands in Sinjar, northern Iraq, as well as the killing and abduction of thousands of Yezidi women and girls.¹

IS particularly targeted minority communities living in Ninewa province in northern Iraq—Christians, Yezidis, Shabaks, Turkmen, and Kaka'i, among others.² The Ninewa Plains has historically been home to many cultural groups living side by side and represents an important part of Iraq as a multicultural society. However, it is also a disputed territory, where since 2003 the Government of Iraq (GoI) and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) have competed for administrative authority. This competition was partly responsible for the failure to deliver on the needs of the region's population, and gradually increasing insecurity and tension, including between the minority communities themselves.

The arrival of IS forces saw a far more rapid and sudden deterioration. Members of these minority communities were executed, enslaved, or forcibly converted to IS's radical form of Sunni Islam. Some fled before the group's arrival, while it forcibly displaced many others. Their sources of livelihood, such as farmland, olive groves, livestock, and factories were also devastated.

The deliberate damage that IS inflicted on these groups' cultural identities is far less often discussed. It destroyed historical and cultural heritage sites, cemeteries, shrines, and other sacred objects. It desecrated religious structures such as churches, mosques, and temples, or it used them for military purposes. In less tangible ways, IS's actions also undermined the communities' ability to perform cultural practices, such as rituals and pilgrimages. In short, IS sought to prevent people from living as Christians, Yezidis, Shabaks, Turkmen or Kaka'i. This was a deliberate bid to erase the traces of centuries of ethnosectarian coexistence in the region, a notion that IS vehemently rejects.³

A joint assessment by the World Bank and the GoI estimates the cost of damages to historic religious buildings by IS at around IQD 56.2 billion (roughly US\$47 million),⁴ with some of the oldest and most prominent sites destroyed or vandalized.⁵ IS also systematically destroyed farms,

¹ World Bank., 'Iraq Reconstruction and Development: Damage and Needs Assessment of Affected Governorates', Jan. 2018, <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/29438>

² See [Appendix 1](#) for more information on the minorities.

³ Buffenstein, A., 'A Monumental Loss: Here Are the Most Significant Cultural Heritage Sites That ISIS Has Destroyed to Date', *Artnet*, 30 May 2017, <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/isis-cultural-heritage-sites-destroyed-950060>

⁴ World Bank, (note 1).

⁵ Curry, A., 'Here Are the Ancient Sites ISIS Has Damaged and Destroyed'. *National Geographic*, 1 Sep. 2015, <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/history/article/150901-isis-destruction-looting-ancient-sites-iraq-syria-archaeology>

sabotaged wells and irrigation systems, cut down trees, and stole machinery and livestock, eliminating the livelihoods on which communities depended.⁶ The damage that IS occupation inflicted on the social fabric of Ninewa Plains—on the diverse communities and the way they coexist—is intrinsically connected to this destruction, but much harder to value.

For example, olives play a central and multifaceted role in many communities. In Bashiqa—a town north of Mosul and home to many Christians, Yezidis and Shabaks—IS devastated olive groves, some of them centuries old, containing hundreds of thousands of olive trees.⁷ While the town is now liberated, its once-thriving olive business, specializing in olive oil and olive soap, will take years to recover. But olive trees also have a significance far beyond their economic value for many of Ninewa’s minority groups. They are symbols of peaceful coexistence and objects of veneration.⁸

Animal husbandry was another economic mainstay of many communities, and the industry was devastated by losses of livestock during the occupation, as animals were stolen, slaughtered, or abandoned.⁹ But livestock are also used for animal sacrifice by many of the minority groups, and the meat is often shared among the community, particularly its poorer members. Such sacrifices may be used to fulfill vows made in times of distress and play an important role in all important celebrations.¹⁰

Reconstruction in Ninewa to date has mainly focused on the more physical, visible aspects, such as rebuilding houses and infrastructure, demining and restoring livelihoods. These are undoubtedly important for facilitating the return of the hundreds of thousands of people who are still displaced. But if the aim is to re-establish these communities for the long term, more attention needs to be given to reinstating cultural identity, and the ability to practice unique customs, rites, and traditions. These underpin the communities’ sense of belonging in Ninewa and in Iraq.

This report highlights key opportunities to help ensure that these cultural practices can continue and are sustainable in the future. It is part of the ‘Cultural Restoration Program for Northern Iraq’ project funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) through LASER PULSE. The project is carried out by the consortium of Indiana University, Purdue University, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, the University of Notre Dame, and the University of Duhok.

⁶ ‘Dead Land: Islamic State’s Deliberate Destruction of Iraq’s Farmland’, *Amnesty International*, 13 Dec. 2018, <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/files/2018-12/DEAD%20LAND%20-%20MDE%2014.9510.2018.pdf?DbbHTVyuGhxPi4eiODHYFVadzHjoGRP3=>

⁷ ‘Iraq’s olive region looks to rebuild after severe damage by ISIL’, *CGTN*, 15 Dec. 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G_RufisMWVc

⁸ ‘Lalish Temple: Life is Back to the Heart of the Yazidi Faith’, *Shafaq News*, 7 Jun. 2020, <https://shafaq.com/en/report/lalish-temple-life-is-back-to-the-heart-of-the-yazidi-faith>

⁹ ‘The Impact of ISIS on Iraq’s Agricultural Sector: Situation Overview’, *RFSAN*, Dec. 2016, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/07122016_IRO_Iraq_Agri_Brefing_V2.pdf

¹⁰ Ashi, J., ‘In Pictures: Yezidis celebrate New Year at ancient temple’, *Middle East Eye*, 18 Apr. 2019, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/pictures-yezidis-celebrate-new-year-ancient-temple>

The report first describes the methods used to gather and summarize the research data. We then organized the results in terms of themes such as farming, social cohesion, and the importance of culture, focusing on the nexus of agriculture, culture, and livelihoods and how the research illuminates the strong connections among them in securing the long-term future of these cultural practices. In this way, the research also demonstrates the importance of systems thinking and a community-based approach to the work to be undertaken in Phase 2 of the project. Finally, a recommendations section closes the report. There, we lay out some general principles for implementation, of which the most important may be to do no harm, and some specific ideas for Phase 2.

2. Methodology

In this report, we focus on key informant interviews (KIIs) and survey data, though the project also included a literature review, and interviews with representatives from national and international nongovernmental organizations working in the region, all of which helped inform the instruments used in the KIIs and survey discussed here. Data collection activities included interviews with local stakeholders such as civil society, religious figures, community, and political leaders, as well as with internally displaced persons (IDPs); a structured survey instrument administered to villagers and farmers; and a second round of interviews with farmers and villagers in the area. Work on the data collection began in May 2020 and concluded in April 2021 (Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1: Major milestones for instrument development and data collection



Each of the data collection instruments was developed jointly by project team members from all institutions involved. The first set of KIIs was conducted by three of the project team who were trained in interview techniques by Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) and Indiana University (IU). The 97 interviews (see Table 1 and 2 for breakdown) were then coded using MaxQDA and summarized by one of those team members. For the surveys, five local multilingual enumerators (two men and three women) facilitated surveys with 892 farmers and villagers. The gender balance was 46.2% women and 53.8% men. The ethnosectarian makeup of the survey is fairly representative of the area, see Figure 2.2. The survey was programmed in Mobenzi in Arabic, Syriac, and Kurdish, and respondents used tablets to take the survey. Respondents were not identified by name and the opportunity for self-administration meant that individuals did not have to share potentially sensitive information such as ethnosectarian group directly with enumerators. The enumerators were hired through the University of Duhok and given full training on conducting household surveys and key-informant interviews by SIPRI and IU. The second round of KIIs was conducted by a subset of the enumerators who collected the survey data, and they were re-trained, again jointly by team members from SIPRI and IU, with a focus on the differences between surveys and interviews and how to administer this type of instrument. This effort yielded 107 interviews (see Table 1 and 2 for breakdown) which were

coded and summarized by two team members, each coding roughly half the interviews. The two coders met regularly to discuss the codes in use and how they were applying them, periodically adjusting the codes and their usage to ensure consistent use of the codes.

Table 2.1: Breakdown of interviews by target locations

| Community Leaders | | | | | | |
|-----------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|
| Locality | Yezidi | Christian | Shabak | Kakai | Turkmen | Total |
| Hamdaniya | - | 11 | 9 | 5 | 3 | 28 |
| Tal Kayf | 1 | 18 | 1 | - | 2 | 22 |
| Bashiqa | 15 | 1 | 10 | - | 5 | 31 |
| Other ¹¹ | 5 | 1 | - | 6 | 1 | 13 |
| Grand total | 21 | 31 | 20 | 11 | 11 | 94 |
| Villagers and Farmers | | | | | | |
| Locality | Yezidi | Christian | Shabak | Kakai | Turkmen | Total |
| Hamdaniya | - | 13 | 12 | 11 | 6 | 42 |
| Tal Kayf | 17 | 17 | - | - | - | 34 |
| Bashiqa | 11 | - | 17 | - | 3 | 31 |
| Grand total | 28 | 30 | 29 | 11 | 9 | 107 |

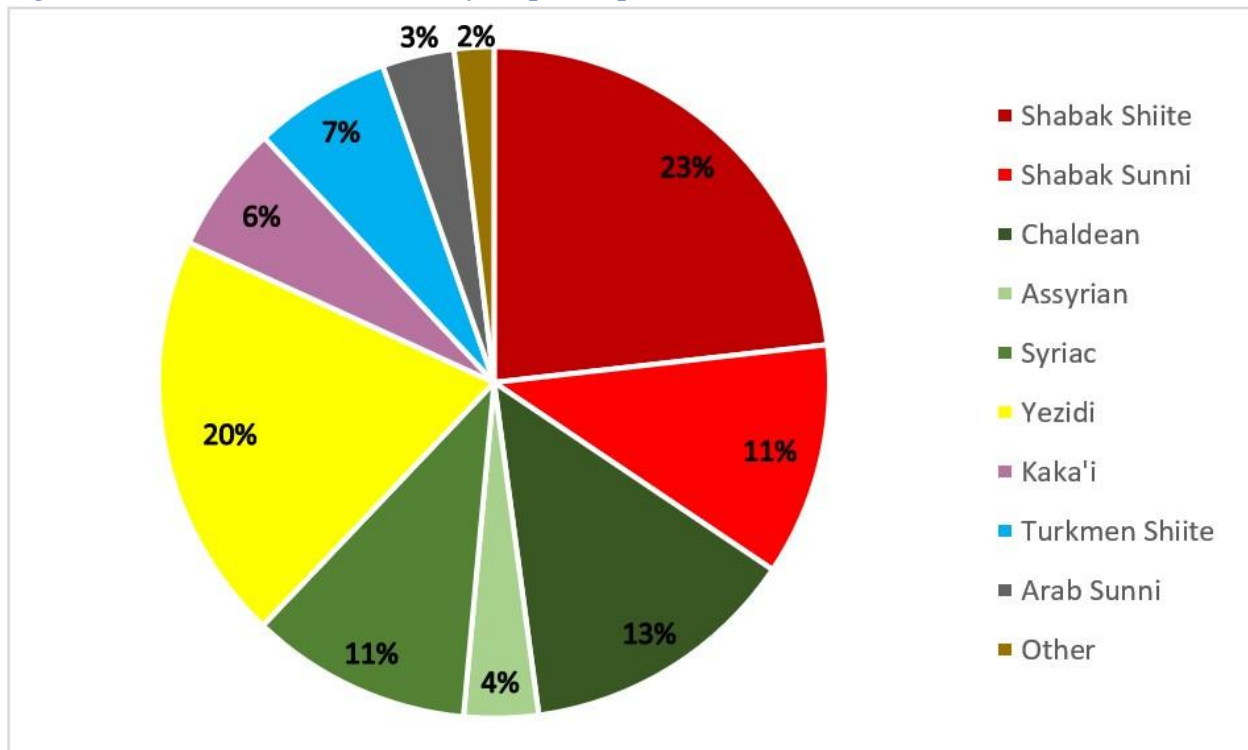
Table 2.2: Breakdown of interviews by gender

| Community Leaders | | | | | | |
|------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|
| | Yezidi | Christian | Shabak | Kakai | Turkmen | Total |
| Male | 14 | 20 | 14 | 8 | 5 | 61 |
| Female | 7 | 11 | 6 | 3 | 6 | 33 |
| Grand total | 21 | 31 | 20 | 11 | 11 | 94 |
| Villagers and Farmers | | | | | | |
| | Yezidi | Christian | Shabak | Kakai | Turkmen | Total |
| Male | 17 | 16 | 14 | 6 | 5 | 58 |
| Female | 11 | 14 | 15 | 5 | 4 | 49 |
| Grand total | 28 | 30 | 29 | 11 | 9 | 107 |
| Internally Displaced Persons | | | | | | |
| | Yezidi | Christian | Shabak | Kakai | Turkmen | Total |
| Male | 2 | 2 | 5 | - | - | 9 |
| Female | 2 | 2 | - | - | 2 | 6 |
| Grand total | 4 | 4 | 5 | - | 2 | 15 |

¹¹ Other refers to community leaders that represent the community, but do not live in our target area. They predominantly live in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq

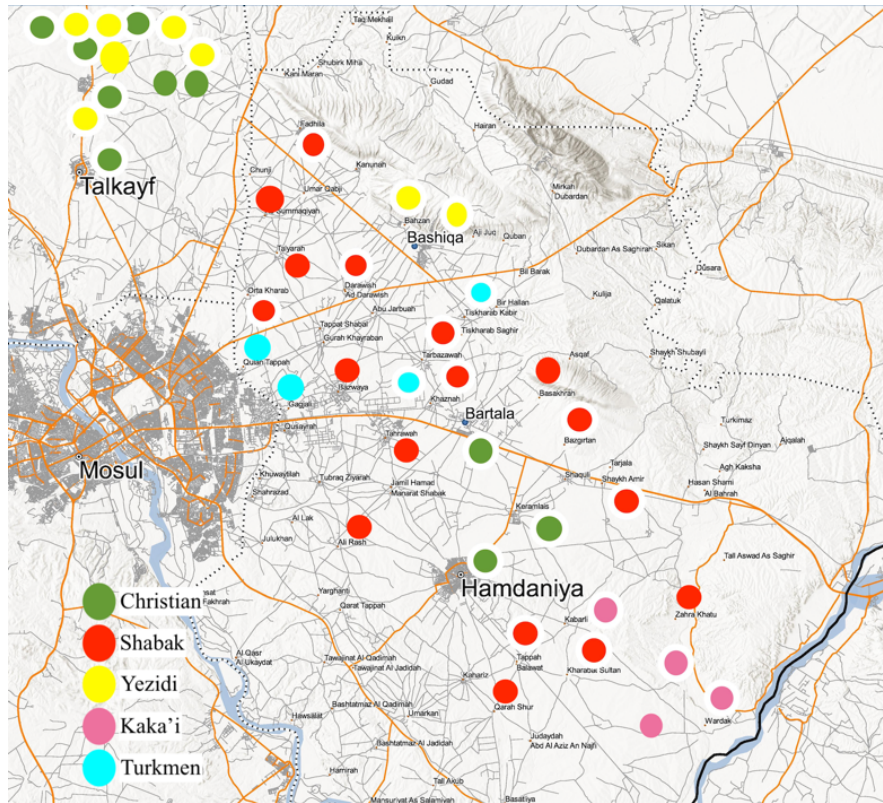
In addition to seeking respondents’ gender balance and particular proportions of each ethnosectarian group in each of the data collection steps, sampling was conducted to help ensure representativeness in a number of additional ways. For the first round of KIIs, the project strove, where possible, for equal gender representation, for representation of the various ethnosectarian groups in keeping with their population size, and for representation from within the various parts of Hamdaniya, Tal Kayf, and Bashiqa. For the surveys, villager/farmer status and geography were the two additional sampling considerations. We aimed for an even balance of farmers and villagers across the region and sampled Hamdaniya, Tal Kayf, and Bashiqa based on population size. For the second round of KIIs, again an even balance between farmers and villagers was planned across the region 'and a gender representation that was as balanced as possible.' Again, we worked for representation of the various ethnosectarian groups based on population size, and representation from within the various parts of Hamdaniya, Tal Kayf and Bashiqa.

