

Urban Conflict Analysis in Basra:
Improving Prospects for Peace and Stability in Vulnerable and Food Insecure
Communities in Southern Iraq

October 2021



This report was prepared together with the United Nations World Food Programme in Iraq (WFP). The views expressed in this publication are those of the participants and do not necessarily represent those of the WFP or Mercy Hands for Humanitarian Aid.

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List of Abbreviations

FGD	Focus Group Discussion
KII	Key Informant Interview
MH	Mercy Hands
WFP	World Food Programme

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BACKGROUND

The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) cooperated with Mercy Hands to carry out a qualitative analysis of urban communities in Basra to better understand current conflict causes, drivers, and triggers in relation to access to (natural) resources, (lack of) livelihood opportunities, climate change, and food insecurity in Basra. This conflict analysis constitutes the starting point of a larger process that WFP is undertaking to understand and continuously adapt and respond programming to the complexity and fluidity of local contexts in Iraq. The research aims to gain a deeper understanding of:

- The role that socio-economic inequality, social marginalization, unemployment and lack of opportunities play in (the creation of) conflict and tensions in urban areas of Basra, especially amongst youths and adolescents.
- And, the entry points for addressing the systemic socio-economic challenges to so indirectly affect the identified conflict drivers, via potential livelihoods and resilience programming for communities in Basra.

The activities of this research were implemented by Mercy Hands for Humanitarian Aid (MH) in conjunction with WFP and other local actors partnering with WFP in Basra to avoid duplication and build upon existing work. The methodology was developed in collaboration with relevant WFP staff, i.e., the conflict sensitivity officer, Basra sub-office staff and EMPACT project staff to ensure the most effective and relevant data capture. Data collected for this analysis comprises of Focus Group Discussions (FGD) and Key Informant Interviews (KII) with relevant stakeholders involved at different levels in the local economy- from adolescents, to youth-focused civil society and relevant economic actors and organizations working on economic support and livelihoods in urban areas of Basra. The findings of this report are expected to inform the strategic planning of future initiatives as well as establish the potential impact of urban livelihoods programs in the area on socio-economic conflict drivers.

As such, this conflict analysis report seeks to answer the following key questions:

1. What types of factors or challenges are causing conflict in Basra city?
2. To what extent is the lack of livelihood opportunities a trigger for conflict and tensions in Basra?
3. Which approaches and which stakeholders can be utilized to help mitigate or resolve conflicts and disputes in Basra?
4. What specific roles do INGOs, the central government, women, and local authorities play in resolving conflicts in Basra?
5. How can specifically designed resilience programming support mitigation of factors leading to socio-economic conflict and tensions in urban areas of Basra?

INTRODUCTION

Basra Governorate, in the south of Iraq, is estimated to be the third most populous Governorate in the country (3,142,449 inhabitants), according to the Iraqi Ministry of Planning¹. It possesses a significant wealth of natural resources, including oil, gas, fertile land, and is Iraq's only maritime point of access. However, since the change of regime in 2003, Basra has witnessed various kinds of conflicts and violence between different religious, tribal, and political factions, over control of the Governorate's resources. Climate change and shortage of water have also fueled conflicts among tribes and residents of rural areas. These continued tensions left a majority of the population grappling with high poverty rates, unemployment, a rise in crime², increased drug addiction³, and public dissatisfaction with poor services and deteriorating living conditions. In addition, urbanization has increased unemployment, waste levels and led to heightened tensions over increased water scarcity⁴.

The labor market in Basra is currently unable to absorb the youth bulge (no accurate updated statistics on youth population in Basra or unemployment rates among this population are currently available), due to compounding peculiarities such as: low labor intensity in the oil sector, inability of the public sector to provide job opportunities to the increasing number of graduates, an underdeveloped private sector, a mismatch between demand and supply in the labor market and a low level of human capital development.

Unemployment triggers a sense of hopelessness among youth and might increase the likelihood that individuals will retaliate against a system they believe to have failed them. This could increase the chances of youth radicalization if extremist groups are able to provide disengaged youth with a sense of a collective objective as well as economic prospects not otherwise obtainable. In Basra, unemployed youth are likely to join armed groups (official or unofficial) operating on ground to earn a living. A Fact-Finding Mission conducted by the NRC in 2018 revealed that residents of Basra perceive that armed groups have become 'often the only employer' and that finding even an hourly labor has become a daily struggle.⁵ Therefore, conflicts among groups and individuals in Basra (although not to deliberately instigate violence but rather are based on even random points of tensions among community members) have become lucrative since they are very likely to lead to monetary compensations that can substitute for unemployment and lack of livelihood opportunities for those individuals involved and concerned (armed) tribal representatives who allegedly mediate to resolve conflicts among individuals and groups across Basra and most of the southern region of Iraq .

¹ Central Statistical Organization, Iraqi Ministry of Planning, 2021, <http://cosit.gov.iq/ar/2013-01-31-08-43-38>.

