

## FARMER, WHERE ART THOU?

### EXPLORING AGRICULTURAL TRENDS IN IRAQ AMIDST ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL CRISES



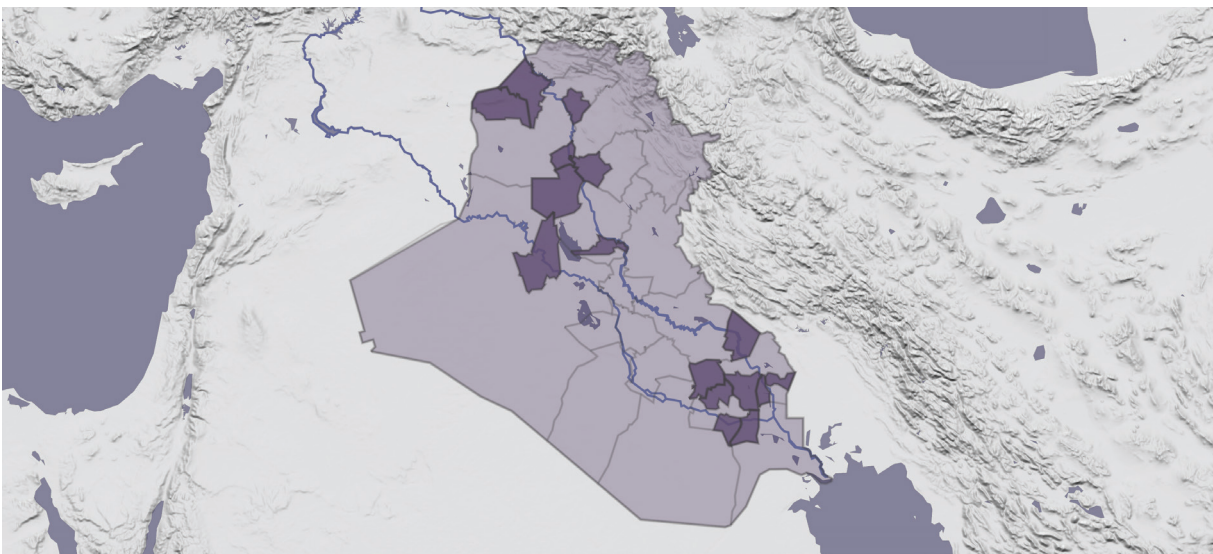
The rural districts in the north-center and south of Iraq provide a useful entry point to analyze the decline of the agriculture sector due to conflict, economic, and environmental factors in the country. Utilizing recent microdata, this brief seeks to describe this phenomenon in more detail and the impacts and implications of this recession on rural communities. This then lays the basis to articulate key considerations, rooted in the local and national dynamics found in rural Iraq, to transition to a more sustainable agriculture sector.

Iraq is not an agrarian society—and has not been for many decades now. Even in the most rural areas, agriculture is not a predominant economic sector in terms of employment and wealth generation. The sector does however feature prominently in the emerging narratives in the country around the climate-displacement and climate-security nexuses, respectively. This is because agriculture is indeed a key steppingstone between environmental degradation and social and economic disruption.

Thus, while it is a relatively small productive sector in Iraq, it is an important one to evaluate in this context. Agriculture remains a strategic sector within any country's national development plan including Iraq's, particularly now as global food supply chains are restructuring. It is also crucial in shaping life and voice in rural communities, contributing to populating and cultivating the landscapes that would otherwise be left empty and fallow. Finally, and most critically, agriculture is a sector that is in clear recession in Iraq due to a confluence of conflict, economic, and climate factors over the last years.

It is this recession that we explore in detail in this brief, drawing on recent large-scale original datasets collected in the north-central and southern parts of the country. This data indicates that most farmers and livestock owners across these areas are facing severe impacts originating from different sources and many are gradually abandoning these activities as a result. A particular concern is that less harvests and smaller herds significantly lower revenue for households, thus impacting their prospects for wellbeing. The persistence of these dynamics run the risk of triggering negative coping strategies among households (e.g., depleting other assets or moving to other informal livelihood options such as daily labor) and, eventually, may affect their capacity to sustainably remain where they currently reside and force them to move elsewhere. Mitigating these impacts requires a political, economic, and social approach to transition to a more sustainable agriculture sector.