Figure 2.2: Ethnosectarian identity of participants



Map 1 highlights where the surveys and interviews were conducted for each group – with Christians referring to Assyrians, Chaldeans, and Syriacs.

Map 2.1: Location and ethnosectarian identity of interviews and surveys¹²



The analysis presented here consists of descriptive statistics for the survey data complemented by qualitative information drawn from the themes identified in the three sets of KIIs. Any survey results disaggregated by age (specifically looking for differences for 18-35s), gender, location (by subdistrict), or ethnosectarian group are presented where there were distinct differences – that is, while disaggregated descriptive statistics were calculated for every survey question, not all of those results are presented here.

¹² Map adapted from International NGO Safety Organisation (INSO).

3. Importance of Culture

Key takeaways:

- Over half of respondents report more difficulty practicing their culture now.
- Nearly three-quarters of respondents who were displaced said that being able to practice their culture and rituals was important in their decision to return home.

Just over 50% of those surveyed see practicing culture as being more difficult post-IS (Figure 3.1). This varies by ethnosectarian group, with a range of 65% of Christians to 46% of Turkmen finding it more difficult. Some of this difficulty is connected to displacement or lack of access; for example, a Yezidi community leader interviewed highlighted how *“for three to four years that we lived away from our areas especially from Bashiqa and Sinjar, we were grieving as we could not celebrate our feasts and occasions. They were hard days and impacted us a lot both physiologically and financially.”*¹³

The difficulty in practicing culture is a significant issue given that 86% of those surveyed see the freedom to practice culture as being very important in relation to their community's identity, sense of belonging, and future in Iraq (Figure 3.2). The importance of freedom to practice culture was higher for 18–24-year-olds ($n = 81$) with 93% seeing it as very important, which conflicts with the way community leaders discussed young people's lack of interest in culture. We note that this may be due to different perceptions of what is meant by “culture,” with community leaders possibly equating it more with religion than younger people do.

¹³ Interview conducted in September 2020 via Skype with a female Yezidi community leader from Bashiqa.

Figure 3.1: Ability to practice culture (i.e., participate in religious and other cultural events) now in comparison to pre-IS

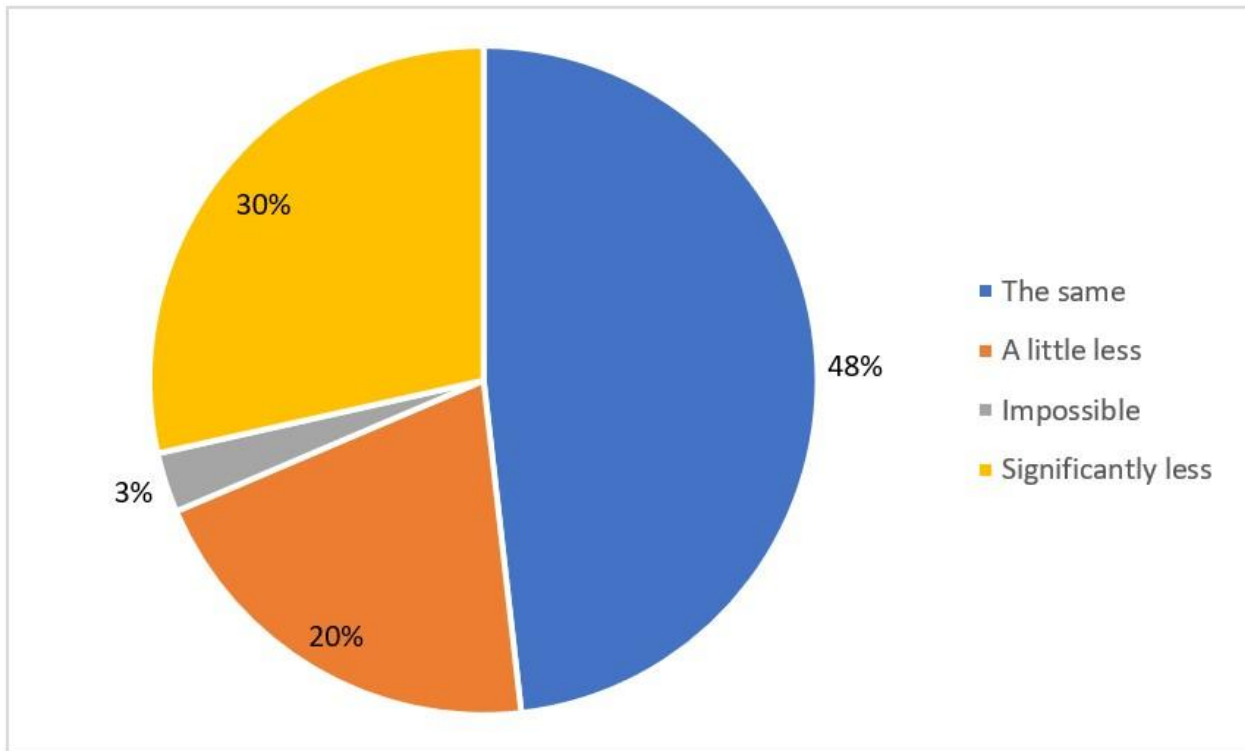
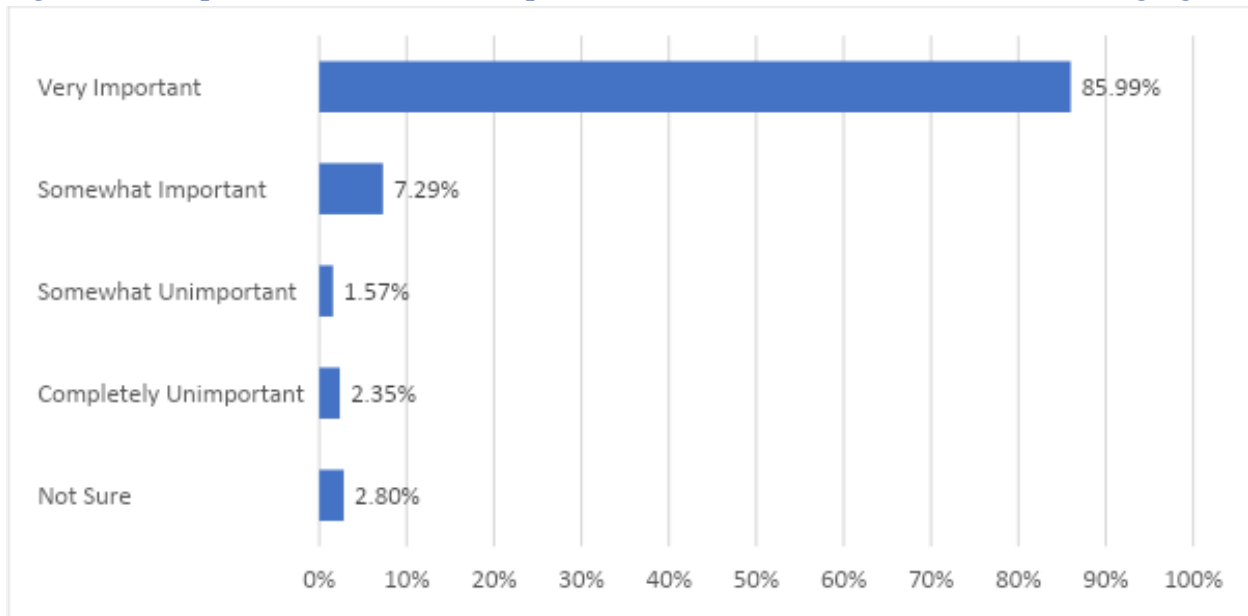


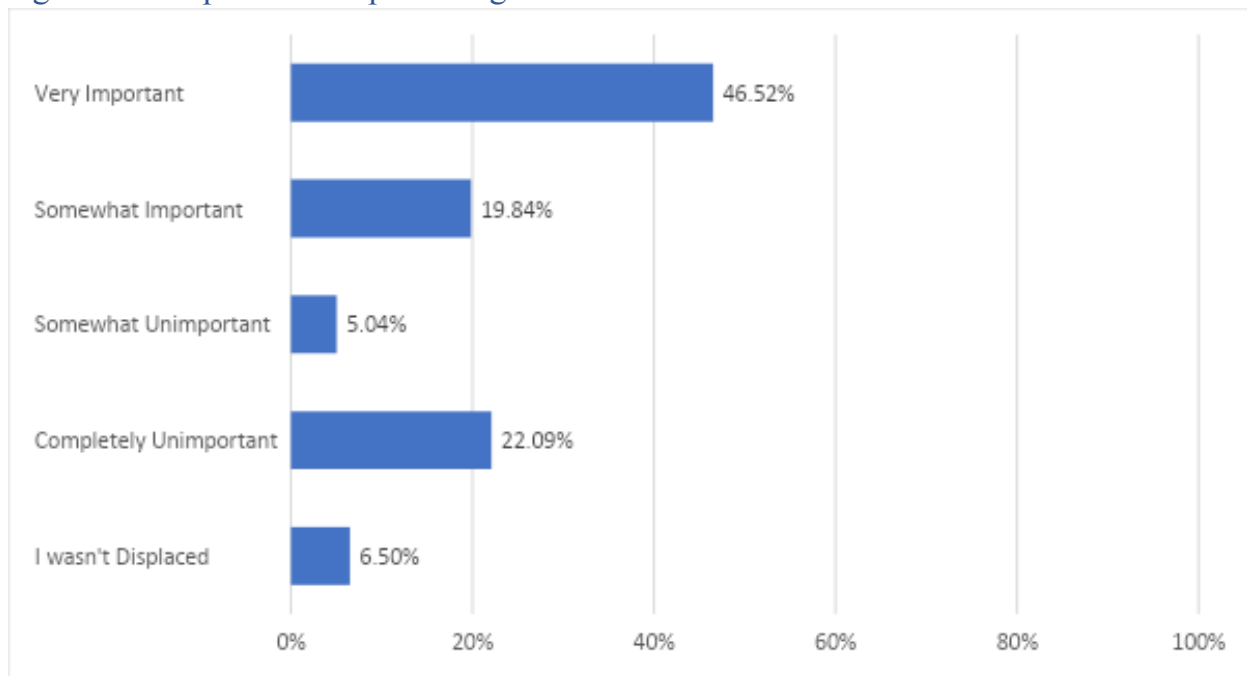
Figure 3.2: Importance of freedom to practice culture in relation to sense of belonging



There is a large body of work that examines the obstacles to returning home for these populations, and security and employment opportunities are seen as the most significant

barriers.¹⁴ However, the majority of our respondents who were displaced also see their ability to practice culture and rituals to have been key to their decisions to return home (Figure 3.3). For Yazidi and Kaka’i respondents, it is especially important, with 76% and 78% respectively stating that the role of culture was very or somewhat important in their decision to return. Christians and Shabaks had access to alternative houses of worship in the KRI and southern Iraq (Baghdad, Najaf, and Karbala respectively) and were able to continue practicing rituals during displacement. However, Yezidi and Kaka’i community leaders reported that their houses of worship, temples, and shrines are located solely in their areas of origin in Ninewa Plains, and unlike Christians and Shabaks have no houses of worship in the KRI. This likely helps explain why the ability to practice culture and the decision to return home was more pronounced among Yezidi and Kaka’i respondents.

Figure 3.3: Importance of practicing culture in the decision to return home



All of the above further underscores the importance of this project. Culture is important to these communities’ sense of belonging in Iraq, it is a factor in return or not migrating out of the country, and finally, it has traditionally played a part in fostering both intra- and inter-community cohesion.

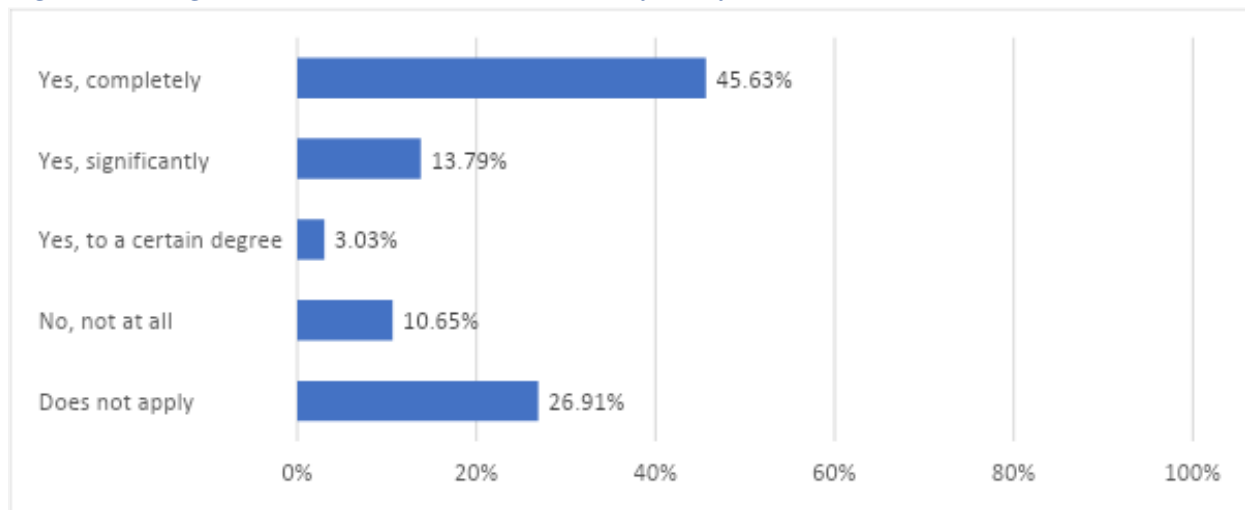
¹⁴ ‘Rural Areas In Ninewa: Legacies of Conflict on Rural Economies and Communities in Sinjar and Ninewa Plains’, *IOM*, 28 Nov. 2019, <https://iraq.iom.int/publications/rural-areas-ninewa-legacies-conflict-rural-economies-and-communities-sinjar-and-ninewa>; ‘Protracted Displacement Study: An In-Depth Analysis of The Main Districts of Origin’, *IOM*, 1 May 2019, <https://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/protracted-displacement-study-depth-analysis-main-districts-displacement>; ‘Understanding Ethno-Religious Groups in Iraq: Displacement and Return’, *IOM*, Feb. 2019, <https://iraq.iom.int/publications/understanding-ethno-religious-groups-iraq-displacementand-return-report>

4. Farming and Livestock

Key takeaways:

- All minority groups’ agricultural livelihoods and animal husbandry have been significantly impacted by IS.
- Kaka’i report the most impact in terms of both livestock loss and agricultural destruction at the hands of IS in general.
- The loss of livestock presents a culture-related impediment for all groups, as animal sacrifice is an important ritual and benefits communities in multiple ways.