² Sinan Salaheddin, "Iraq: Crime soars in Basra as army leaves to fight Isis," Independent, July 10, 2016

³ Alissa J. Rubin, Iraq Faces a New Adversary: Crystal Meth," New York Times, September 14, 2019.

⁴ IDMC, Global Report on Internal Displacement: Grid 2020, 23 April 2020, p. 33

⁵ NRC, Basra Fact-Finding Mission Report #2, 22 September 2018.

Sources reviewed also refer to governance-related issues that Basra has been encountering since 2003, in particular, conflicting responsibilities and conflicting interests and objectives between the local and the federal governments over managing the Governorate and its resources that are demonstrated through conflicting policies especially those with economic impact on the Basrawi community.⁶

This precarious situation has been further compounded by the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic. This threatens to further impact the government's ability to support employment opportunities in the public and private sector, and economic opportunities for its predominantly young population at a time when the country is still facing daunting challenges to rebuild its infrastructure and provide needed public services to its population. Basra exemplifies all problems faced by Iraq: a land rich with oil and once was fortunate with natural resources as well as fertile agricultural lands and water and yet unable to harness and properly develop such resources for the good of its population. The fertility of the land and the availability of water have been decreasing for years in Basra. The socioeconomic situation has been worsening and deteriorating.

At present, among the biggest challenges faced by the Governorate is the significant discontent of its people, in particular its youth. Over the last eight years, the people of Basra have demonstrated in the streets against the lack of services and employment opportunities with no positive outlook or change that could uplift living conditions in Basra. Although Basra has seen some degrees of economic growth in terms of oil production, the governorate has yet to see real progress in terms of government ability to deliver services, reduced corruption levels, establishment of a realistic economic plan, and establishment of the necessary infrastructure to spur growth.

The unstable security conditions in Basra were further impacted by the (at the time of data collection and writing) upcoming October federal elections or strategic programming based on thorough understanding of how government authorities, academic community, and citizens of Basra perceived conflicts, their nuances and implications on maintaining peace and stability in Basra.

⁶ Jiyad, S., Failure of Governance in Basra puts all of Iraq at Risk, LSE, 2 April 2020.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This analysis aims to assess the main socio-economic challenges impacting conflict in Basra. Based on this analysis, feasibility of WFP's program expansion in resilience building for food insecure and conflict-affected communities in Basra Governorate, for example via its EMPACT⁷ program, can be established.

The objective of conducting a conflict analysis in Basra City is to improve the effectiveness of WFP resilience programming in contributing to conflict prevention and reduction and increasing WFP conflict sensitivity. The assessment provided below evaluates the risks of negative effects of conflicts on programs, the risks of programs or policies exacerbating conflicts, the opportunities to improve the effectiveness of resilience interventions in contributing to conflict prevention and reduction.

The data collected structured an analysis that led to a strong and methodically-substantive understanding of Basra context, with the goal of supporting evidence-based decision-making for WFP's and other developmental actors' engagement. The approach, therefore, aims at mapping out the conflict drivers and current responses to identify gaps and strategic entry points for future policy and program options.

The urban conflict analysis specifically seeks to answer the following questions:

- What are emergent political, economic, ecological, and social issues in Basra?
- Is there a history of conflict?
- What are the structural causes of conflict? (Lack of political participation, lack of equal economic and social opportunities, inequitable access to natural resources, poor governance). Which areas are more conflict-prone within this context? (Areas of influence of specific actors, frontlines around the location of natural oil resources, important infrastructure and lines of communication, pockets of socially marginalized or excluded populations).
- How these tensions impact the social and economic factors?
- Does the lack of livelihood opportunities impact the social stability, conflict, and tensions in Basra? How does this manifest itself? How does this affect communities or youth? What are the recommendations to improve the situation?

⁷ Building Resilience through skills development towards employment - Empowerment in Action (EMPACT) provides digital skills through a tailored vocational training program. Participants receive English language classes, an introduction to the basics of information technology, and a further program of more advanced training. Participants learn how to use Advanced MS Office Package, Web Development, Business Administration Support, Social Media Marketing, Graphic & Web Design, Simple Coding, mobile application development, networking, and E commerce.

Conflicts are multifaceted and are characterized by multiple dynamics: economic, political, environmental, social, etc. Therefore, a broad literature review was carried out to identify the main sources of conflict that have characterized Basra in the last decades. However, to support effectiveness, this assessment puts particular attention on events occurred since the 2019's protests in Basra. It takes a closer look at the socio-economic factors exacerbating tensions in the urban area and the main vulnerabilities (unemployment, poor public sector services, corruption) that led to protest outbreak. The conflict assessment targets selected districts of Basra city, according to their different socio-economic characteristics. Targeting different sub-districts allowed Mercy Hands to reach different groups and ensure a relevant diversification of the participants in the assessment.