Figure 1. Map of top agricultural districts assessed





## TECHNICAL FACTSHEET

The data for the maps, figures, and tables generated in this brief comes from the following datasets, where the same question modules pertaining to agriculture and economic activities were asked:

- *IOM and Social Inquiry (2022), A Climate of Fragility: A Household Profiling of the South of Iraq*. This is a statistically representative profiling of households and individuals for each of the 18 districts in Basra, Thi-Qar, and Missan governorates.
- *IOM and Social Inquiry (2022), Reimagining Reintegration: An Analysis of Sustainable Return After Conflict*. This is a statistically representative sample of households in the top 14 districts of return across the north-central governorates most affected by the ISIL conflict, namely, Ninewa, Kirkuk, Salah al-Din, and Anbar.

We combined these datasets, using population weights, across comparable relevant questions. We then identified the top agricultural districts across geographies based on whether at least 20% of the district-level population reported either currently engaging in agricultural activities or having done so and stopped within the last 5 to 8 years. This helps keep the focus on areas with enough depth of data to ensure findings are representative of agricultural trends. The resulting 16 districts, from north to south, are: Sinjar (Ninewa), Tal Afar (Ninewa), Hamdaniya (Ninewa), Hawija (Kirkuk), Shirqat (Salah al-Din), Baiji (Salah al-Din), Balad (Salah al-Din), Hit (Anbar), Ali al-Gharbi (Missan), Kahla'a (Missan), Maimouna (Missan), Al-Majir al-Kabir (Missan), Shatra (Thi-Qar), Rifaai (Thi-Qar), Suq al-Shuyukh (Thi-Qar), and Chibayish (Thi-Qar).

Finally, we classified these districts by geography and context, North-Central Districts and South Districts, for ease of analysis and to better highlight trends by region. Districts within the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and the Center-South of the country are not included here as comparable, granular data from these areas is not available.

## A SECTOR IN RECESSION

The 16 selected districts with large agricultural activity span Iraq, ranging from Sinjar in the north to Chibayish in the south and encompassing different contexts. With very few exceptions, however, engagement in agriculture even in these selected rural areas is relatively low. Only around one-fifth of households overall across these districts remain involved in farming or livestock rearing, with many other households reporting having abandoned these activities altogether over the last decade (see the circular graphs in Figure 2). Even for those households still engaged in the sector, less than half report agriculture as their only source of earned income; most rely on other income sources as well to get by, primarily public employment and membership in security forces.

Further underscoring this noted recession in the sector is the inability of agricultural households to sustain productivity and yields in such activities over time. As depicted in the bar charts in Figure 2, the vast majority of households still engaged in farming or livestock rearing report a diminished harvest or smaller livestock herd compared to a few years ago. While these responses are admittedly subjective and qualitative given their self-reported nature, their consistency across districts indicates a general negative trend in this sector and in this type of livelihood.

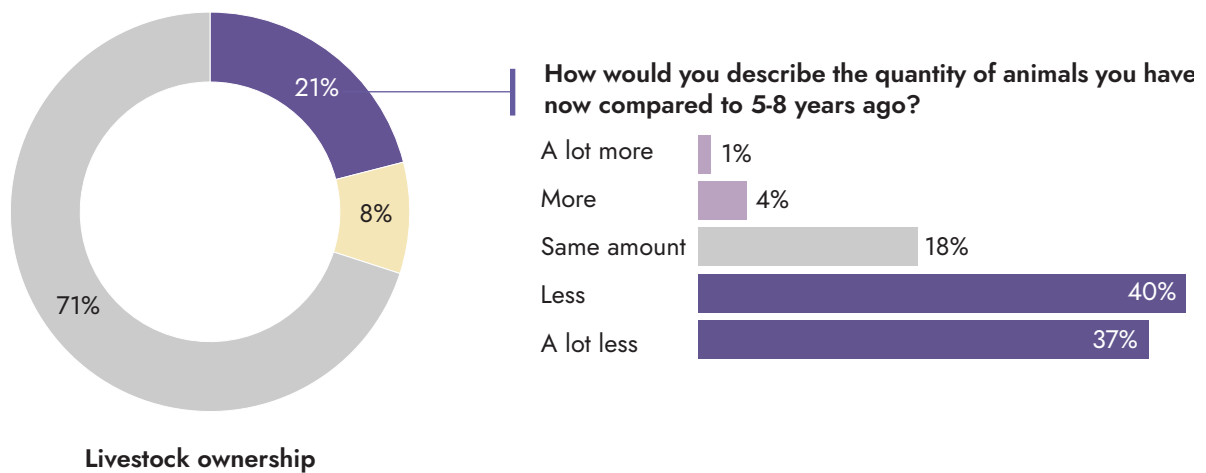
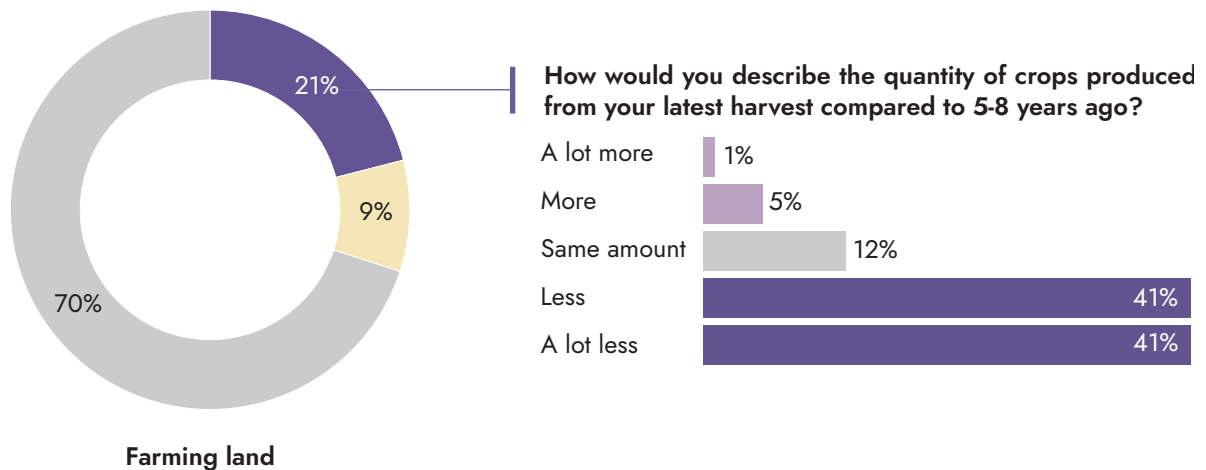
The context in which households engage in agriculture is challenging across these areas in different ways. The ISIL conflict has directly affected households in the north-central districts, with most having displaced to flee the violence and only in recent years returning and seeking to resume activities. For those in the south, historical development neglect and an erosion of local institutions, rather than direct recent conflict experience per se, shape the prevailing socio-economic landscape.