Figure 4.1: Agricultural lands/livestock destroyed by IS

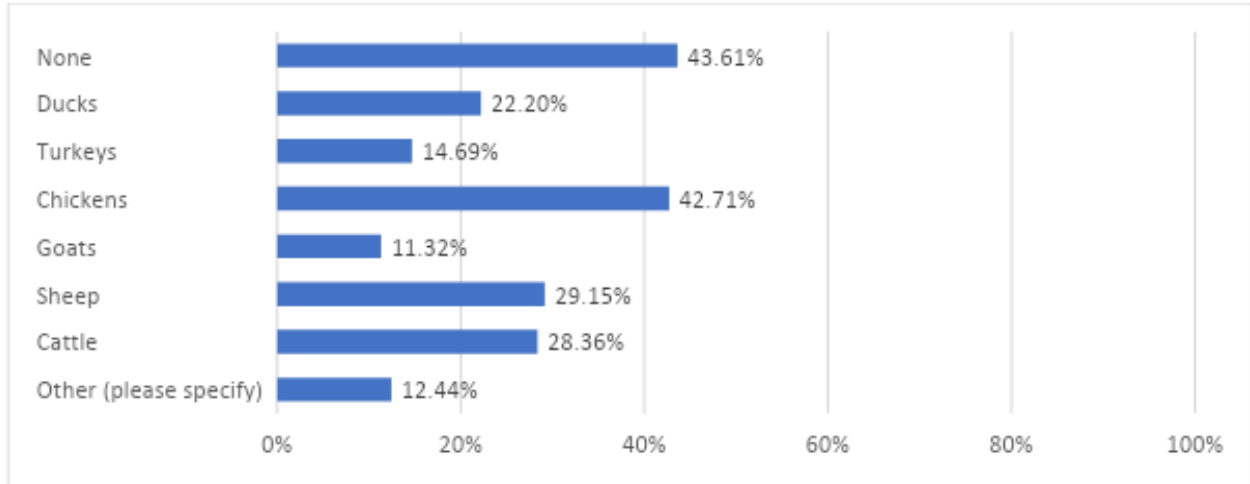


Agricultural destruction by IS was high for all groups (Figure 4.1). It was particularly high for Kaka’i at 71%. The losses incurred include orchards and olive trees, crops of wheat and barley, agricultural machinery, livestock, including poultry projects, hatcheries, fish farms, and beekeeping, as well as factories for producing tahini and date syrup (molasses), olive oil, and soap.

Despite the significant time that has passed since the territorial defeat of IS in the Ninewa Plains, when compared to pre-IS times, just over 10% more of those surveyed no longer farm vegetables or fruit (55%; [Figures 1 and 2 in Appendix 2](#)). While only 13% more of those surveyed no longer keep livestock, the portfolios of livestock kept have shifted significantly (Figures 4.2 and 4.3). In general, people have managed to recover smaller livestock such as chickens, but have been less successful with larger livestock such as cows or sheep. However, the different ethnosectarian groups rely on agriculture and livestock to different extents and thus have been impacted in distinct ways, with some reporting that agricultural crops are more important to them than livestock, while others say that livestock is more important. Christians, in general, keep less livestock than other groups, so were impacted less in that area, while Kaka’i, Turkmen, and Shabak, who in particular have a history of cattle breeding, have been more reliant on livestock than on agriculture. Kaka’i have especially been heavily impacted by the loss of livestock, with about 27% more respondents no longer keeping any livestock and especially high reductions in

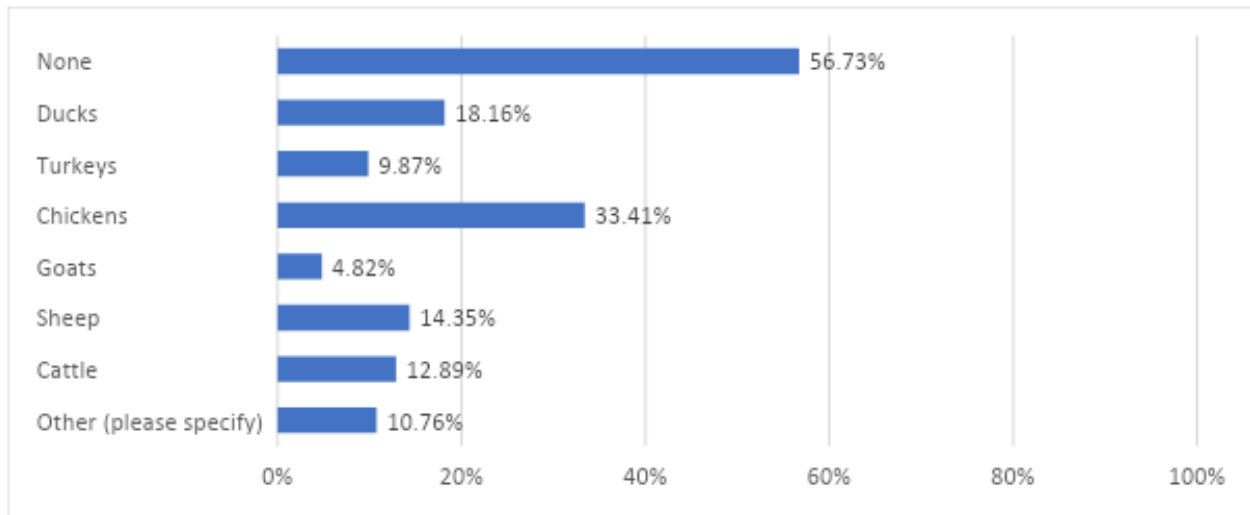
keeping cattle, sheep, and goats (Figures 4.4 and 4.5). This is consistent with that group reporting the most livelihood-related destruction by IS.

Figure 4.2: Livestock kept prior to IS



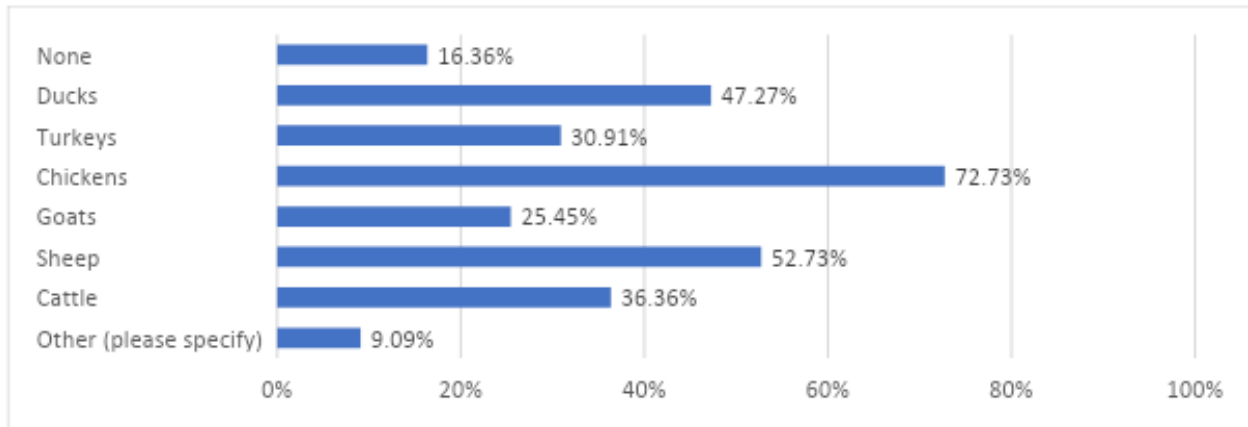
Note: Participants could provide more than one response.

Figure 4.3: Livestock kept post-IS



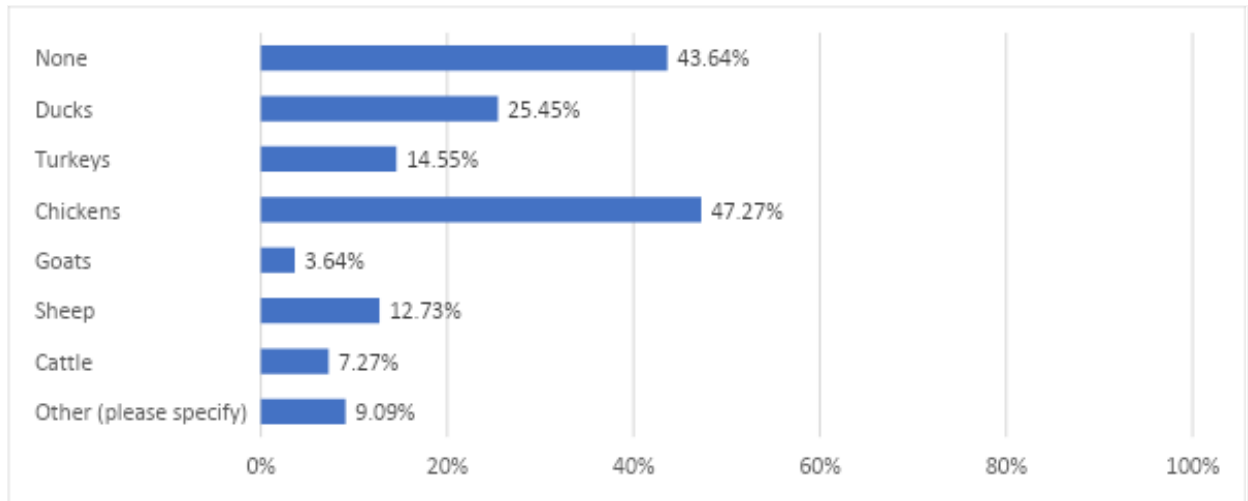
Note: Participants could provide more than one response.

Figure 4.4: Livestock kept prior to IS: Kaka’i



Note: Participants could provide more than one response.

Figure 4.5: Livestock kept post-IS: Kaka’i



Note: Participants could provide more than one response.

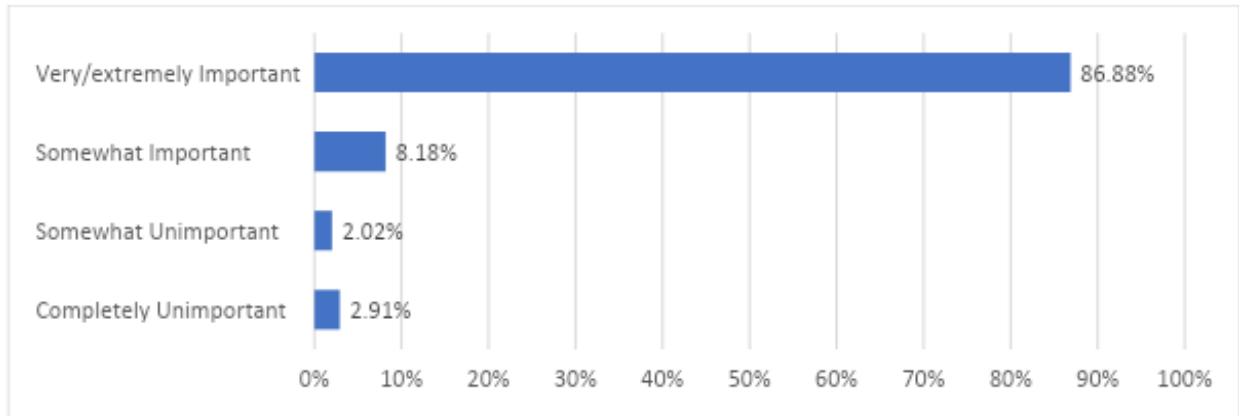
However, it is important to remember that livestock is of significant cultural importance to all ethnosectarian groups: 87% of those surveyed (ranging from 75% of Christians to 94% of Shabaks) see animal ritual offerings as very important (Figure 4.6). The decrease in the number of households keeping livestock as a result of IS has negatively affected people’s ability to practice animal sacrifice and therefore is a significant cultural impediment. Animal sacrifice plays an important role among all minority groups, especially during religious commemorations and holidays that bring people both within and outside the community together. The meat from animal sacrifice is also typically distributed to poorer community members.

“[give the meat from sacrifice to] whoever you want. But the most important thing is that you cook it. These are our traditions, and they must be maintained.”¹⁵

¹⁵ Interview conducted in February 2021 with a female Yezidi farmer from Bashiqa.

In addition to its cultural importance, livestock is also reported as a source of generating steady income through selling its various products such as milk, cheese, yogurt, wool, meat, and so on.

Figure 4.6: Importance of animal ritual offerings



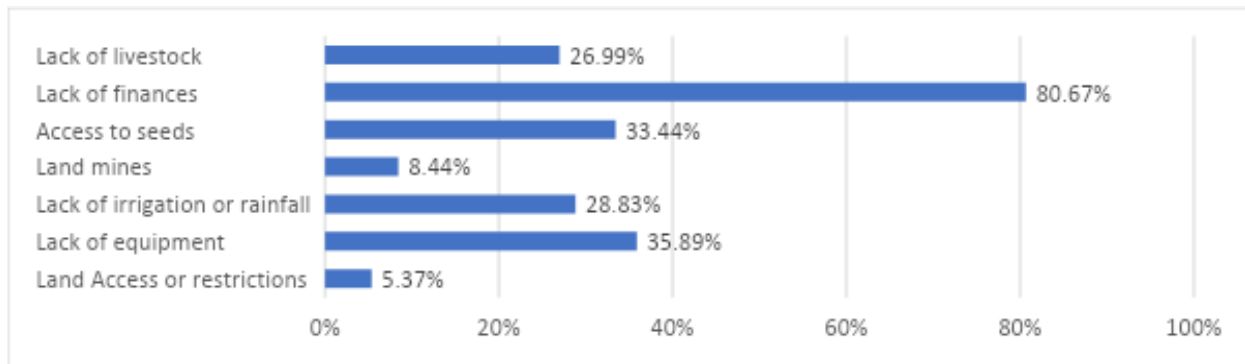
5. Obstacles to Farming

Key Takeaways:

- Economic obstacles in the form of lack of finances and support from the state are the most frequently cited problems for farming.
- Frequent dry spells and droughts threaten the sustainability of grain farming, wheat and barley, which are the two main winter cereal crops and almost entirely rain-fed.
- The lack of government support for obtaining supply sets (such as pest control, fertilizers, seeds etc) and electricity to operate wells and irrigation systems were among the most cited challenges.

Lack of finances (81%) followed by lack of equipment (36%) are seen by those surveyed as the two biggest obstacles to farming post-IS (Figure 5.1). Kaka’i also highlighted more obstacles than other groups, including 18% of them identifying landmines as a challenge. However, when focusing on just those from Hamdaniya, lack of irrigation or rainfall becomes the second most significant – with 45% in Nimrud, 41% in Bartella, and 37% in Qaraqosh seeing it as an obstacle to cultivating land and keeping livestock.

Figure 5.1: Current obstacles to farming



Note: Participants could provide more than one response.

Farmers interviewed provided especially rich, complementary detail as to how these types of obstacles impede farming activities. In terms of irrigation and rainfall, farmers across minority groups report drought or delay of seasonal rain, and this has the most impact on grain farming because it is mostly, if not entirely, rainfed. Some grain farmers stated that due to delays in seasonal rains, they have resorted to cultivating lentils and chickpeas, which are far less profitable than wheat and barley. For Kaka’i in particular, drought and lack of electricity have impeded their ability to restore and continue fish farming. For farmers who do have access to irrigation, they are still hampered by a lack of, or the high cost of generator electricity, which is generally required to draw water from wells for irrigation. Further, many farmers indicated their preference to switch to more profitable crops based on irrigation, but the absence of irrigation systems and electricity that could help increase production prevents this.