3.3 DATA COLLECTION AND DATA SOURCES

This assessment was based on a participatory and inclusive approach. Privacy, transparency and security of participants were ensured, as detailed below.

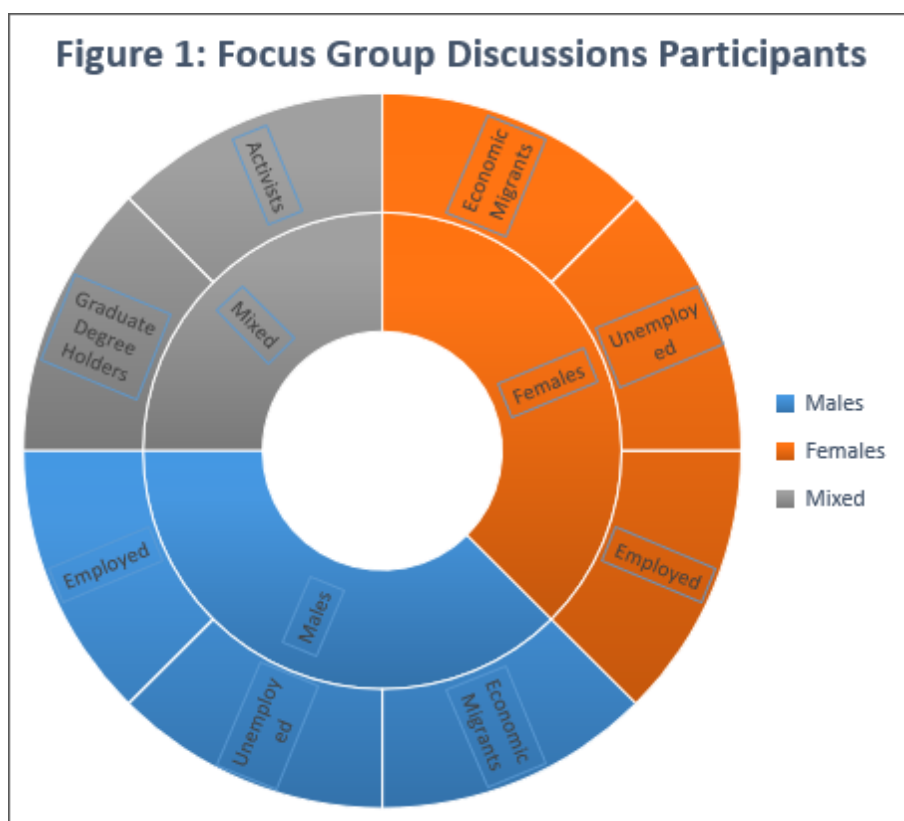
Data was gathered through quantitative data collection methods of FGDs and KIIs with relevant stakeholders who are involved at different levels of the local economy- from adolescents to youth-focused civil society and economic actors and organizations working on economic support and livelihoods in urban areas of Basra. Data collection took place between June 2021 and September 2021.

Table 1: Data Collection Tools and Participants

Tools for the Urban Conflict Analysis	Target	Number of Participants
8 Focus Group Discussions	Male youth unemployed (age 18-30)	14
	Female youth unemployed (age 18-30)	10
	Political activists – gender mixed (age 18-30)	12
	Male youth employed (age 18-30)	18
	Female youth employed (age 18-30)	11
	Graduate Degree Holders– gender mixed (age 18-30)	12

	Male economic migrants from rural areas to urban settings	12
	Female economic migrants from rural areas to urban settings	8
Key Informant Interviews	1-Local authority (governor office, chamber of commerce, ministry of youth and sport, ministry of education) 2-Political activists and influencers 3-Youth organizations. 4-Tribal leaders or tribal council members 5-Women activist or women civil society organizations 6-Private business representatives	26

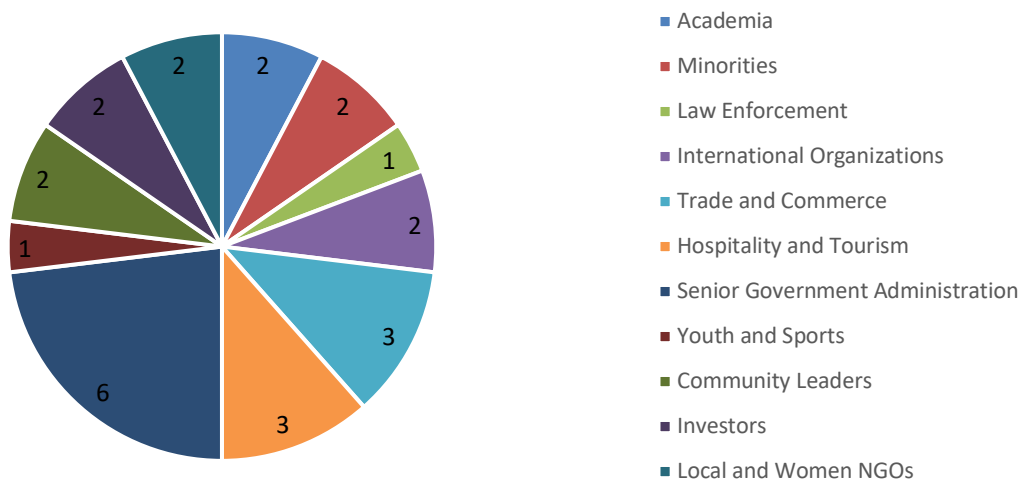
In addition, a gender-balanced sample was sought for.