What is common across this wide geographic swath is that environmental change is a growing concern and is having an increasing impact on agriculture.<sup>1</sup> It is the combination of these factors and where and how they intersect that we will turn to next.

Figure 2. Proportion of households currently or previously engaged in agricultural activities

- Currently engaged in activity
- Abandoned activity 5-8 years ago
- Never engaged in activity



## ON THE FORCES AND SHOCKS PULLING AGRICULTURE APART

To ground the evolution of agriculture in Iraq into the historical legacies and emerging dynamics described above, we rely on the impacts to agricultural livelihoods that these households themselves report in each of the 16 rural districts analyzed. Overall, key common themes appear—conflict, economy, and environment—to explain their gradually lower agricultural production (or abandonment altogether), though their narratives differ by region (Table 1).

<sup>1</sup> World Bank, *Iraq Country Climate and Development Report* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2022).



Table 1. Typologies of impacts to farming by district and geography

		Sinjar	Tal Afar	Hamdaniya	Hawija	Shirqat	Baiji	Balad	Hit	Ali al-Gharbi	Kahla'a	Maimouna	Al-Majir al-Kabir	Shatra	Rifaa'i	Suq al-Shuykh	Chibayish	North-Central	South
Environmental factors	Not enough water	4%	53%	81%	12%	6%	64%	3%	19%	81%	73%	88%	57%	78%	87%	79%	64%	31%	78%
	Unpredictable and bad weather	74%	41%	74%	3%	92%	0%	4%	3%	8%	10%	15%	16%	21%	16%	18%	11%	41%	17%
	Salinization	0%	0%	0%	0%	2%	12%	0%	3%	57%	35%	57%	50%	51%	51%	66%	27%	2%	52%
	Too hot	19%	7%	0%	0%	16%	7%	0%	3%	12%	16%	3%	16%	31%	22%	19%	11%	7%	21%
	Too much water / flooding	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	9%	0%	0%	3%	7%	0%	0%	16%	0%	3%
Economic factors	High increase in the price of inputs / cannot afford inputs	10%	10%	35%	49%	26%	82%	47%	71%	16%	12%	15%	16%	24%	13%	5%	20%	35%	15%
	Lack of government support and public funding	11%	8%	24%	1%	29%	12%	51%	60%	11%	24%	24%	7%	10%	19%	8%	8%	21%	13%
	Not profitable	8%	3%	5%	2%	3%	5%	39%	3%	33%	15%	5%	5%	6%	10%	13%	35%	8%	11%
	Sold land out of need	0%	0%	0%	0%	27%	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	4%	0%
	No functioning markets to sell goods	7%	1%	0%	0%	3%	0%	35%	5%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	6%	0%
Other factors	Diseases and pests	4%	1%	0%	2%	0%	0%	39%	5%	31%	14%	18%	8%	21%	26%	22%	18%	6%	21%
	Land has UXOs and land mines	0%	0%	0%	0%	44%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	6%	0%
	Cannot access land due to issues with government or security actors	3%	0%	4%	0%	2%	0%	3%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%
	Shifted crops or left the land fallow	0%	4%	0%	0%	0%	0%	23%	0%	4%	2%	3%	3%	0%	10%	0%	0%	4%	3%
	Arson	3%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
	Found a different job	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	6%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%