For example, a Christian farmer from Tal Kayf stated that *“we don’t have an irrigation system, it is all rainfed. When there is a delay or no rain, we are in serious trouble and we cannot do anything about it because we have no other options.”*¹⁶

While a Kaka’i farmer from Hamdaniya lamented that *“we have had a serious drought for many years now. If there is an irrigation system, we can manage but now we face serious problems. If it does not rain, we will lose everything we have cultivated this year.”*¹⁷

Farmers using/operating wells as an alternative water source report that electricity and fuel increase their production cost while the profit margin is already low. For example, an olive farmer from Bashiqa stated that *“the national electricity is very expensive and there is no support for farmers like subsidized electricity or fuel. We used to sell a ton of olive for a million IQD before IS, now we sell the best variety of olive for half of that or even less.”*¹⁸

There are many ways that economic obstacles hinder farmers. A lack of finances coupled with little to no financial support from the state has meant that many who lost their livestock and machinery have not been able to replace them because of the cost. Because there are no tariffs in place to help boost the competitiveness of local produce and livestock, farmers cannot compete with cheaper imports from Turkey and Iran. This in turn has led to the perception that, despite constituting an important source of income, agriculture cannot be relied upon as a primary source of income unless there is immediate and long-term support and assurance from the state for production and marketing.

For example, a Turkmen farmer in Hamdaniya said *“we cannot depend on agriculture as a main source of income because it is not as profitable as it used to be, and due to the lack of rain, we need to use a sprinkler system to irrigate our crops.”*¹⁹

Moreover, a Yezidi farmer in Bashiqa stated that she can return to agriculture as the main source of family income *“only if there is support to farmers in terms of seeds and marketing. Currently, farmers plant but we have difficulties in marketing. One or two years from now, we will all have to give up.”*²⁰

More and more families now rely on day labor and other jobs for income. As one Shabak farmer succinctly put it, *“We used to have agriculture and livestock before. Now we have employment.”*²¹ Some have also reported breaking up their farmland and selling portions of it as a source of income. Some farmers indicate their preference to grow organic vegetables to compete with cheap imports but report that lack of consumer awareness about organic and naturally produced varieties is an impediment. Branding, packaging and promotion of these locally grown products and raising consumer awareness should be considered for the intervention phase of this project. This model is particularly useful to produce and market regional specialty products such as olive

¹⁶ Interview conducted in February 2021 with a female Christian farmer from Tal Kayf.

¹⁷ Interview conducted in March 2021 with a male Kaka’i farmer from Hamdaniya.

¹⁸ Interview conducted in February 2021 with a male Shabak farmer from Bashiqa.

¹⁹ Interview conducted in February 2021 with a female Turkmen farmer from Hamdaniya.

²⁰ Interview conducted in February 2021 with a male Yezidi farmer from Bashiqa.

²¹ Interview conducted in February 2021 with a male Shabak farmer from Hamdaniya.

oil, cheese, tahini, olive oil soaps, and other such items that connect agriculture, culture, and livelihoods.

6. Food and Manufacturing

Key takeaways:

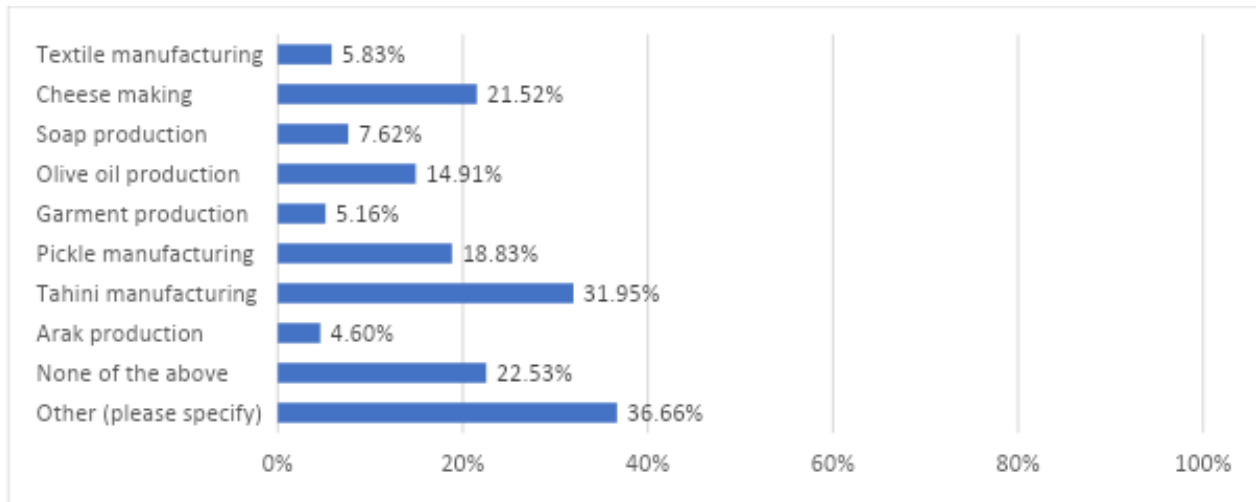
- Destruction of raw materials and production facilities has eradicated most local food manufacturing.
- Manufacturing was an important source of employment for both men and women in the region.
- Cultural significance of manufactured foods varies by ethnosectarian group.

Food is seen to have significant cultural importance, with a large majority of those surveyed seeing meals for special occasions (72% of overall respondents; 82% for Kaka'i) and dishes connected to religious events (62% of overall respondents; 76% of Yazidis; 83% of Turkmen) as playing an important role in their life. This connects to the KII community leader interviews where interviewees talked about the importance of food and the role this plays in social cohesion connected to bringing groups together for specific religious events.

There has been a loss of traditional methods of producing culturally significant food products due to not only the destruction of many of the raw materials used (e.g., olive trees) but also to the destruction of factories and production facilities. One Shabak olive farmer noted that “*We used to sell our olives to the most famous pickle manufacturers in Mosul, Al Shifa family and Alsaqaar family.*”²² Aside from using the “Other” response option, overall, respondents note the importance of tahini manufacturing most often (Figure 6.1). Responses in the Other category were varied, with the most frequently noted activity being related to mills. Most communities used to make their own bulgur, groats, and other food staples from wheat after the harvest season, but the destruction of the mills in (Karamles) Hamdaniya and Tal Kayf, along with the destruction of grain farming, pushes many households to buy bulgur and other milled ingredients off the shelf. Community leaders also pointed to the role that these shared mills have played in bringing communities together. Women, in particular, played a key role in making bulgur and other food staples from wheat for household consumption.

²² Interview conducted in February 2021 with a male Shabak farmer from Bashiqa.

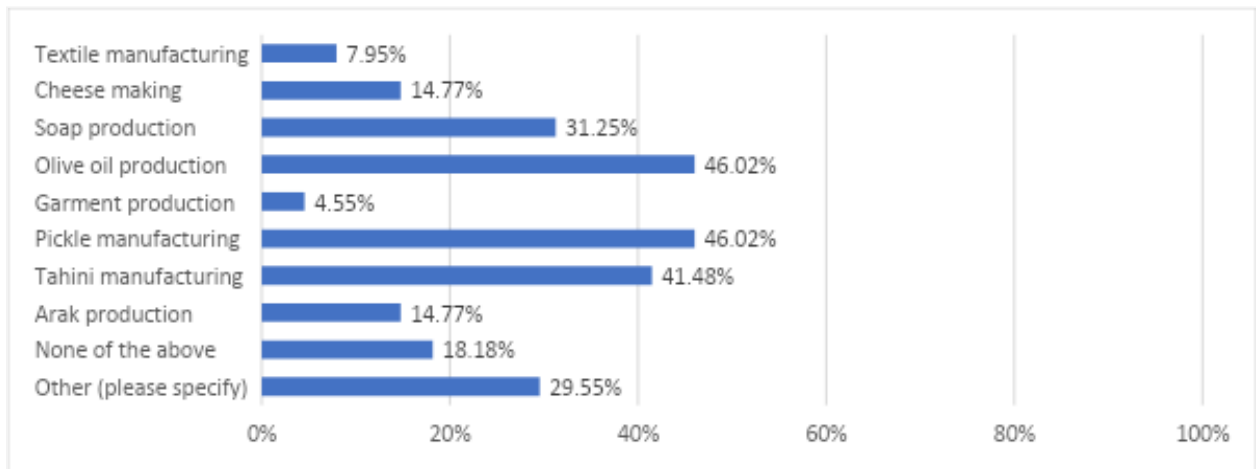
Figure 6.1: Manufacturing considered of cultural importance



Note: Participants could provide more than one response.

We note again some differences by ethnosectarian group. Yazidis place more importance on olive oil production, pickle manufacturing, tahini manufacturing, and soap production, which is connected to olive oil production (Figure 6.2). Kaka’i (35%) and Turkmen (27%) participants only identified cheesemaking as being of significant cultural importance, while Shabaks demonstrate less interest in manufacturing with tahini production (19% Shiite and 17% Sunni) and cheesemaking (20% Shiite and 10% Sunni) seen as the culturally important by those surveyed.

Figure 6.2: Manufacturing considered of cultural importance: Yazidis



Note: Participants could provide more than one response.

KIIs across the board emphasized the importance of restoring production factories for goods such as tahini and olive oil, and restoring mills and hatcheries, because these are critical for employment in the region. In addition, women have typically played an active role in the production and manufacturing sectors for goods like tahini, date syrup (molasses), dairy

products, and olive oil. This is one of the few sectors that created employment opportunities for women.

7. Restrictions on Movement

Key takeaways:

- Movement is restricted by both GoI and KRG, the multiplicity of security actors, and the lingering effects of IS.
- Lack of mobility fragments communities and prevents full expression of cultural and agricultural activities.

The multiple actors that control parts of Ninewa impact the daily lives of community members in many ways. One such issue is the restrictions of freedom of movement, or the difficulties/hassle that surrounds moving through multiple checkpoints controlled by different actors, which community leaders pointed to in interviews. Yezidis face difficulties in visiting Sheikhan, home to their holy temple Lalish, which inhibits their ability to participate in religious commemorations, pilgrimages and practice religious and cultural rituals. For example, a Yezidi community leader from Bashiqa expressed her concerns about restrictions on mobility, stating *“we have problems when it comes to reaching Sheikhan. Lalish is located there, and it is important for us to be able to visit it. Sometimes we cannot visit Lalish because of road closures between our areas and the Kurdistan Region.”*²³ Another Yezidi community leader stated that lack of access affects their ability to carry out religious and cultural rituals and pressed *“if I cannot reach Lalish temple how am I supposed to practice my religious rituals? When there is a barrier, it obviously hinders our ability to practice rituals.”*²⁴

The impact of restrictions on movement is not limited to Yezidis, but it includes other minority groups as well. For example, a Christian community leader from Hamdaniya, which is under the control of GoI since October 2017, reported *“we cannot visit Mar Mattai monastery because it is located within the areas under the control of the Kurdistan Regional Government, it is more of a political issue than a security one.”*²⁵

Kaka’i in the villages in the sub district of Nimrud in Hamdaniya are also affected, as their agricultural areas, as well as pilgrimage sites, are located beyond the trench line that divides the territory controlled by the security forces belonging to the GoI from those controlled by the KRG. They are asked for permits when wanting to access these areas and must process paperwork in Hamdaniya and are discouraged from cultivating land that they might not be able to access during the harvest. Many are forced to take a detour and drive longer distances to reach their villages, adding increased transport costs to their agricultural activities.

For example, a Kaka’i farmer from Hamdaniya stated: *“we don’t have access to our agrarian lands on the other side of the trench that’s why we rent our land to others to cultivate and in return, we share the produce in half. There should be political cooperation between the Kurdistan Regional Government and the Iraqi Government to facilitate the movement between the areas under the control of the two sides so we can freely move and cultivate our lands.”*²⁶

²³ Interview conducted in September 2020 via Skype with a female Yezidi community leader from Bashiqa.

²⁴ Interview conducted in August 2020 via Skype with a male Yezidi community leader from Bashiqa.

²⁵ Interview conducted in September 2020 via Skype with a male Christian community leader from Hamdaniya.

²⁶ Interview conducted in February 2021 with a female Kaka’i farmer from Wardak village in Hamdaniya.

These restrictions also fragment communities, cutting members off from each other. As one Christian interviewee put it, *“as people from Batnaya we want to be able to freely visit Telskuf, Alqosh, Baqofa, all these are Christian areas in Tal Kayf. We are one, we don’t want to be disconnected.”*²⁷ This lack of mobility, coupled with feelings of insecurity, is effectively restricting the minority groups from carrying out cultural practices such as religious rituals, commemorations, land cultivation practices, and harvests. Respondents noted that practices or cultural activities are no longer held in large numbers due to lack of mobility, among other reasons.

Other factors limiting mobility are land mines or IEDs that remain scattered across swaths of the landscape. While some report that mines have been cleared and movement now feels less restricted, multiple respondents know someone who has died due to a device exploding, and many people are afraid to cross the landscape to gather wild plants or to access particular sites. They are also afraid to graze animals and cultivate crops.

GoI and KRG lockdown measures in response to the spread of the COVID-19 in March 2020 also severely restricted the movement of people, goods, and services. Farmers were unable to travel between rural and urban areas and were as a result unable to market their produce, obtain veterinary products and animal feed, and service their machinery before harvest. Altogether, restrictions led to the loss in income among the vegetable and grain farmers and livestock producers in Ninewa Plains.²⁸

²⁷ Interview conducted in September 2020 with a male Christian community leader from Tal Kayf.

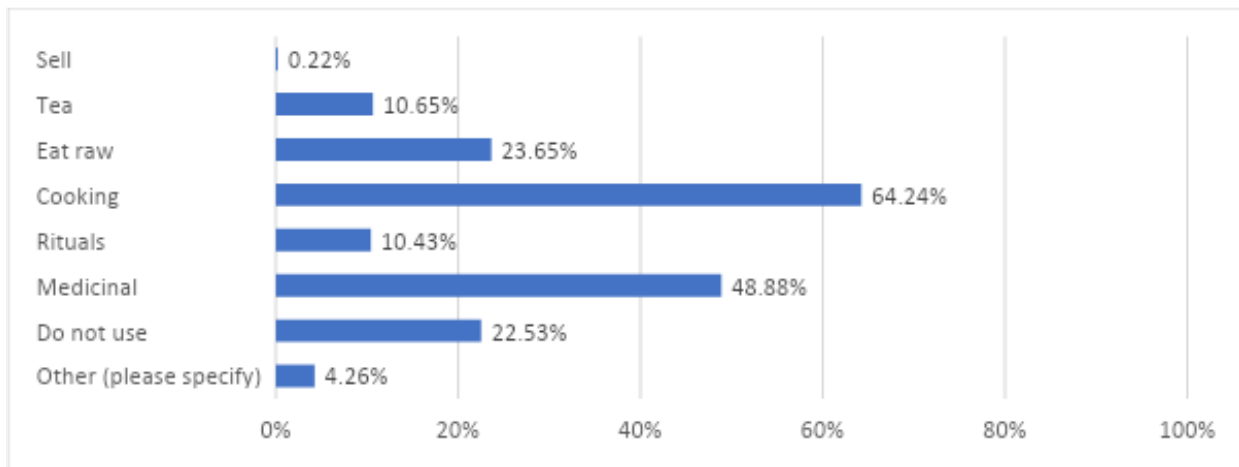
²⁸ Mercy Corps. (2020). ‘the Economic Impact of COVID-19 on Agriculture in Ninewa’, May 2020.