- The FGDs: the participants were divided 50/50. This is important to identify perceptions and point of views from both lenses, especially as women in Basra don't have full access to participation in the public sphere and the socio-economic life.

- For the KIIs, a gender balance could not be achieved as the main target is policymakers and experts, who are mostly male. Meanwhile, the voice of women was present by interviewing women activists and women's rights CSOs representatives.

Figure 2: Data Source #2: Communities and Sectors Represented among 26 Key Informant Interviewees (KIIs)

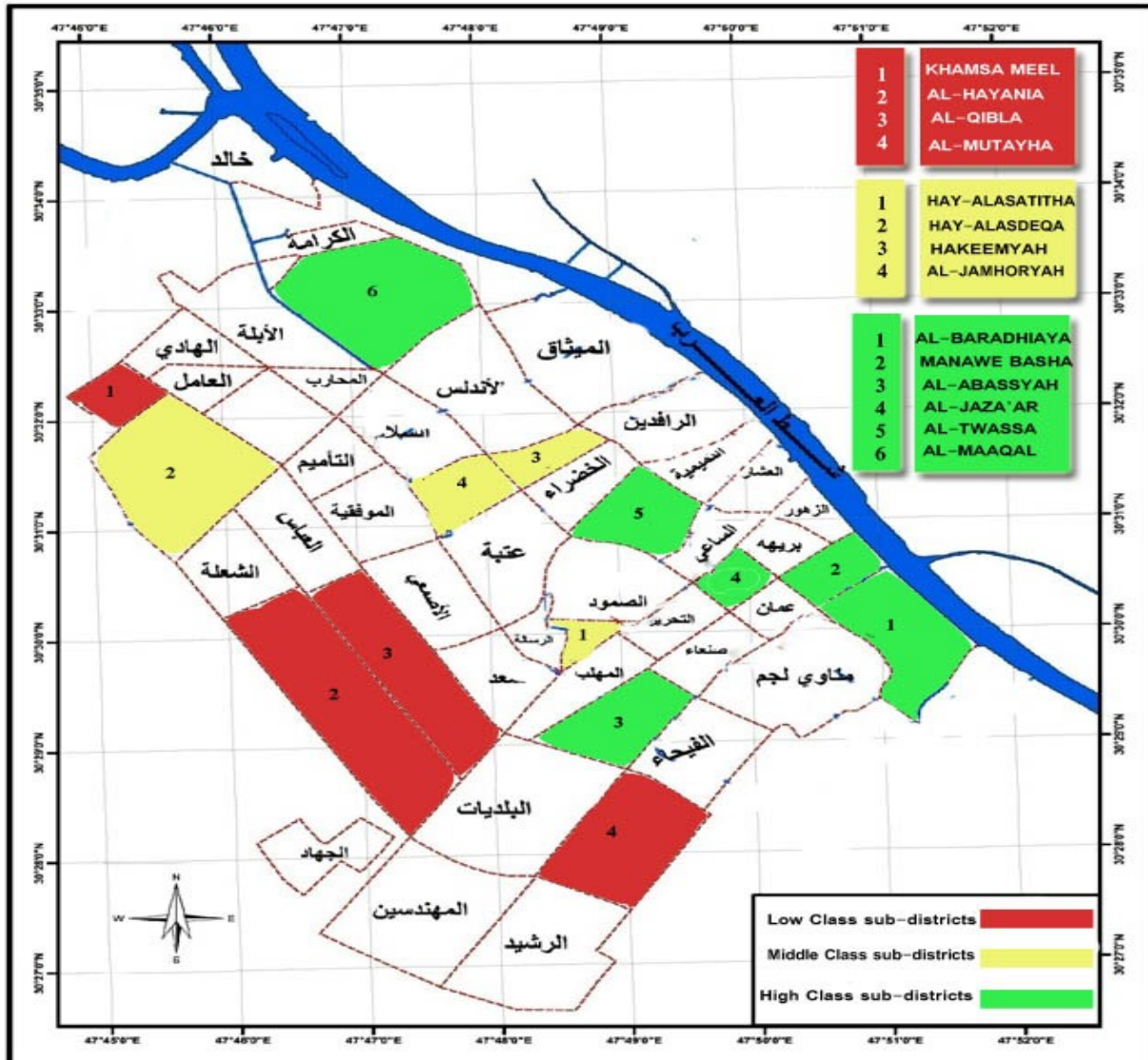


Data triangulation was ensured throughout the data collection and data analysis processes. In addition to data collected from KII and FGD participants, a review of contextual and underlying long-term conflict factors that characterize Basra urban area and mapping of the sources of tension and conflict was conducted, as presented in the introduction above.