Note: Percentages represent the proportion of farming households that report their production is negatively impacted by these factors.

The legacy of the recent ISIL conflict in Iraq is inseparable in this discussion for those districts in the north-central part of the country in particular. In each of them for the last five years, large return movements of internally displaced families to their cities and villages of origin have taken place, with relatively few families remaining displaced in other parts of the country. This has not translated into a full-scale resumption of agricultural activities and productivity to pre-conflict levels. Affordability and lack of financial resources play a crucial role in explaining the sluggish recovery in this sector here. Recovery of farming equipment and reinvestment in inputs like seeds, fertilizers, or pest control, require an investment capacity that may not be readily available to families after having spent resources in the act of returning home. Additionally, the restarting of activities and programs of local agriculture and livestock directorates in many districts, in terms of staff or support capacity, may still lag behind pre-conflict levels.<sup>2</sup> This last element is especially important given that the public sector has traditionally provided a strong support for the agricultural sector, either in facilitating subsidized inputs, crop planification, loans, or in directly purchasing the produce at above global market prices.<sup>3</sup>

These drivers are much less prominent in the southern districts. First, farmers here were not affected by the ISIL conflict, so the displacement and return narrative and its associated disruption is absent. Second, while the economic capacity of these farmers has also been put

<sup>2</sup> Laila Barhoum and Elise Nalbandian, *Unfarmed Now. Uninhabited When? Agriculture and Climate Change in Iraq* (Oxford: Oxfam, 2022); and Roger Guiu and Sogand Afkari, "Post-Conflict Political Economy in Sinjar: What the Aftermath of Conflict and Historical Neglect Mean for Recovering the Local Economy," Policy Brief (Erbil: Social Inquiry, 2019).

<sup>3</sup> Paolo Lucani, *Iraq Agriculture Sector Note* (Rome: FAO / World Bank, 2012).

to the test in line with the steady impoverishment of the south of Iraq since 2003,<sup>4</sup> it has been so to a lesser degree than those in the north-center.

Beyond economics, the environment seems to be a common factor limiting farming. The ways in which it does so, however, is dependent on geography and specific local systems therein. The northernmost districts depend heavily on rainfall for farming and thus do not have steady access to water. As a result, changes in weather patterns have the capacity to disrupt harvests here more significantly than in other areas of Iraq. Even in some centrally located districts, unpredictable and poor weather conditions and thus lack of sufficient rainfall are the primary reasons for lower production over any other financial or conflict-related factor. In others, however, little negative impact from climate is reported. Even so, given that climate variability has indeed intensified in recent years<sup>5</sup> and is expected to continue to do so in the mid-term, these impacts are likely to expand in across north-central districts over time.

Contrary to the north, farming in the south mostly relies on intensive irrigation facilitated by a vast network of canals flowing southwards or diverted from rivers. As such, the quantity and quality of water resources in these districts are highly vulnerable to the environmental issues currently impacting the whole river basin, both climate-triggered (e.g., decreasing rainfall at the origin of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, pushing neighboring countries to build dams to preserve their own supply, and increasing temperatures causing evapotranspiration) and man-made (e.g., lack of wastewater treatment along the river and poor investment and maintenance in the canal network). Almost no southern district appears without widespread issues in terms of lack of water flow combined with water salinization impacting the ability to farm crops.

## AN INTERTWINED FATE FOR LIVESTOCK ACTIVITIES

Although we put a focus on farming in this section, livestock rearing and herding is a key related sector embedded in similar dynamics and challenges. The significance of this sector is variable, in the sense that it is often a side activity to farming and not always oriented to the market. In the southern districts there tends to be more dedicated livestock herders than farmers, especially in those districts bordering the marshes like Chibayish, Suq al-Shyukh, and Maiomouna, while the prevalence of this activity in the north-central districts is lower.