8. Wild Plants

Key takeaways:

- The use of wild plants is widespread, with 77% of respondents using them, especially for cooking and for medicinal purposes.
- Edible plants (47%) and medicinal plants (34%) have cultural importance for both men and for women.
- Some wild plants are used to supplement household income through the sale of herbs, truffles, or brooms, among other activities.
- While most people still can access wild plants, both women and men express concerns with decreased supply, the possible existence of landmines and IEDs in collection sites, and the contamination of plants by agricultural chemicals.

Figure 8.1: Use of wild plants



Note: Participants could provide more than one response.

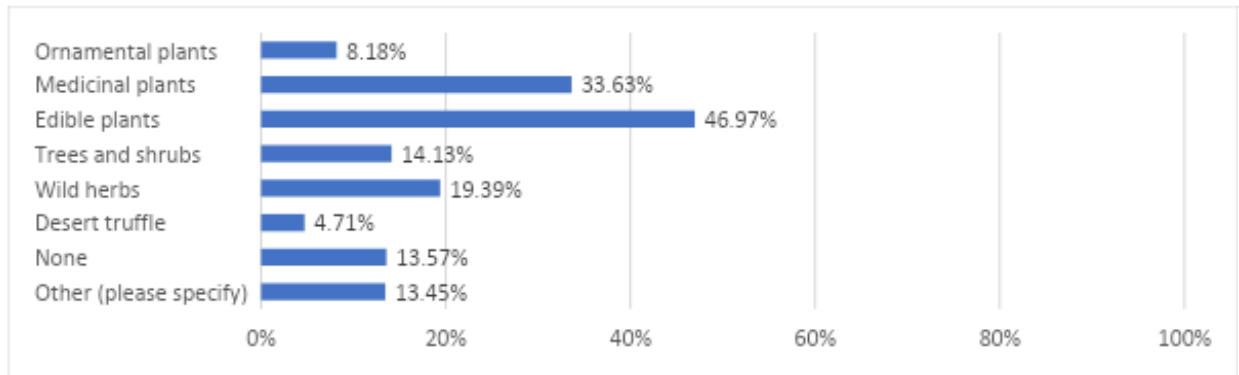
Approximately 77% of respondents report using wild plants in some way (Figure 8.1), demonstrating their shared importance in Ninewa. Approximately 87% of Kaka’i reported using wild plants, with 58% using them for medicinal purposes and 78% for cooking. Shiite Shabaks also report widespread use of wild plants (83%), especially for medicinal purposes (67%). Turkmen communities had 91% of respondents note their use of wild plants, with 78% using them for cooking and 62% for medicinal purposes. In comparison, wild plants were used less by Sunni Shabaks (54%), although the majority of people did still collect wild plants for certain uses.

Participants noted that edible plants (47%) and medicinal plants (34%) have the most cultural importance (Figure 8.2). In interviews with community members, people highlighted that wildflowers are used by women for beautification. Young Yezidi men and women collect and exchange flowers, sticking them to the walls or doors of their homes and kitchens.²⁹ Some species of plants used for household consumption or sold in markets include cheeseweed or

²⁹ ‘With red flowers, Yezidis prepare to welcome the New Year’, *Rudaw*, 16 Apr. 2019, <https://www.rudaw.net/english/kurdistan/160420191>

mallow, gundelia, curry leaves, truffles, turmeric, chamomile, and rosemary. Women mix certain wild plants with henna for cosmetic purposes. Explaining the importance of wild plants culturally, a Yezidi farmer noted that *“on New Year’s Day, which is our annual religious ritual in April, we collect wild red flowers to adorn the gates of our homes and kitchen. This is part of our culture and heritage. There is another plant that women collect and grind it and use it like henna during occasions.”*³⁰ Other plants are used to make brooms to sell, while still others are used to treat diabetes, wounds, diarrhea, and other ailments.

Figure 8.2: Wild plants with cultural significance³¹



Note: Participants could provide more than one response.

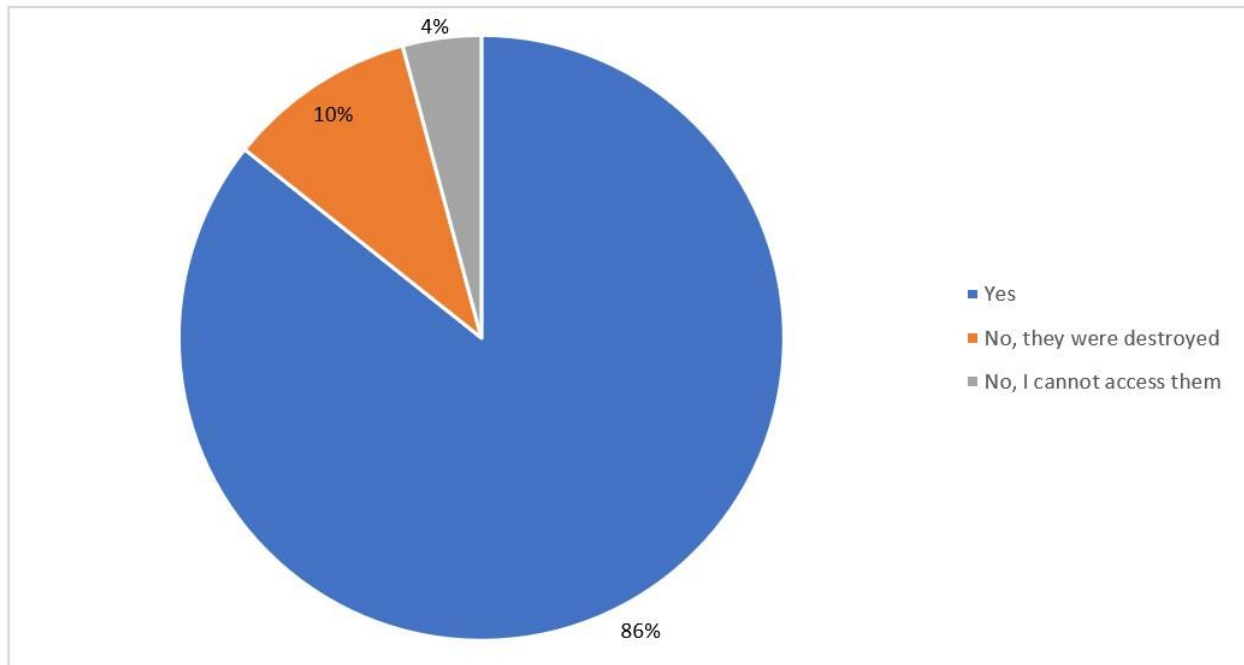
Of those who use wild plants, the majority still have the ability to collect them (Figure 8.3). However, 17% of Kaka’i and 26% of Turkmen respondents report that the wild plants they used previously have been destroyed. In interviews, people note that the presence of IEDs and booby-traps impedes their ability to collect wild plants. For example, a Shabak villager noted, *“currently we cannot collect wild plants, we are afraid of going to areas that are further afield from our village because we are afraid of the presence of IEDs.”*³²

³⁰ Interview conducted in February with male Yezidi farmer from Tal Kayf.

³¹ The ‘other’ category here mainly referred to individual herbs.

³² Interview conducted in February with male Shabak villager from Hamdaniya.

Figure 8.3: Ability to currently access wild plants



Farmers also reported that there are now fewer wild plants growing as a result of drought. They connect the lack of wild plants to the decreased ability for their livestock to naturally graze, which results in less milk and yogurt production and therefore decreased income for households. In some cases, communities and livestock farmers are forced to travel further to collect wild plants for household consumption and to graze their livestock. People also worry that wild plants are being contaminated by agricultural chemicals such as fertilizers and pesticides.

As demonstrated, wild plants play an important role in all the minority groups’ cultural practices. However, as highlighted, there are stresses on the system and little attention to reverse them. Due to the cultural importance of wild plants and the limited focus on them, this forms an important entry point for activities.

9. Social Cohesion and Change

Key takeaways:

- Community events and the production of agricultural and food goods connect with social cohesion within and between groups.
- Most community members report that inter-group tensions are not a big issue, although they are increasing, especially around topics of land ownership, services, religious displays, and harassment.
- Community leaders are more likely to emphasize community tensions compared to community members.
- Both community leaders and members reflect positively on increasing community cooperation, especially to promote agricultural activities.

Despite the destruction experienced by so many respondents, people demonstrated resilience and a sense of continued togetherness: “[IS] did destroy [our shrines] but we rebuilt them. So, it wasn’t able to stop us from our faith. We didn’t give in, we became stronger. We rebuilt them better than before”.³³ And “The region is safe and we’re now brothers like before, Shias and Sunnis, because we’ve recognized the intentions of IS.”³⁴ Many community members and leaders pointed to cultural practices, including the production of food products, the gathering for community events, and the collective participation in religious rites, as a way of bringing the various communities together. In interviews with community leaders, they noted that some events reinforced intra- and inter-group solidarity, especially when elders, religious figures, and other notables participate. These include attending condolence services in each other’s house of worship, as well as cultural exchange during seasonal commemorations and celebrations. For example, in an interview with a Shabak community leader in Hamdaniya, he underlined the importance of religious commemorations in bringing different communities together in Ninewa Plains: “Shabaks, Christians, and Yezidis participate in each other’s religious commemorations and celebrations. During these occasions we emphasize tolerance, brotherhood and building bridges with one another.”³⁵

People are seeing a decrease in these activities, in part due to the number of displaced people still absent from communities, as well as the barriers to accessing different regions and villages. Overall, people report that communities experience some limited tensions, but mostly can get along and cooperate when necessary. They do note, however, that such community cohesion is less than before. In general, community leaders note greater inter-group tensions than community members themselves. Some people interviewed speculated that some members of the political elite may sow inter-group divisions if it benefits their personal political interests. For example, a Christian community leader in Hamdaniya blamed the political parties for resorting to identity politics and sowing divisions instead of fostering coexistence: “Some political parties of a religious nature spread poison in societies and divide them with the aim of controlling them.”³⁶

³³ Interview conducted in February with a female Yezidi farmer from Bashiqa.

³⁴ Interview conducted in March with male Shabak farmer from Hamdaniya.

³⁵ Interview conducted in August 2020 via Skype with male Shabak community leader from Hamdaniya.

³⁶ Interview conducted in August 2020 via Skype with male Christian community leader from Hamdaniya.

Community leaders do point to a number of tensions between communities. They note an overall lack of trust towards Sunni Shabaks and Sunni Arabs as a result of their perceived connection to IS. They also highlight tensions between Christians and Shabaks, in part because of Christians migrating abroad since 2003 and the desire of Shabaks for better access to schools, hospitals, and other services after these were targeted by IS in Mosul. Shabaks also point to the fact that their population has increased, creating more demand for housing in and around Bartella. As Shabaks purchase more land and housing, some Christian community leaders believe that the Shabaks have financial support from external actors to buy Christian properties above the market price.

Christian community leaders from Bartella, note that they are observing the over-display of religiosity by Shia Shabaks during religious events, causing tensions when these events coincide with Christian festivities or when they block roads. They also complain of incidents of harassment of Christian girls and women by some Shabak men, which they connect to limited freedom for Christian women, who are no longer able to dress freely or attend school or work. Both Christian and Shabak community leaders mention the impact of inflammatory remarks and hate speech spreading on social media, especially during periods of political and security tensions.³⁷

In addition, farmers report conflict over land ownership and land rental agreements. Some farmers who do not have their own land indicate they are either renting or cultivating in return for sharing the profit. Land disputes were also reported by returnee farmers who found that someone else had made a claim on their land while they were absent. Others reported landlords renting out land that is unusable due to mines, preventing renters from earning enough from farming to pay for rent.

The above points to tensions simmering below the surface. However, community members still demonstrate a willingness to collaborate, and both community leaders and members talk fondly of the past when cultural practices brought communities closer together. Farmers across minority groups highlight that they are currently cooperating with other farmers, including sharing equipment, storage facilities, and information with one another. Farmers with limited finances and machinery were reported to consult and seek cooperation with other big farmers who are self-sufficient and have their own machinery. As one example, a person interviewed mentioned the idea of shared grain storage, another Yezidi farmer stated that “*we have Christian neighbors. They help us and we help them with agricultural machinery, equipment, and other things.*”³⁸

Cooperation is not limited to sharing machinery. Farmers also indicated they are exchanging information about crops, pest control, irrigation, seeds and learning from one another. For example, a Kaka’i farmer said “*our neighbor has better experience and information about growing onions. He is sharing his information and ideas with me and shows me how to grow*

³⁷ For instance, during the Summer of 2019 when the former prime minister ordered the PMF Brigade 30 to leave Hamdaniya to be replaced by the Iraqi Army, apart from blocking the roads and blocking the army, there was a campaign of hate speech and inflammatory remarks between the two communities on social media pages. On another occasion, a Christian priest’s remarks during a panel at the American University of Kurdistan in Duhok, hosted jointly with the Open Think Tank, where he accused the Shabaks of the ongoing demographic change and brigade 30 of PMF as the main impediments for the return of the Christian IDPs.

³⁸ Interview conducted in February with male Yezidi farmer from Tal Kayf.

onions. I am better at growing peppers and chickpeas, so I do the same and share my information with him, meaning we teach one another.”³⁹

Optimistically, farmers across the board believe that cooperation and agricultural exchange can be improved, would like to see it improve, and demonstrated a willingness to help improve it. Programs can build from this desire, as well as the history of farmer cooperatives in the region, to facilitate community organizations and farmer associations designed to increase access to resources and markets. For example, farmers in Bashiqa reported they have formed an Agricultural Cooperative Society to coordinate with veterinarians and agricultural experts on extension services and information especially in terms of pest control, seeds and fertilizers, and livestock well-being.

Some farmers also saw the potential of social cohesion through improving cooperation, for example, a Christian farmer stated that *“increasing cooperation will help to develop agriculture and improve relations between different components.”⁴⁰*

³⁹ Interview conducted in March with male Kaka’i farmer from Hamdaniya.

⁴⁰ Interview conducted in February with male Christian farmer from Hamdaniya.

10. Needs and Opportunities for Assistance

Key takeaways:

- Lack of finances was most frequently cited as a barrier to continuing agricultural and related cultural practices.
- Income and farming sustainability are closely linked, as only farmers who receive sufficient income from their fields are motivated to continue to cultivate their land.
- Nearly half of respondents reported receiving no assistance in restoring their agricultural and cultural practices.
- Access to water is a significant factor for people to feel secure about their future in Hamdaniya.
- While training was not cited as a high priority need, people expressed an interest in vocational training, agricultural training, and cultural awareness training.

When asked what prevented them from continuing with their agricultural and cultural practices, people consistently highlighted the lack of finances as the biggest issue. Considering the large size of the households (Figure 10.1) and the low household income (Figure 10.2), this is an understandable obstacle. Thus, all discussions of assistance will need to take the economic hardships of many households as an underlying factor to address. This will result in projects being better received and more likely to ensure their future sustainability.