3.4 GEOGRAPHICAL SCOPE

The assessment covers urban conflict in the following urban districts in Basra: Al-Karma sub-district (close to the oil-fields); Al-Bardhiaya, Manawee Basha, Al-Abassyah, Al-Jaza'ar, Al-Twassa and Al-Maaqal (high-class sub-districts); Hay Al-Asatitha, Hay Al-Asdeqa, Hakeemyah, and Al-Jamhoryah (middle-class residential sub-districts); Khamsa meel, Al-Hayania, Al-Qibla, and Al-Mutayha (low-class sub-districts). Targeted Sub-districts were chosen after consultation with WFP.

Map of Urban Districts of Basra Covered in this Study



3.5 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Informed consent forms were used to assure that the fundamental rights and welfare of subjects are protected. Signing the informed consent ensures that the document has been provided to a prospective subject. Risks and benefits have been explained, participants agree to participate, and a contact has been given in case of any complaints or queries. Informed consent was obtained in

advance from each individual who participates during data collection. The research team and enumerators ensure that participants fully understand the information and do not feel pressured or coerced into giving consent. Participants were given the right to withdraw their consent or discontinue participation at any time without penalty. If they preferred not to answer any questions at any time and for any reason, participants were free to skip those questions.

3.6 SAFETY AND ANONYMITY

The confidentiality of participants was protected at any point during data collection for the Mercy Hands for Humanitarian Aid by carefully treating personal data. Participants were informed about the scope and limits of confidentiality to understand their own, other participants', and the researchers' respect to not disclose any shared information.

3.7 COVID SPREAD PREVENTION MEASURES

Interviews took place in accordance with the appropriate public health regulations related to COVID-19 restrictions in Basra. For their own safety and that of study participants, the field team was provided with personal protective equipment (masks and hand sanitizer), and where possible, they conducted interviews outdoors or in well-ventilated spaces. Use of masks and other sanitation measures was mandatory for the interviews. Mercy Hands' staff was provided with the equipment necessary to maintain Covid-19 appropriate countermeasures. The Security and Logistics Department, through EHO, provide personal protective equipment (PPE) to staff and beneficiaries as per WHO and Iraqi government requirements. Soap and water, or hand sanitization gel, were available at every meeting and work site.

4. FINDINGS

Data collected through discussions with FGD and semi-structured interviews with KIIs participants revealed significant insights related to conflicts in Basra, nuances of each type of conflict, impacts of conflicts on residents of the Governorate, the various triggers of conflicts, conflict resolving dynamics, and the players perceived to have/have not a role in resolving conflicts in Basra. Findings are discussed in details below.

“Poverty caused by unemployment and lack of employment opportunities trigger all forms of conflicts and instability”

FGD, Male Economic Migrants

4.1 CONFLICTS IN (URBAN) BASRA, PERCEPTIONS, AND NUANCES

The concept of conflict and its nuances was explored in this study. Conflict, an active disagreement between people with opposing opinions or principles, as defined by Cambridge Dictionary⁸, was introduced for discussion with participants within targeted FGD and KII. In order to facilitate explorations of undirected opinions and perceptions, KII and FGD participants were asked about conflict in Basra without narrowing it down to armed/unarmed, group/individual, formal/informal, or urban/rural with specific focus on urban contexts. This approach provided ground for free elaborations of opinions and constructive exchange of discussions among participants with diverse backgrounds. These diverse backgrounds reflected overlap of perception of conflict and conflict dynamics between urban and rural contexts, as will be discussed below.

As expressed by participants in this study, conflicts in Basra take various forms and can escalate rapidly due to the presence of clashing authorities (formal and/or informal), weak rule of law, and the availability of massive amounts of unauthorized weapons. The most common and complicated conflicts in Basra are tribal and political conflicts as massive monetary resources and casualties are usually involved. These are more prominent in the southern regions than other parts of the country. It is important to note that sometimes, political and tribal conflicts in Basra are intertwined due to interrelated dynamics and allegiances to tribal and political affiliations at the same time. Characterized as a tribal community, political figures in Basra often seek to be backed by tribal power through tribal affiliation. Likewise, leading tribal figures tend to support political figures to which they belong in exchange of potential economic and political clout. According to KII and FGD participants, conflicts can be classified into three major categories. These are:

⁸ Cambridge Dictionary, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/conflict>

4.1.1 TRIBAL CONFLICTS

These conflicts are the most intense and are usually triggered by competition over resources such as water and oil fields. Tribal leaders and armed groups are usually those involved in these armed and deadly clashes. Although these conflicts that seem to be driven by collective purpose are more prominent in rural contexts, such conflicts can be dragged to urban contexts as well. When these conflicts erupt, Basrawi communities are gravely impacted and even lead to casualties, sometimes. Such conflicts have devastating impacts on Basra as they can impede the ability of companies, businesses, as well as individual's to commute to work or do work related activities. Participants in FGDs agree that such violent conflicts are enabled by the spread of unauthorized weapons, incompetence of local and federal authorities, and weakened law enforcement.