The impacts reported differ between the two regions even more drastically than in the case of farming. Livestock in the south is highly dependent on water being available in the canals and rivers given that water buffalo rearing is the principal livestock activity. Livestock owners that have been affected by lower herd size or have abandoned the activity mostly report lack of water as well as food for their animals as the major cause. These environmental stressors therefore also affect the financial sustainability of livestock herding in these areas, making it less profitable and thus most households in the sector also report resorting to selling their livestock out of financial need.

The majority of livestock herders in the north-central districts, for their part, seem to have had their livestock stolen during the ISIL conflict period or have been forced to sell livestock as a coping strategy. As a result, livestock herders have smaller herders and are unable to increase their size due to limited financial capacity. The inconducive weather conditions for farming and the related lower harvest production in these areas, in turn, reduces the availability of local fodder for livestock, driving its prices up and making livestock rearing a more expensive endeavor, and limits the availability of grazing land for herds after harvesting.

<sup>4</sup>IOM and Social Inquiry, *A Climate of Fragility: Household Profiling in the South of Iraq* (Baghdad: IOM, 2022).

<sup>5</sup>FAO, GIEWS Earth Observation for Iraq, available at: <https://www.fao.org/giews/earthobservation/country/index.jsp?code=IRQ>



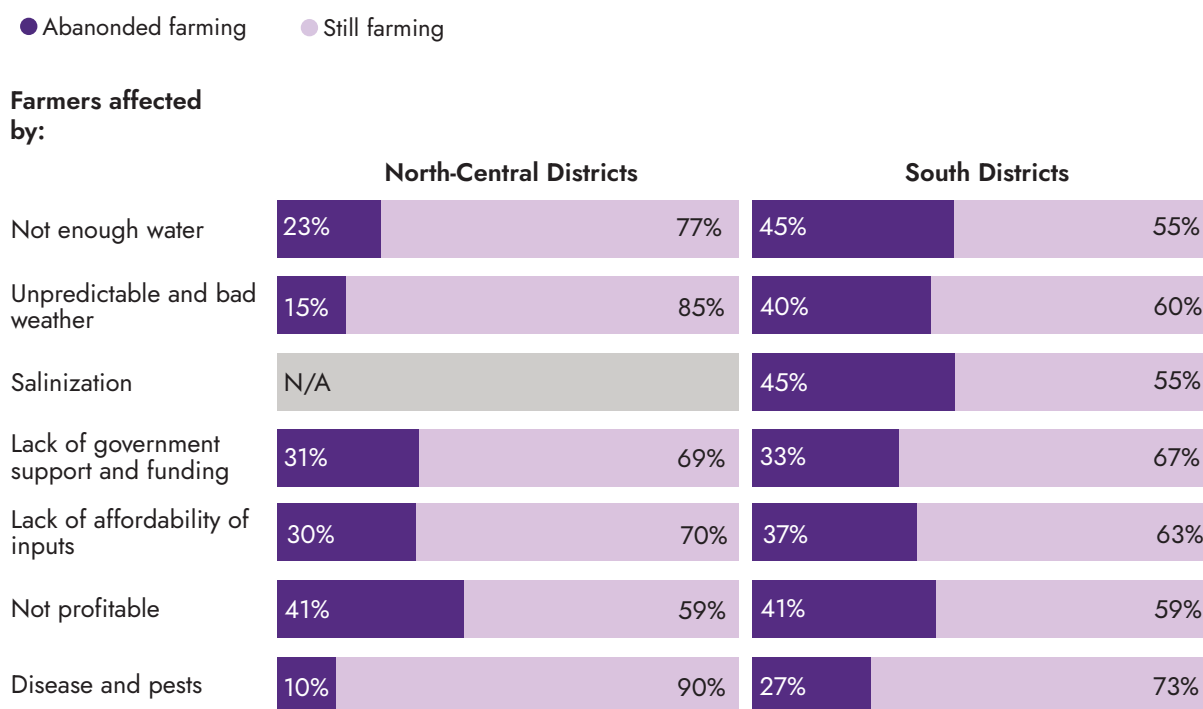


Other challenges and stressors seem to play a lesser role in the changes in this sector overall. Security issues linked with the presence of mines or interference by security actors, for example, are not significantly reported. The same holds true for the absence of physical markets to sell or buy produce.

Up to here, we have discussed the varied impacts households that are or were engaged in farming face at present. But, to what extent does being affected by these impacts drive farmers to abandon their activities? The data available also allows us to estimate the propensity of abandonment based on the impacts reported, as a sort of measurement of how much more “deadly to farming” one impact is over another. In this sense, environmental factors in the southern districts are extremely critical, in that almost one of every two farmers that report experiencing an impact related to the environment, be it lack of water or salinization, has abandoned agriculture within the last five to eight years (Figure 3). The reliance on water-intensive cultivation may explain this ratio. This does not seem to be the case in the northern and central districts, where the ratio of environmental impacts to abandonment is significantly lower. This may imply that farmers in these districts do attempt (and are able) to adapt to challenging climate conditions for a time before fully abandoning these activities and seeking livelihoods in other sectors.