Figure 10.1: Household size of participants

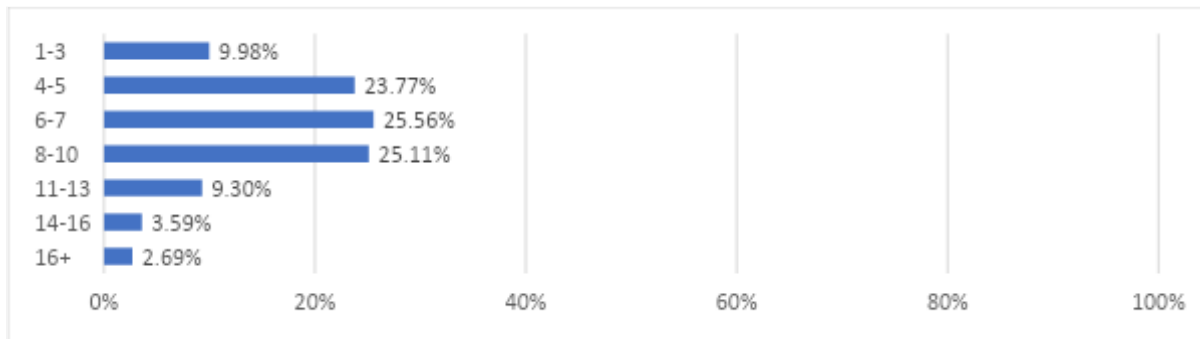
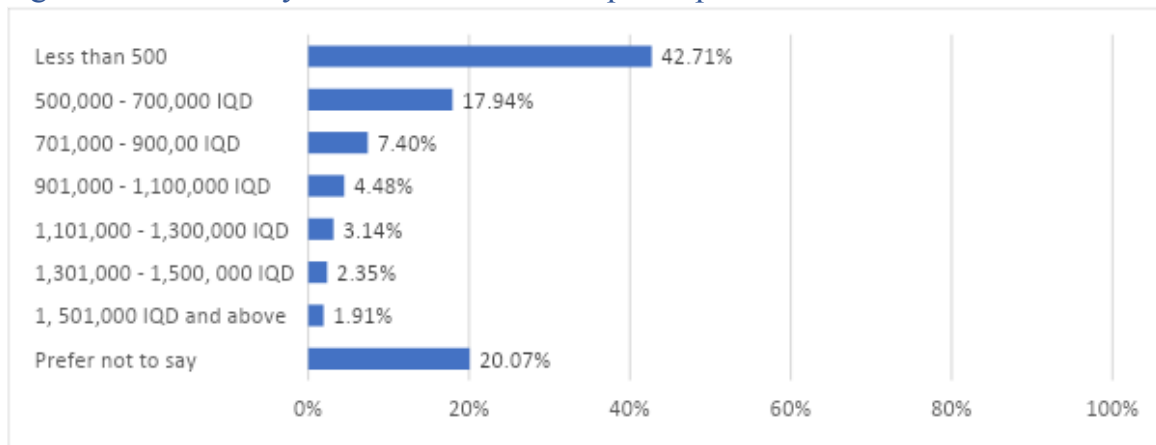


Figure 10.2: Monthly household income of participants



Finances (31%) and factors closely connected to finances, such as supply sets (21%) and machinery (13%) are seen as the most significant requirements to bring back cultural and agricultural practices (Figure 10.3). In interviews with farmers, seeds, grains (such as wheat of better quality), fertilizers, pest control, and machinery were among the most widely cited needs. Lack of financial capital is preventing farmers from buying machinery, fertilizers and hiring labor to make the best use of their agrarian land. Some people end up renting half of their land because of the costs associated with agricultural production. Very few farmers indicated using greenhouses to grow crops and those who did highlight the economic benefits received from this practice.

Figure 10.3: What is needed most to bring back cultural practices related to agriculture

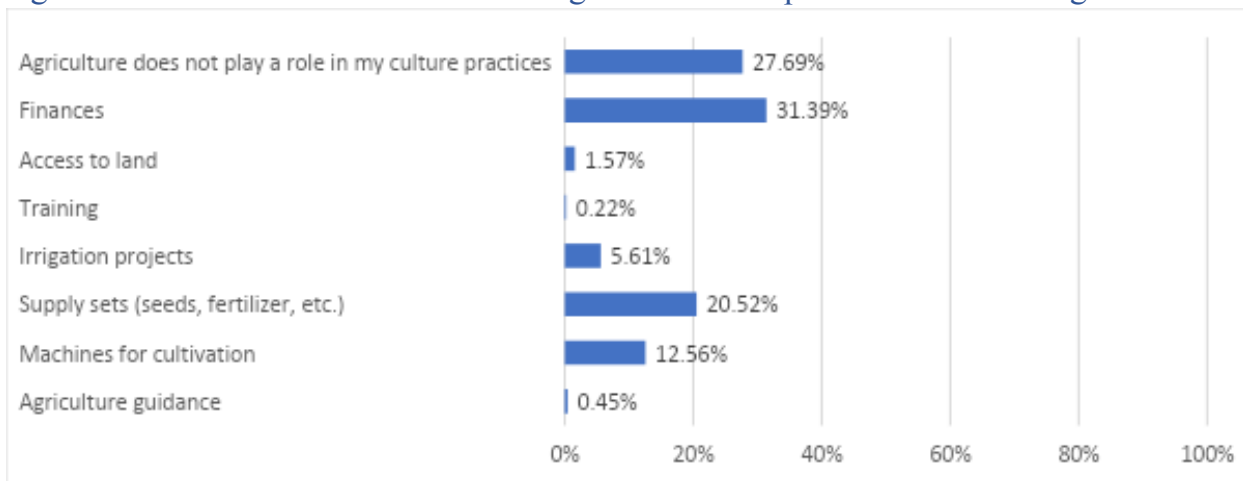
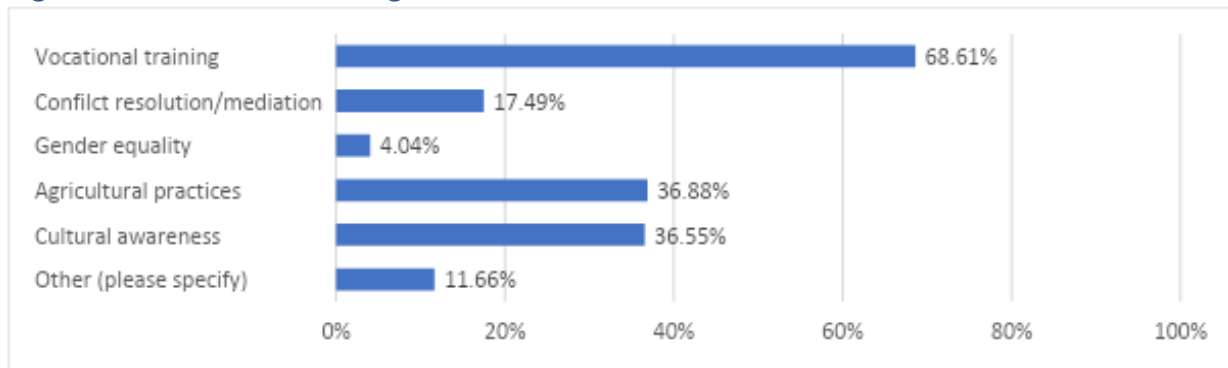


Figure 10.4: Desired training courses⁴¹



Note: Participants could provide more than one response.

For Figure 10.3 it is important to note that respondents were asked to highlight the most important need. Thus, even though training was not indicated as the most important need for respondents, when people were asked what training courses they would like to see, 37% desired training related to agricultural practices (Figure 10.4). 37% also want training on cultural awareness, which could connect to programs in culture and peacebuilding. Vocational training is the most desired training by those surveyed (69%). This training could help increase household income, leading to more opportunities for cultural practices and empowerment.⁴²

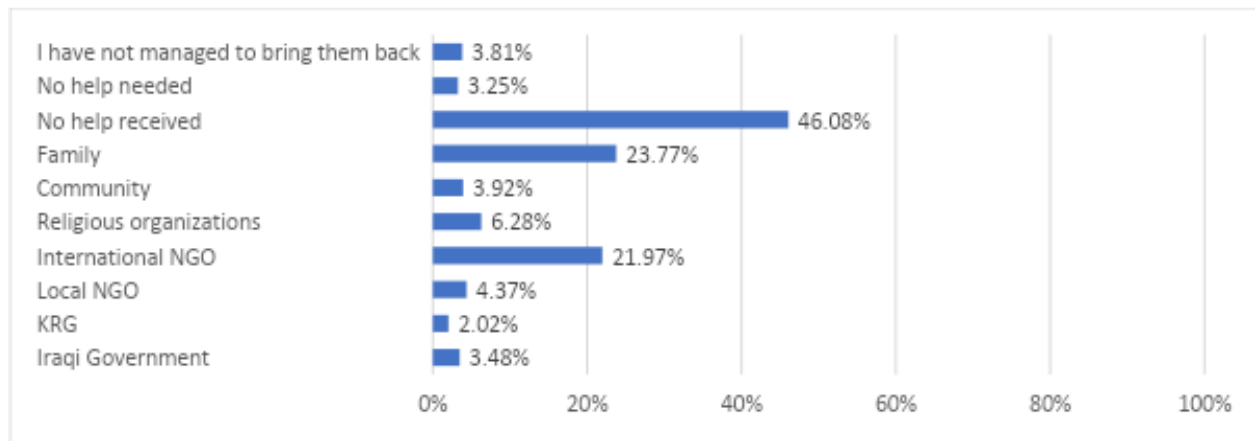
About 37% of the respondents expressed an interest in cultural awareness training, and 4% an interest in gender equity training. With Yazidis, the desire for cultural awareness training is higher (43%) than the overall average, which may be related to the adverse effects Yazidis experienced due to the lack of general knowledge about their religion and culture. Yezidi respondents pointed out that hate speech directed towards their community stems from a lack of understanding of the Yezidi faith and culture. Kaka'i community leaders also highlighted that misconceptions about their faith, religious rituals, and cultural practices fuel discrimination against them by Muslim communities.

However, there are opportunities to create a local cultural awareness campaign and to get communities working together. Moreover, the creation of cooperatives does much to address some of these issues, as products would be the cooperatives, which represent all communities. At the same time, in formulating marketing strategies, communities could work together to tell their stories through their products, which would also raise cultural awareness.

⁴¹ The 'other' category here mainly refers to specific vocational training, such as tailoring and so on.

⁴² Argan oil cooperatives in Morocco are a successful example of this in operation.

Figure 10.5: Sources of assistance for those who have restored cultural or agricultural practices



Note: Participants could provide more than one response.

46% of those surveyed reported that they received no help in bringing back their cultural and agricultural practices (Figure 10.5). Those that have received help have mainly received it from their family (24%) or INGOs (22%). In interviews with farmers, the absent role of the government was repeatedly brought up when asked about obstacles and challenges faced in production and marketing their crops. KIIs across all groups complained about the lack of government support for cultural heritage, education in their mother tongue, preservation of cultural heritage, and supporting cultural practices of minority groups. Most communities also reported the absence of designated cultural centers where the community could gather and where youth could learn their group’s culture and heritage. Others pointed out that community centers play a crucial role in fostering peace and community cohesion.

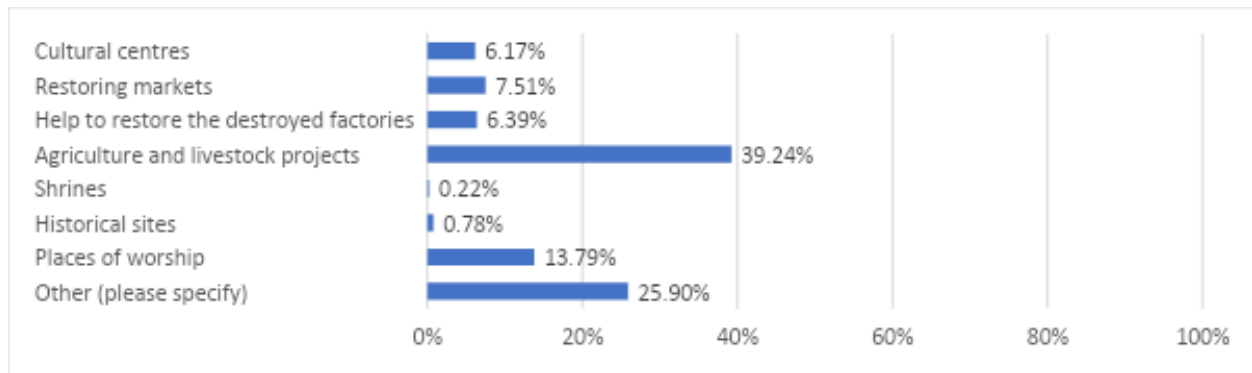
For Yazidis, the results were similar to the overall average, although more people identified they received help from their family (34%) and community (9%) and less help from INGOs (11%). Kaka’i mainly identified they received help from their families (45%), followed by INGOs (25%), with only 22% reporting that they received no help at all. Turkmen mainly identified that they received help from their families (43%) and INGOs (17%), with 36% stating that they received no help at all. Christians reported receiving the most help from INGOs (Syriacs 33%, Chaldeans 25%, Assyrian 28%). This result is consistent with the statements during interviews that Christians receive more assistance than other minority groups – a fact that leads to tension in the region. Shabaks also received a relatively high level of assistance from INGOs (26%), but also a high percentage of respondents who received no help at all (51%). 18–24-year-olds (*n* 81) reported receiving the most assistance from INGOs of any age group (25%).

The provision of assistance to help farmers restore their agriculture has created competition for aid and many farmers feel left out deliberately: “*We have not received any assistance. But they helped farmers in Qaraqosh where farmers there received seeds, machinery, even cows, sheep, and financial assistance.*”⁴³ Moreover, many farmers believe there is a bias in the distribution of aid and the selection of beneficiaries. “*We have not received any assistance, nothing at all. Most*

⁴³ Interview conducted in March with a female Christian farmer from Hamdaniya.

of the villages received tractors and other machinery, the farmers in Teskhrab and Karamles received assistance, but we the farmers in Khazneh received nothing.”⁴⁴ Another Christian farmer indicated “We have not received any assistance neither from the state nor from any organizations. There are people who received assistance, but there are deserving people that have not received any.”⁴⁵ Finally, there have also been problems with ineffective or inappropriate aid: “There were a couple of organizations that brought us olive trees to plant, but were not good enough, they brought us olive trees without roots that wouldn’t survive or would take ten years to grow, in addition, those who brought them were not qualified.”⁴⁶

Figure 10.6: Priority areas for reconstruction in relation to cultural practices⁴⁷



In terms of priority areas for reconstruction related to cultural practices (Figure 10.6), the most significant priority (39% of those surveyed; 58% of Kaka’i; 47% of Shabaks and Turkmen) was agricultural and livestock projects. Syriacs identified the most important area for reconstruction as destroyed factories (37%), while Chaldeans identified restoring places of worship (28%).