4.1.2 POLITICAL CONFLICTS

Political conflicts are often characterized by violence and tense armed confrontations. It is well known that some political parties in Iraq might use on armed groups, although not openly admitted, to support these parties' existence, furthering their agendas and silencing those who oppose them. These parties seek to control resource-rich areas in specific regions in the Governorate of Basra as a source of revenue. Political parties are also said to have control over specific areas of Basra especially those near oil producing wells as well as other strategically positioned districts that host government offices. Such control is imposed directly through the presence of affiliated armed groups or through employment of affiliated individuals in certain government sectors and offices.

Throughout the FGD of employed female youth from urban areas in Basra, participants indicated that “political conflicts impact stability and that any political conflict

(specifically in Basra) among politicians significantly and negatively impacts society.” Members of this FGD also agreed that the existence of many clashing political parties in Basra who fight over resource and control of the oil-rich governorate is one of the main sources and reasons for conflict in the Governorate.

Representatives of civil society and international organizations highlighted that tribal as well as political conflicts are some of the main challenges to implementing programs in the various areas of Basra especially to the south of the Governorate. The intensity and scope of tribal and political conflicts can lead to heightened insecurity situations that could threaten the safety of those involved in program implementation.

“We believe that social and tribal conflicts will significantly affect the economy and various sectors of Basra, especially foreign investment in the Governorate.”

KII, High Ranking Security Official

4.1.3 PERSONAL AND INDIVIDUAL CONFLICTS

These conflicts are triggered by more personal related tensions such as disputes among farmers over water for farming or competition over job opportunities in daily labor, divorce, inheritance, fighting kids. It is important to note that most conflicts in Basra erupt for financial reasons among individuals or groups, as multiple KII and FGD participants explained.

Some KII participants indicated that disputes and conflicts deepen due to bureaucracy and long processing in courts. Therefore, disputing individuals resort to tribal authorities to settle conflicts in light of tribal settlement and ruling traditions. Personal disputes are likely to progress to be armed tribal conflicts, if not financially compensated. Some KII participants indicated that personal conflicts can also escalate from verbal arguments to full-blown violent clashes due to random reasons such as disputes over the ownership of a bird, a barking dog that could have bitten a passerby, or anything. While high level tribal conflicts are enacted through medium artillery, low level and “individual conflict violent clashes take place using personal weapons, knives, and other sharp objects,” some female migrants participating in the FGD acknowledged.

No matter the type and extent of conflicts, the occurrence of any of these conflicts, if turned violent, can significantly impact people’s ability to go to work and earn a living specifically in urban areas. FGD of female economic migrants study stated that:

“Conflicts can hinder people’s ability to leave for work because clashing groups might impose curfews by force and using arms. Sometimes, this happens with absolute absence to law enforcement security forces. Conflicting armed groups could also force families to leave their houses.” (FGD, Female Economic Migrants)

4.2 TRIGGERS OF CONFLICT IN BASRA

4.2.1 Fighting over Natural Resources: Conflicts over oil-rich pieces of lands are classified as the most contentious and uncontrollable conflicts that Basra has been witnessing since 2003. The weak role of security forces and spread of armed militias and gangs encouraged tribal groups as well as others to seek control over these resourceful areas to use for personal benefits without the local or federal government authorization.

Conflicts over natural resources can particularly vary among urban and rural areas in Basra. For example, the scarcity of water is more often a point of conflict among farmers and individuals in rural areas that are being hit hard by drought and climate change. Scarcity of water, lack of governmental support for farmers and local production, and the push for urbanizing rural areas caused higher unemployment rates among young farmers who chose to migrate to urban areas of

Basra For example, “lack of government support for farmers and the scarcity of water contributed to conflicts and unemployment in Al-Zubair district that was once famous for its fertility,” female economic migrants in Basra explained.

However, in urban districts in Basra, conflict over resources might take different forms. Scarcity of drinking water, lack of adequate electric power coverage and even proper sewage system has pushed individuals to seek unauthorized access to such resources connecting their homes to grid lines and water systems of neighboring streets. These fraudulent practices have become so common across central and southern regions of Iraq for residents to substitute for poor public services. For example, webs of randomly connected electric cords spread across urban areas and often stir contentious tensions among residents of urban districts in relation to power or water supply across urban suburbs.