While the propensity of abandonment due to environmental factors vary by geography, landscape, and type of farming, there is no such difference when it comes to abandonment due to economic impediments. Almost one of every two farmers in both north-central and south districts will abandon farming if it is not profitable and almost one of every three will do so if they do not receive support or cannot afford inputs, respectively.

**Figure 3. Propensity of abandonment by impacts**



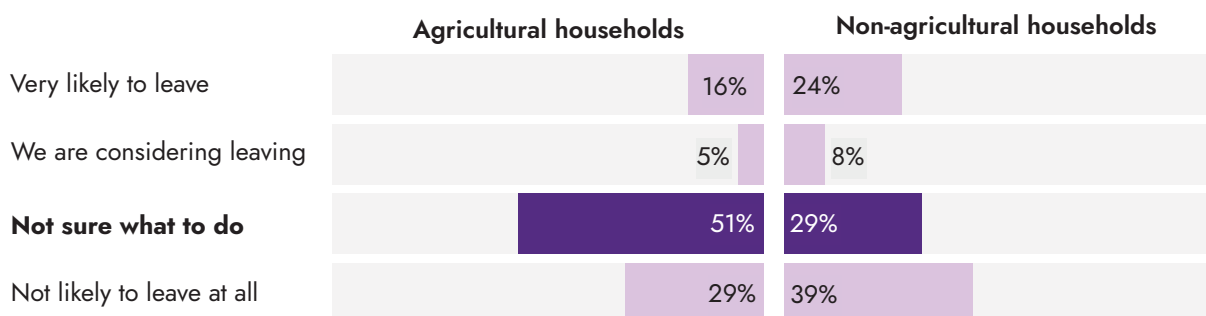
Note: Only the most prevalent impacts from Table 1 are reported. Percentages by impact represent the proportion of farmers that reported abandoning farming due to that impact or that are having less harvest due to that impact.

## WHERE IS THIS HEADING?

Even though climate-induced migration features prominently in ongoing policy discussions in Iraq, available estimates for this type of migration point to a relatively contained situation. The significant environmental and economic impacts on agriculture as well as its abandonment may not have translated, so far, in large population movements. For example, IOM Iraq’s Displacement Tracking Matrix identified and monitors slightly more than 68,000 individuals from the central and southern governorates who migrated because of environmental degradation and livelihoods loss.<sup>6</sup> This is a quite small ratio within a total population of around 12 million people in the region. Similarly, the recent household profiling of Basra, Thi-Qar and Missan governorates estimates that just around 3% of the population are internal migrants that moved within the last decade, with this migration most prevalent from urban areas due to joblessness than from rural ones.<sup>7</sup> Movements elsewhere in the country remain largely anecdotal. It is important to note, however, that the nature of climate-induced migration in this context makes measurement a complicated effort. Its movement trajectories and locations are difficult to track and map—frequently it occurs very locally within the subdistrict, or into scattered farmlands that offer seasonal work, or into informal urban neighborhoods. These movements also tend to lack a single immediate trigger, unlike conflict-related displacement, and rather result in a trickle of families moving over time rather than a steady flow all at once.

The broader policy discussions so far have thus centered more around the risks that could trigger this migration more rapidly rather than the current movements per se. The situation depicted here in terms of conflict, financial, and environmental impacts put families that depend on agricultural livelihoods at significant economic risk and indeed raises questions in terms of their capacity to remain in their current locations long-term. One illustration of this comes from the reintegration dynamics of rural households displaced by the ISIL conflict in the north-central districts analyzed here (Figure 4). When asked about their future prospects now that they returned, non-agricultural households tend to be split between those who think they will not be able to reintegrate given existing conditions and so will have to migrate/displace again, and those who are confident and feel able to effectively remain home. Agricultural households present quite a different picture, in that their situation is considerably more unsure and could go either way—stay or leave. For the most part, this could be dependent on their ability to cope with the impacts highlighted above and continue pursuing their agricultural livelihoods for the time being though at a reduced scale. Under such precarity, were these impacts to persist or worsen, then we would probably see a gradually higher proportion of agricultural households considering leaving their homes for elsewhere.

Figure 4. Likelihood of leaving place of origin given its current conditions



Note: Results only available for the eight districts in the north-central region assessed here (see Technical Factsheet).