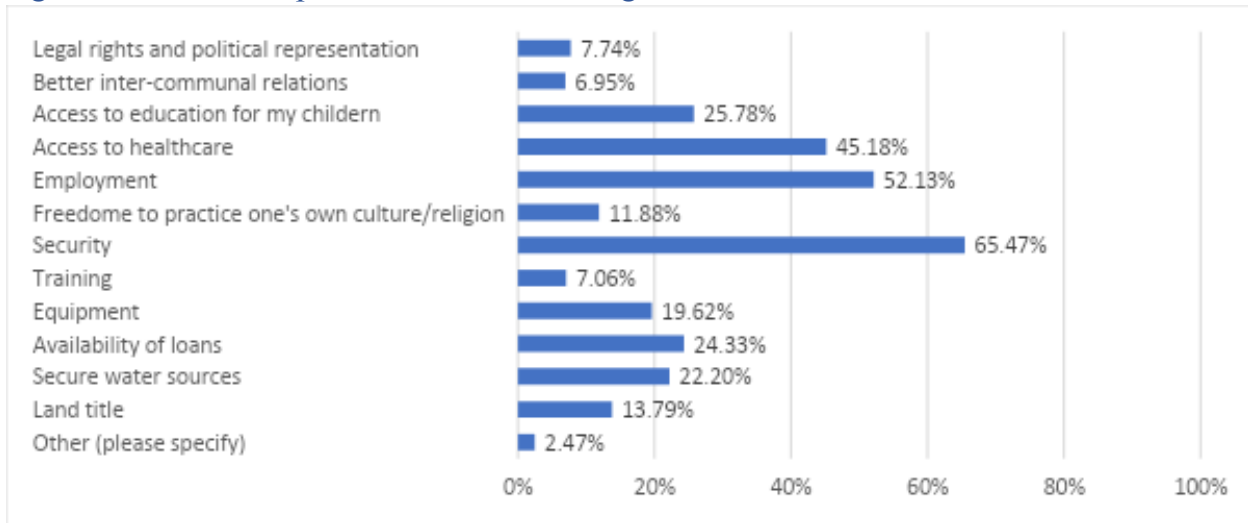
⁴⁴ Interview conducted in February with a female Shabak farmer from Hamdaniya.

⁴⁵ Interview conducted in February with male Christian farmer from Hamdaniya.

⁴⁶ Interview conducted in February with male Yezidi farmer from Bashiqa.

⁴⁷ The ‘other’ category here mainly refers to infrastructure development and improvement related to roads and services.

Figure 10.7: Most important factors in feeling secure about future



Note: Participants could provide up to three responses.

A secure water source was mentioned by 22% of respondents as a top factor in their overall security (Figure 10.7). This increased to 28% when only including responses from Qaraqosh, Hamdaniya; 29% in Bashiqa, and a significant 45% in Nimrud, Hamdaniya. For Kaka'i (who live across Hamdaniya), water is the most important factor in feeling secure about their future (62%), which may connect to their greater focus on agriculture, particularly fish farming (Figure 10.8). For Turkmen (who mainly live in Nimrud, Hamdaniya, and Bashiqa) water was the second most important factor about feeling secure about their future (42%), and equipment was also significant at 41% (Figure 10.8). In interviews with farmers, they articulated concerns about climate change and its impact on their future agricultural activities and livelihoods. In Bashiqa, farmers urge the construction of irrigation systems to better utilize rainfall for agriculture, as dry spells have become more frequent.

For Sunni Shabaks, access to healthcare is the second highest factor after security at 54% (Figure 10.8). For 18 to 24-year-olds of all groups, employment is the most important factor in feeling secure about the future (62%) and security is the second most important (58%). This may connect to the low employment rate of Iraqi youth and the bleak outlook they have for the future in this regard.

Figure 10.8: Most important factors in feeling secure about future – Sunni Shabak, Kaka’i, and Turkmen

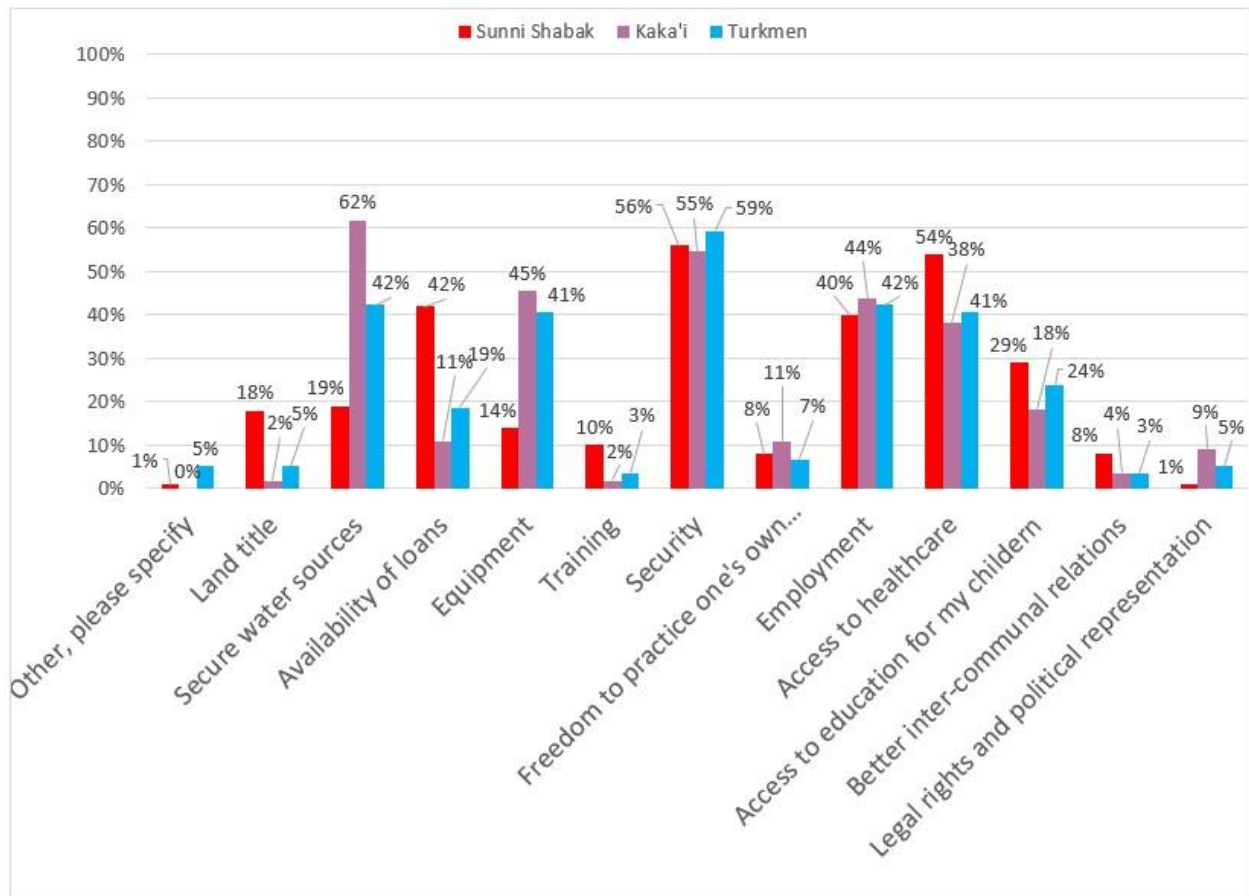
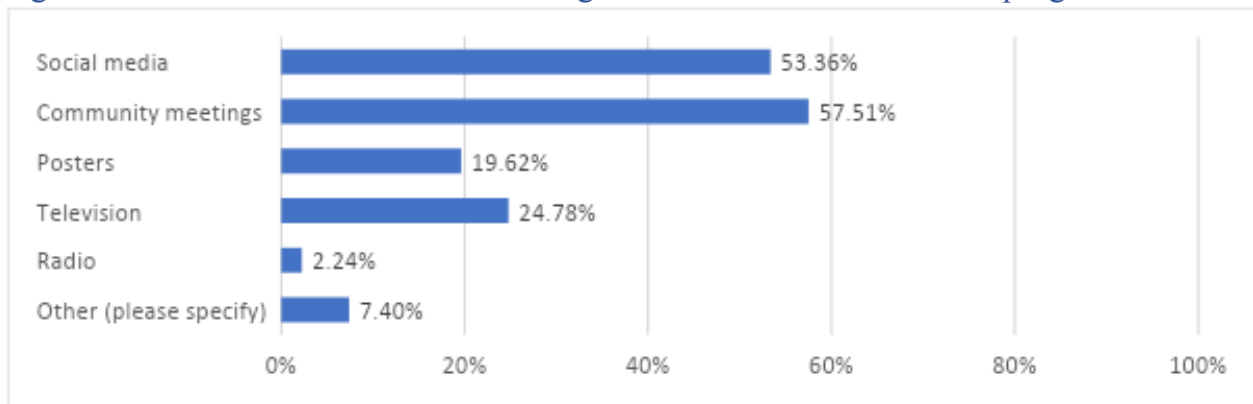


Figure 10.9: Preferred source for receiving information about extension programs⁴⁸

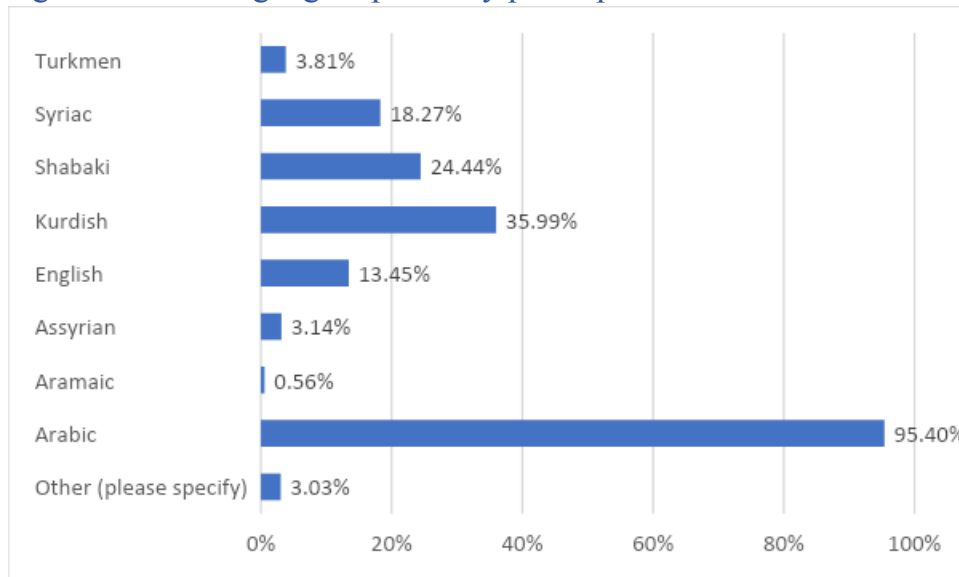


Note: Participants could provide more than one response.

⁴⁸ The ‘other’ category here mainly refers to manuals or receiving information through religious centers and agricultural/veterinary departments.

Community meetings (58%) and social media (53%) are the favored methods of receiving information (Figure 10.9). However, there is a clear gendered dimension to these preferences. For women (*n* 412) 55% preferred social media and 43% television and only 34% of women preferred community meetings. In contrast, 78% of men (*n* 480) preferred community meetings, 52% social media, and only 9% preferred television. 18 to 34-year-olds (*n* 265) favor social media (54%) with community meetings (52%) being the second favorite mode of communication. Of further relevance for the project’s communication strategy is that many of those surveyed have no or limited schooling and the majority speak Arabic, but it is important to note that 5% do not speak Arabic (Figure 10.10).

Figure 10.10: Languages spoken by participants



Note: Participants could provide more than one response.

11. Recommendations

Based on the research undertaken and consultations with the project team, we have identified several avenues for Phase II extension project activities. These projects each have the potential to strengthen the generative connections between cultural meaning and agricultural landscapes, and to support community resilience, recovery, and healing over the long term. These activities include:

- Diversification of markets and market linkages, including livestock and value-added products that draw from existing cultural and agricultural strengths and knowledge.
- Local and regional farmer association development that may include the sharing of equipment, market access, and knowledge among members.
- Advocacy efforts to include cultural components and other important research findings in the activities of other actors carrying out interventions in Ninewa.
- Cultural awareness: launching a social media campaign and providing cultural awareness meetings to community leaders.
- A focus on wild plants, including information gathering; community exchange through cooperative workshops on planting, cooking, and storytelling; and skill-building through resource mapping.
- Knowledge production: turning the data collected into knowledge through reports, academic articles, and op-eds.
- Continued capacity building/enhancing in partnership with the University of Duhok.

General principles

All extension and research activities should be guided, above all, by the “do no harm” principle and should not exacerbate community inequities, tensions, or vulnerabilities. The “do no harm” principle in humanitarian aid and development focuses on identifying and reducing the potential negative impacts of interventions. It factors into planning that aid can have negative impacts, and thus requires those involved in interventions to think before they act and to ‘look at the broader context and mitigate potential negative effects on the social fabric, the economy, and the environment.’⁴⁹ In our project, it is important to note, and reflect upon, the fact that aid from other organizations is reported by our respondents to have created competition and tension. Some community leaders interviewed related the lack of restoration support to community representation and believe some communities are getting more support due to their strong community leadership and/or the preference of some INGOs and humanitarian actors of some communities over others. Community leaders also pointed to the fact that some individuals get assistance from multiple organizations, whilst others get no assistance. In turn, they argue that

⁴⁹ Charanle, Jean Martial Bonis & Elena Lucchi., ‘Incorporating the principle of “Do No Harm”’: How to take action without causing harm’, *F3E*, 1 Oct. 2018, https://www.alnap.org/system/files/content/resource/files/main/donoharm_pe07_synthesis.pdf

INGOs need to go to the field and do their assessment on the ground by meeting the community members and hope communal shared spaces are developed and included in the reconstruction efforts. In interviews with farmers, some complained that assistance was not effective due to nepotism and corruption as some who received help were not farmers but employees and some ended up selling the machinery and extension materials they received in the market. For our project, it is important to reflect on the impact that activities may have on these wider tensions between communities and individuals.

Taking a systems- and community-based approach does help to address some of the above. There are many, discipline-specific ways of systems thinking, but here we make two general points: First, thinking in terms of systems means considering what effects, unintentional or not, that any intervention we propose might have on other parts of Iraqis' lives. Second, because we are working in food systems specifically, there are particular linkages to be taken into account and we need to think of the product from the beginning to the end, including care, getting to market, marketing, and so on. Moreover, by focusing on the wider system, we can ensure that our interventions contribute to the sustainability of these practices and that we don't contribute to the process of assistance not being utilized or utilized in unintended ways. In terms of a community-based approach, we focus on the assets and knowledge already present in the community and think about how to leverage those in Phase II project work. We also consider how focusing on what helps the community rather than the individual or household can help ensure that we do not contribute to aid competition and tensions.

This report has also demonstrated that there is a significant gendered impact, particularly with regards to the damage done to (agri)cultural livelihoods. For this reason, it is important that Phase II also applies a gender lens to all interventions. Moreover, the research has also demonstrated the gendered dimension in preferences of receiving information, and it is important that this is reflected in the project's activities. On a similar note, although the majority of those surveyed speak Arabic, five percent of respondents could not, and this has to be considered in all activities to ensure equality of access.

Advocacy

Many of the underlying issues people face in the region, including landmine removal, replacement of expensive agricultural equipment, replacing livestock, and rebuilding of infrastructure, are large-scale in nature and likely beyond the scope of the project. The project can, however, work with communities to help identify and form linkages with other programs addressing these important issues. Moreover, the project can also help inform the work of other actors carrying out interventions in the region, particularly on how culture can connect to their programming. This includes, but is not limited to:

- the role culture and cultural identity can play in livelihoods, particularly of products connected to agriculture.