4.2.2 Socio-economics Triggers: Lack of social safety nets pushed locals to look for other options to supplement income and livelihoods. Also, lack and scarcity of services especially in health and education sectors have been referred to as reasons for conflicts among individuals and families in Basra. The public medical system is underfunded and unable to provide appropriate service to patients in the highly populated urban areas in Basra. Likewise, the pandemic’s impact on face-to-face learning approaches and the push for virtual education has economically marginalized economically disadvantaged students further. The intensity of conflict over health services and medical safety resources has doubled specially after the spread of COVID-19 in Basra and southern Governorates of Iraq, according to FGD participants. Such tensions can be manifested in more frequent attacks against medical services providers by patients or their relatives due to dissatisfaction with inadequate or lack of medical services.

The transition to virtual education, due to the spread of COVID-19, has crippled the ability of families to keep up with educating their kids. Basra, like many areas in Iraq, lacks the infrastructure to make virtual education a successful experience for school kids. This situation has exposed inequalities among communities across Iraq and further disadvantaged vulnerable families. Some female participants asserted that “the government’s lack of understanding of these challenges and measures to counter health and education related obstacles have increased dissatisfaction among communities and tightened livelihood opportunities in Basra.”

Many FGD and KII participants reiterated that corruption of government officials, favoritism, and nepotism practices by many employers, are among the most social aspects that deepen division and dissatisfaction among residents of Basra. This is especially true when it comes to employment in the public sector.

Moreover, economic migration of youth and families from other southern Governorates to Basra intensified the scarcity of jobs and heightened prospects of conflicts among crowds of unemployed youth workforce in Basra. Such migration is the reason of crowded neighborhoods

and higher levels of waste in Basra as well, KII tribal representatives and KII local authorities explain.

4.2.3 Foreign Labor in Basra: Some academic and professional KII and FGD participants highlighted that the dependence on foreign labor in the oil sector and the unbalanced ratios of employment opportunities among local and foreign workforce have added extra tensions among residents in Basra. Youth resentment of such practices was manifested through a number of demonstrations by recent graduates of related fields of study. Employers in sectors of restaurants and hospitality also showed tendencies to hire cheap foreign labor who might be willing to work more hours for less pay. Public resentment against increased foreign labor is driven by high unemployment numbers among Basrawi youth.

However, A KII representative of international oil company highlighted that public perceptions of foreign labor in Basra are misinform by social media and other platforms that exaggerate the number of foreign labor in Basra. He stated that, “social media and the news circulated.. on Facebook drives the public, and most of it, if not the majority of it, is fake or serves (political) agendas. He went further clarifying that “the percentage of Iraqis to expats is 96% (in the oil company that he represents).

4.2.4 Education: Participants in KII and FGD agreed that the absence of good educational system is one contributor to tensions in Basra. Because the educational system is unable to match educational needs of the population, students are struggling to meet employer expectations with the limited teaching and learning resources available. Youth drop-outs of schools increase as students proceed to higher levels of education. In order to supplement the missing teaching and learning opportunities, parents have to pay massive amounts for private tutors and other expenses. Such expenses are driving higher drop-outs among low-income families who cannot take up these extra educational expenses. This phenomenon applies to both men and women in Basra, with women scoring lower on educational participation. According to the Iraqi CSO, illiteracy among women aged 15-49 in 2018 was 28.9 % in Basra.⁹ Interestingly, some KII and FGD participants highlighted that girls in Basra are usually denied access to education due to financial reasons rather than societal norms, where families in less affluent areas prefer to limit their expenses to essential living needs rather than educate their (female) children.

Other FGD female participants asserted that students are not able to learn because “the educational... staff members suffer from the lack of enthusiasm to support students’ learning.”

⁹ Iraq, CSO, Basra Statistical Summary 2018,21 June 2020.

Most children finish primary education. However, children’s enrollment drastically diminishes in further education. This is generally attributed to the stagnant educational system and poor condition of schools in the region in addition to financial reasons. Girls represent a big portion of this out-of-school population due to lack of gender-segregated schools that are socially accepted as the only option for girls to be in school, and social norms that encourage under-age marriages of girls in tribal communities.

“High unemployment rates mean more problems in the Governorate.”

KII, High Ranking Security Official

4.3 UNEMPLOYMENT, YOUTH, AND CONFLICT IN BASRA

Lack of employment opportunities is a real burden on a considerable percentage of residents in Basra.