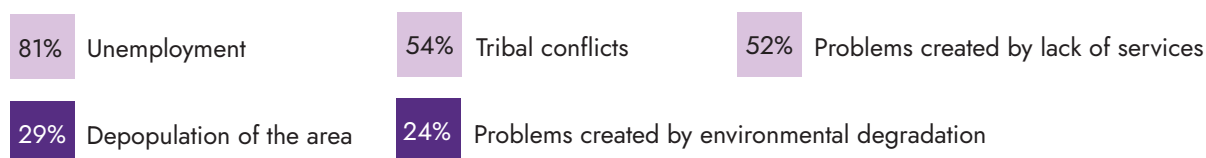
<sup>6</sup> IOM DTM, Emergency Tracking Climate-Induced Displacement–Southern Iraq, December 1-15, 2022 (Baghdad: IOM, 2022).

<sup>7</sup> IOM and Social Inquiry, *A Climate of Fragility*.



Furthermore, the idea of migration indeed seems to pervade the public consciousness of rural communities. Depopulation and outmigration are major concerns households report in the agricultural districts in the south of Iraq analyzed here in particular. Almost one of every three households in these communities signal depopulation as among the top five social concerns these locations face—coming only after related issues including unemployment and lack of adequate wellbeing linked to neglect, poor service provision, and tribal conflicts, respectively (Figure 5). Many seem to feel that their communities are hollowing out (or at risk of doing so) as eventually more people, particularly the young, are attracted elsewhere.<sup>8</sup> While available data from multiple sources presented here suggests this movement is not taking place at great frequency yet, it is perhaps being discussed in daily life as an existential threat to rural communities given that as more people start to leave, it becomes harder for others to justify remaining behind. Concerns about depopulation are also frequently associated with a loss of voice vis-à-vis the authorities, in that they will matter (even) less in decision-making.<sup>9</sup>

**Figure 5. Most important social issues in the community among agricultural households**



Note: Results only available for the eight districts in the south region assessed here (see Technical Factsheet).

Addressing this precarity in rural districts is a priority not only for sustaining their populations and the agricultural sector, but also, and more critically, for building less fragile rural communities overall.

## TIME TO TILL RIGHT

The analysis presented here puts into context the fact that a significant proportion of agricultural households across north-central and southern Iraq are struggling to continue or restart these livelihoods, either in farming or livestock herding. For those households who still engage in these activities, their levels of production and revenues generated are considerably lower now than in the recent past. This is due to a confluence of conflict, economic, and environmental factors whose severity depend on geography—conflict and economic factors are more predominant in the north-central parts of the country and environmental factors in the south. Likely because agriculture is not a particularly large economic sector even in rural areas, its recession has not yet triggered large-scale population movements out of them. It has however bred considerable uncertainty and fear of further isolation among agricultural communities across this geography.

These dynamics in the agriculture sector intersect directly with other pressing issues in Iraq including the need to adapt to climate change, to reduce sources of instability and violence, and to strengthen state presence and functioning. The following points seek to place these findings more squarely into this wider context of priorities.

<sup>8</sup> For analysis of existing migration trends and their implications for Basra City, see, IOM and Social Inquiry, *Migration into a Fragile Setting: Responding to Climate-Induced Informal Urbanization and Inequality in Basra* (Baghdad: IOM, 2021).

<sup>9</sup> Roger Guiu, *When Canals Run Dry: Displacement Triggered by Water Stress in the South of Iraq* (Geneva: IDMC, 2020).



**On politics and governance.** On the surface, solutions to agricultural decline seem purely technocratic in nature. It is true, as noted in Table 1, that some of the most detrimental impacts farmers and livestock herders face is the lack of state support for the sector, public funding, issues in the broader agricultural value chain, and poor water management. It is often assumed, with reason, that this stems from a lack of technical capacity or know-how by relevant public administrators and the ensuing response is then capacity-building in this regard.<sup>10</sup> This should not however come at the expense of understanding that technical mismanagement and regulatory non-compliance may also originate from maleficent behavior by political actors, both state and sub-state. The current governance landscape of Iraq is one of institutional capture by political factionalism which often leads to lack of compliance with centrally issued directives and regulations, lack of cooperation between (or even within) governorates, diversion of funds, and biased interventions, among others.<sup>11</sup> As such, interventions in agriculture as well as in climate and related fields need not only technocratic expertise, but in-depth contextual awareness to map out how institutions work, who the spoilers are, and where the incentives (or disincentives) are to operate in the public interest. In short, these efforts need to also connect to those that seek to strengthen the state and build legitimate governance that works for the public good.