- the role that traditional practices can play in peacebuilding.
- including cultural practices in projects focused on return dynamics.
- the benefits of, and opportunities for, taking a community-based approach to interventions.
- incorporating storytelling, oral histories, and intergenerational cultural knowledge into ongoing development programs.

This can be done through reports that are disseminated amongst (I)NGOs and donors, meetings with key actors working in the region, presentations in policy-focused conferences, and meetings with government officials. The project could also organize a workshop with organizations working in the region to create an understanding of what work is being undertaken and where there are synergies and opportunities for collaboration amongst actors.

Wild plants

While the collection and use of wild plants is not the most important concern of survey respondents, it does represent a shared point of connection and interest among respondents across groups. We see the topic of wild plants as serving as a “gateway” theme to incorporate other project goals of restoration and cooperation within a cultural/agricultural landscape approach. Project activities could work separately with women, men, youth, and across minority groups. They could also integrate these groups, bringing people together in broader initiatives across the region. Some specific projects addressing wild plants could include:

- Information gathering through workshops, focus groups, and community discussions. Topics could include local species of wild plants, their uses, availability, importance, challenges to their continued use, and changes over time.
- Participatory resource mapping on wild plant distribution. This activity could incorporate skill-building in GPS, GIS, and other digital mapping skills. The activities would not include controversial information such as territorial ownership or tenure but would encourage cohesion and community-building through a shared participatory mapping framework.
- Gatherings around recipe and food sharing to highlight the culinary knowledge, skills, and stories associated with the use of wild plants, especially for culturally significant occasions.
- Developing print and online public resources in Arabic and local dialects that note the use and histories of wild plants in the region. This project could pair teams of different generations to document existing plant knowledge.
- In consultation with specialists, potentially restore some wild plants to the landscape as feasible. This would likely be a longer-term initiative and could include shared workdays that incorporate story-telling and shared meals.

Diversification of market and market linkages

Many survey and interview respondents noted that one challenge to economic recovery is the lack of access to markets. People say that local, high-quality products are often not able to compete with less expensive imports. This is true of local specialties including tahini, olive oil, olive oil products, and local cheeses, among other artisanal products. Many of these regional products have cultural significance and connect to local forms of knowledge, meaning, and memory.

Given the existence of high-quality, high-value artisanal products throughout the region, we see the potential for economic development projects focused on market diversification. These can include facilitating more direct trade relationships between producers and consumers, as well as the potential for value-added certifications including Fair Trade and Geographical Indication designations. Direct trade projects often include organizing local cooperatives. These groups can work to share resources, knowledge, and equipment. They can also provide a point of contact for buyers, as well as an organizational structure for market certifications.

Although such projects present many complexities, there are several promising existing characteristics in the region to build from. First, there is much existing expertise in producing distinctive, high-quality, and high-value products. Further, many of these products have a long shelf life, which is useful when navigating new trade relationships. There is anecdotal evidence of possible domestic markets for high-value products, lessening the initial complications of export regulations. Finally, people express their desire to pursue new market options, as well as the willingness to work together to achieve these goals. Some potential market diversification activities to pursue during the next 18 months of the project include:

- Identifying the initial products to focus on for each community. For each product complete an initial supply chain map across the realms of production, trade, regulation, and consumer markets.
- Organizational development of producer cooperatives that can share equipment and knowledge, and that can provide a point of access for buyers and certifications.
- Identify other potential partners in the private and NGO sectors.
- Conduct ongoing outreach and training, including facilitating “producer to producer” networks.
- Create digital and print ‘how to’ guides in Arabic for creating cooperatives.

Farmers associations

We pose the possibility of facilitating the organization of farmers’ associations or cooperatives for a few reasons. Associations or cooperatives are a flexible means of collective action that can be put into the service of any number of goals. Outcomes associated with such action can range

from sharing networks and more efficient farms to rural development and poverty reduction. Respondents referenced farmer associations that used to exist in the area and respondents overwhelmingly agreed that cooperation in terms of farming already exists and that they wish to see such cooperation continue and to see more of it. The farmers must decide what their main concerns and goals are to help guide the organization, but the data provides some issues around which farmers might organize:

- Men and women would likely have separate groups related to the different nature of work they tend to do, and the support required for each.
- While farmers often already share information, they also want additional training. Organizing around knowledge and training may offer opportunities not only to learn about farming but also to learn about each other.
- Producer cooperatives as described in the section ‘Diversification of markets and market linkages’.
- Groups to facilitate financial assistance among members or to pool and share resources.
- Create digital and print ‘how to’ guides in Arabic for creating farmers’ associations.

Cultural awareness

Many elements of the recommendations above work towards increasing cultural awareness, such as the community projects around wild plants, cooperatives, and farmers’ associations. However, information gathered, particularly through the storytelling elements, can also form part of a cultural awareness campaign on social media. Community leaders interviewed identified social media as a place where cultural knowledge is shared, but also where abuses occur. We can use the positive elements of social media to enhance cultural understanding.

Additionally, cultural awareness training can be given to community leaders, where members from discriminated groups are facilitated to discuss their culture. Given that Yazidis and Kaka’i have highlighted the impact of discrimination on their livelihoods connected to agriculture, cultural awareness can help to ensure the sustainability of these practices, which in turn connects back to the sustainability of their cultural practices.

Knowledge production

It is important that the large amount of data collected from this project be turned into knowledge. There are valuable contributions to be made by this project to the wider literature on minorities in Ninewa, cultural and agricultural practices, and the impact of IS, and thus publications are extremely important. Additionally, beyond contributing to the literature, the knowledge produced can also feed into the interventions of other organizations, thus closely linking the knowledge production and advocacy parts of Phase II.

Capacity building/enhancement

All aspects of the recommendations require closely working with the University of Duhok and enhancing their existing capacity and introducing them to new types of programs that they have not worked on before but have existing capacity that can be developed to feed into these programs. The principle guiding all of our activities is to have a team member from Purdue, IU, Notre Dame, or SIPRI partner with a team member from the University of Duhok to ensure knowledge is exchanged both ways. For example, all publications will be led by a member from SIPRI or IU and a member from the University of Duhok. Knowledge on the creation of farmers' associations and cooperatives will be passed on to the University of Duhok in order to allow them to lead the process on the ground with the assistance of Purdue and IU.

Appendix 1: Minorities in the Study Area

Christians

Christians in Iraq trace their origin to ancient Mesopotamia and the Assyrian empire in Ashur on the Tigris riverbank south of Ninewa. They are mostly Assyrian, Chaldean, Syriac, and Armenian. According to the 2018 International Religious Freedom Report, less than 250,000 Christians currently live in Iraq, 200,000 of which live in the Ninewa Plains and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). The Christian population has steadily declined over the past 16 years from a pre-2002 population estimate of between 800,000 to 1.4 million persons. Moreover, approximately 67 percent are Chaldean Catholics and nearly 20 percent are members of the Assyrian Church of the East.⁵⁰

Yezidi

Yezidis are an ancient religious group that has existed for thousands of years in Mesopotamia. The Yezidi identity has remained a subject of disagreement, despite their distinct identity some community members, as well as Kurds, consider Yezidis ethnically Kurdish. Others place a stronger emphasis on their religious identity. Nonetheless, the conflict with IS gave the Yezidis a stronger sense of religious identification over ethnic Kurdish identification. This has contributed to intra-community tensions and pressure from Kurdish officials and Kurdish-identifying community members.⁵¹ Yezidi leaders have reported that most of the 400,000 to 500,000 Yezidis in the country reside in the two governorates of Ninewa and Duhok, and approximately 360,000 remain displaced.⁵² Apart from Mosul and different districts of the Ninewa province, up until the last decade, Yezidis constituted the majority in Sinjar district, at roughly 85%, and almost all the population in Bashiqa. Due to a misinterpretation of their religion, some militants regard Yezidis as heretical and not ‘People of the Book’. They have regularly been targeted with violence as a result.⁵³

Shabak

Shabaks have been located for centuries in the Ninewa plain, between the Khazir and Tigris rivers and near Mosul, with a population of 200,000– 500,000. The majority are Shi’a Muslims, with Sunni Muslims making up the remaining 30 to 40 percent. However, IS and its predecessors view Shabak as infidels and have targeted them as a result.⁵⁴ They live in approximately 56 villages and towns in the districts of Hamdaniya (Bartella and Nimrud subdistricts) and Sheikhan.⁵⁵ The Shabaks are culturally distinct with their own customs and traditions as well as clothing and language. They are pressured to identify as Kurdish or Arab and face

⁵⁰ US Department of State., ‘2018 Annual Report on Religious Freedom: Iraq’, *Office of International Religious Freedom*, 21 Jun. 2019, <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/IRAQ-2018-INTERNATIONAL-RELIGIOUS-FREEDOM-REPORT.pdf>

⁵¹ ‘Five Years After ISIS: The Yazidis’ Quest for Justice and Recovery’, *Enabling Peace*, 16 Oct. 2019, <https://enablingpeace.org/the-yazidis-struggle-for-justice-and-recovery/>

⁵² US Department of State., (note 50).

⁵³ Minority Rights Group., ‘Crossroads: The Future of Iraq’s Minorities After ISIS’, 7 Jun. 2017, https://minorityrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/MRG_Rep_Iraq_ENG_May17_FINAL2.pdf

⁵⁴ Minority Rights Group., (note 53).

⁵⁵ van Zoonen, D., & Wirya, K., ‘The Shabaks Perceptions of Reconciliation and Conflict’, *MERI*, Aug. 2017, <http://www.meri-k.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Shabak-Report.pdf>

marginalization from both sides as part of the broader KRG-GoI territorial dispute over the control of the fertile and strategically important lands of the Ninewa plains. After 2003, Shabaks in Mosul were forced to leave after facing harassment and prosecution and sought refuge in Bashiqa and Bartella. This influx led to much land changing hands and building new housing to absorb this additional population pressure, which has since caused concern among Christians fearing demographic change.⁵⁶

Kaka'i

The Kaka'i, also known as Yarsan or Ahl-e Haqq are estimated to be around 120,000 to 200,000 in Iraq, scattered throughout the provinces of Ninewa (in Qaraqosh and Nimrud subdistricts), Sulaymaniyah, Halabja, and some villages in the southeast of Kirkuk as well as in Khanaqin, Diyala province. There are existing disagreements on the classification of Kaka'i, between those who see the Kaka'i as an independent religion and those who claim it is a sect or subgroup of Islam. A division that is exacerbated by the community's fear of being labeled as infidels and attacked by IS or other extremists.⁵⁷ Kaka'i ethnically associate themselves with Kurds, but some community leaders claim Kaka'i are a distinct community and demand political representation. Internal division has prevented the Kaka'i from forming independent political parties and gaining representation in Iraq's Council of Representatives and the Kurdistan Parliament.⁵⁸ The Kaka'i faith dates to the fourteenth century in western Iran and contains elements of Zoroastrianism and Shi'a Islam. Nevertheless, their distinct practices and beliefs have resulted in persecution. As a result, Kaka'i are secretive about their faith.

Turkmen

Turkmen consider themselves the third largest ethnic group in Iraq after Arabs and Kurds. They reside in an arc stretching from Tel Afar, west of Mosul city, through Mosul city, Erbil, Altun Kopri (Prde), Kirkuk, Tuz Khurmatu, Kifri, to Khaniqin. Religiously, Turkmen are Muslims who are almost equally distributed between Sunni Turkmen (mainly in Kirkuk, Altun Kopri, and Kifri) and Shi'a Turkmen (mostly in Tel Afar, Daquq, Tuz Khurmatu and Qaratapa).⁵⁹ Estimates about Turkmen population in Iraq vary between 600,000 and 2 million.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ 'Iraq's Shabaks and the Search for Land Rights and Representation', *Enabling Peace*, 13 Dec. 2019, <https://enablingpeace.org/iraqs-shabaks-and-the-search-for-land-rights-and-representation/>

⁵⁷ 'A fight for survival Kaka'is left with three unpleasant options', *Kirkuk Now*, 30 Jun. 2020, <https://kirkuknow.com/en/news/62643>

⁵⁸ Salloum, S., 'Who are Iraq's Kakai?', *Al Monitor*, 10 Feb. 2016, <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2016/02/iraq-kakai-religious-minority-kurdistan-quota.html>

⁵⁹ 'After ISIS. Perspectives of displaced communities from Ninewa on return to Iraq's disputed territory', *PAX*, Jun. 2015, <https://paxforpeace.nl/media/download/pax-iraq-report--after-isis.pdf> .

⁶⁰ Minority Rights Group., (note 53).

Appendix 2: Vegetables Grown Pre- and Post-IS

Figure 1: Number of vegetables grown prior to IS

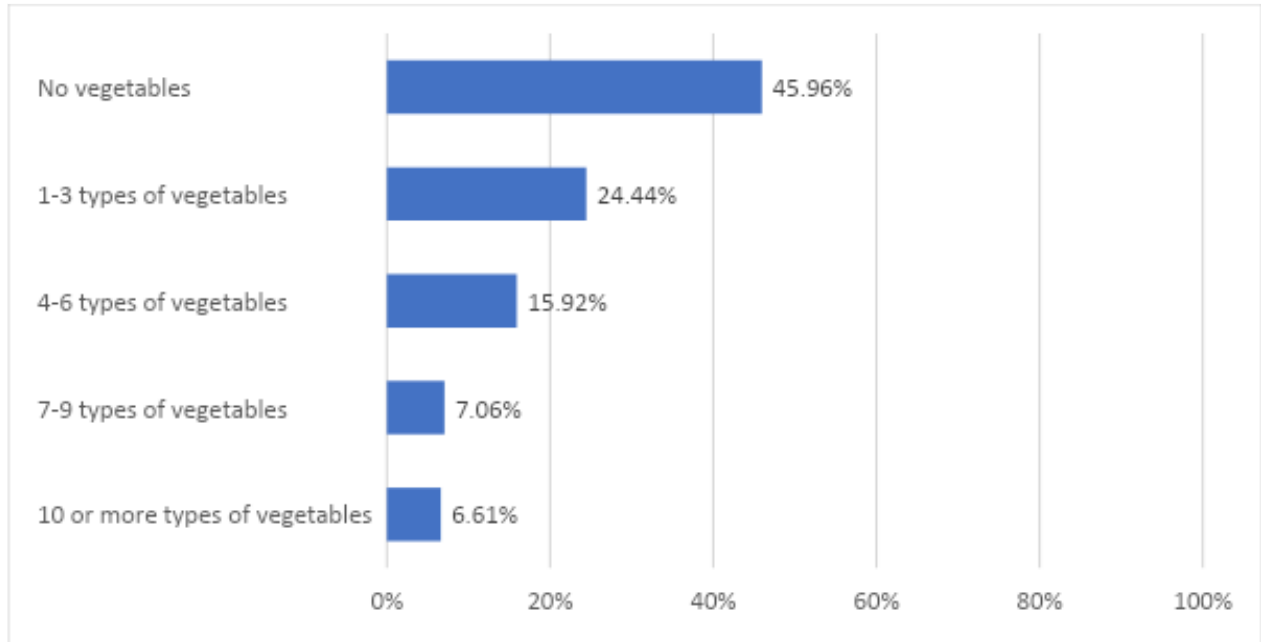


Figure 2: Number of vegetables grown post-IS