**On economic sense and environmental limits.** It is important to recognize that the loss of agriculture in many parts of the country has reasonably crossed a point of no-return and will not be able to fully recover. This is especially true for areas significantly impacted by the lack of water<sup>12</sup> such that nearly no one is farming anymore. Basra Governorate is one such example where cultivated land there currently represents less than 0.5% of the total active farmland in the country<sup>13</sup> due in part to repressive policies, sanctions, and environmental damage and to which so much investment is placed on its revival. At the same time, the fact that there is little information on the health of agriculture in the center-south of the country, where the sector is intensive and productive and attracts a seasonal migrating workforce, underscores this lack of economic sense in responding to agricultural recession. Rather, it should be imperative to evaluate how prepared the center-south is to withstand potential environmental impacts ahead and act accordingly from there. Similarly, the focus on intervention should be on the districts highlighted in this analysis where agriculture is still taking place but is slowly diminishing. This means approaching agriculture as a productive sector that needs modernization rather than taking a somewhat nostalgic approach to reviving an agrarian lifestyle in rural areas from which people shifted away long ago.

**On those left behind.** The above realization implies accepting that there are “economic losers” in the agricultural sector. In the recent past, when people lost livelihoods, the state served as a buffer by expanding public employment and payroll which allowed people to sustain life in rural areas even if they could no longer earn an income from agriculture. These compensation mechanisms are not sustainable in general and certainly are not now in Iraq, leaving people, particularly the rural and the young, out in the cold in the absence of alternative opportunities in the places where they live. Without the state as a buffer and without other options, migration and urbanization are becoming more prominent trends, having earlier emerged due to the

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<sup>10</sup> Tobias von Lossow et al., *Water Governance: Enabling a Gamechanger* (The Hague: WPS / Clingendael, 2022).

<sup>11</sup> Mac Skelton, *Competing Over the Tigris: The Politics of Water Governance in Iraq* (Sulaimani: IRIS / KAS, 2022).

<sup>12</sup> Bassam Yousif, Omar El-Joumayle, and Jehan Baban, “Challenges to Iraq’s Environment: Applying the Water-Energy-Food Nexus Framework,” Working Paper No. 1564 (Giza: Economic Research Forum, 2022).

<sup>13</sup> This is estimated from 2021-2022 data from the Iraqi Central Statistical Organization.



legacy of conflict and developmental neglect. Even some active farmers are opting for a mixed migration approach, living elsewhere in cities for most of the year and coming back seasonally to farm if there is enough water available (e.g., a year with good rainfall).<sup>14</sup> To avoid continuing down this path of “disorganized transition,” to reign in the physical, social, and political hollowing out of rural communities and culture, and to ensure there are no losers, two types of interventions are needed: public investment and material development in these areas, and the revitalization and empowerment of civic institutions and community structures that peacefully advocate for these communities’ interests. Agriculture may recede, but the state and civic space should not be allowed to do so.

**On conflict.** Finally, in terms of what conflict and security implications this recession in agriculture may bring, it is important to ground analysis in the dynamics of Iraq as a middle-income country rather than extrapolate what may happen based on climate-security frameworks developed in more agrarian contexts. It is an overstretch to expect that economic and environmental impacts to agriculture will lead to the type of direct conflict or violence generated by competition of individuals and communities, including raids and farmer-herder clashes, over access to water and agricultural resources. These factors are absent from what farmers and livestock herders report as impacts. Rather, the decline in agriculture is a force multiplier to the underlying restive and destabilizing social and political dynamics in the country: people cannot succeed in farming anymore as in many other facets of daily life now and do not seem to receive adequate responses from institutions to help them. It highlights a gap between people’s—farmers and non-farmers, urban and rural—expectations and the realities they face. This in combination with a context where the state is receding and civic space is shrinking, cedes the ground to sub-state actors and illicit networks to take their place in providing opportunities, dispute resolution, and representation.<sup>15</sup> Central to addressing issues linked to conflict and security is making progress on the preceding elements above: good governance, economic rationality, and social and political representation and accountability.

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<sup>14</sup> Guiu, *When Canals Run Dry*.

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, Social Inquiry and WFP, *Prospect for Resilience Amid Fragility: Conflict Analysis of Al-Qurna and Al-Dair Districts in Basra Governorate* (Baghdad: WFP, 2022); and EPC, “Maysan and the Cycle of Violence in Southern Iraq,” *Emirates Policy Center*, March 23, 2022.

## ABOUT SOCIAL INQUIRY

Social Inquiry is a not-for-profit research organization examining the ties that bind us and the forces that pull us apart. Our aim is to improve the impact and effectiveness of public policies and interventions that seek to address the root causes of conflict and fragility related to governance, civic trust, and inequality.

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