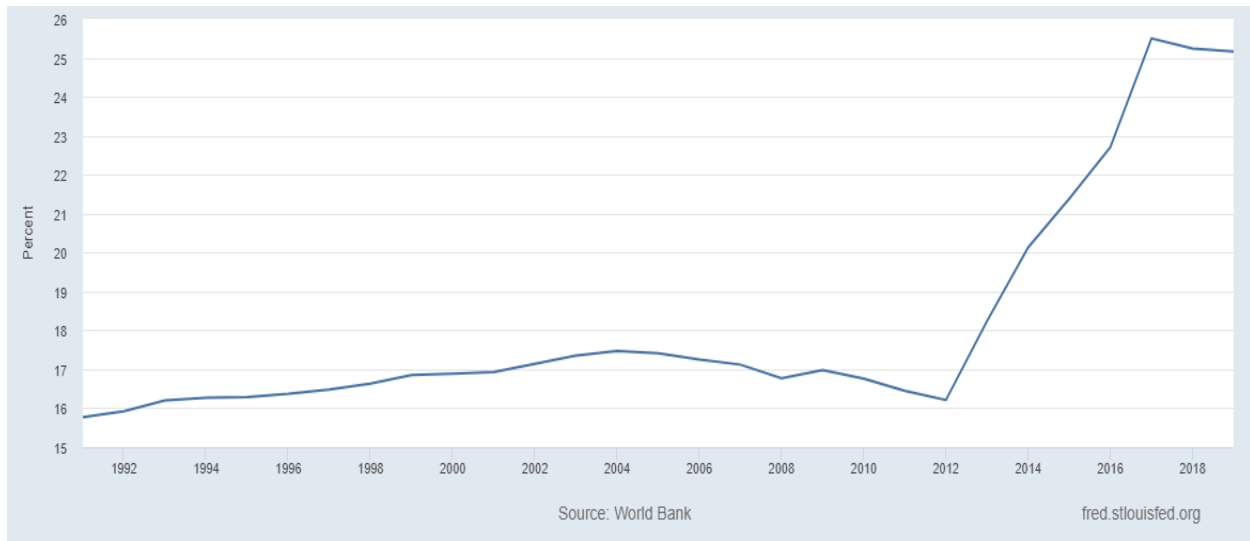
Unemployment is implicating serious social problems on youth in Basra. Unemployment is affecting Basrawi youth psychologically and emotionally and pushing them into addiction and illegal practices to earn a living and regain their self-esteem. In addition, unemployment is forcing youth into illegal paths to earn living and to enhances their social images within their communities and to create a sense of self-worth. “The various forms of social conflicts and unrest worsened the economic atmosphere in Basra,” KII representatives of minorities agree. According to female migrants, unemployment can dangerously impact youth and divert them to embrace drugs and illegal pathways to earn a living.

“Girls are usually denied access to education due to financial reasons!”

FGDs, Unemployed Male Youth

In a tight labor market like this, youth are limited to work, if any, in basic services as barbers, taxi drivers, and construction workers. Unfortunately, these jobs are not enough to keep up with increasing living expenses in a city like Basra.

Figure 3: Youth Unemployment Rate in Iraq



As expressed by FGD male participants, “Poverty caused by unemployment and lack of employment opportunities trigger all forms of conflicts and instability”.

Many KII and FGD participants attributed high rates of unemployment to lack of public and private employment opportunities, low investment, decrease in development projects, lack of government support, favoritism-based employment practices, and corruption.

The thorough analysis of the perspectives of KII and FGD participants revealed that there is a high correlation between conflict and unemployment. The impact of unemployment on increasing conflict in Basra is best described by a representative of local government. According to him:

Unemployment has a negative impact on (Basrawi) youth and their communities. It causes them psychological disturbance and pushes them to...alcohol and substance addictions and other actions that can destroy the society. In addition, (high unemployment) leads to committing more crimes especially theft due to widened gaps among social classes. All these consequences (of unemployment) dismantle cohesion among members of Basra’s community.

A KII representing the local government in Basra confirmed that, “most of the problems in Basra and the demonstration are attributed back to unemployment.” adding, “poverty and lack of employment opportunities motivate conflict and violence due to their psychological implications on youth and their life experiences.”

Also, KII and FGD participants with different backgrounds confirmed that their communities are experiencing conflicts and unemployment in various ways. For example, unemployed youth are very likely to resort to illegal ways to earn living such as joining armed militias and gangs, committing armed robbery, or become drug dealers. In other cases, hopeless youth are resorting to begging for money or are committing suicide, which has been increasing among youth lately according to unofficial media sources.

Basrawi youth also displayed frustration with current socioeconomic hurdles and the high unemployment through protesting publically demanding employment opportunities that can help them earn decent living. These protest that erupted in Basra during the last few years particularly the protest of October 2019 led to social unrest that spread later to Baghdad and other southern governorates. Basrawi youth who took on streets expressed distrust in the central and local government. The demonstration were attributed to the approved 2019 central budget that missed employment earmarks and shrunk employment opportunities for local youth in Basra, as expressed by the representative of local government in Basra.

4.4 CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN BASRA

4.4.1 How Are Conflicts Resolved in Basra? According to the majority of the FGD and KII’ participants, conflicts in Basra are resolved through tribal involvement. It was mentioned earlier that even personal disputes might end up tackled through traditional tribal conflict resolution channels due to long processing of disputes through courts. This is quite conceivable taking into consideration the tribal social context that governs Basra and other southern Governorates in Iraq, in addition to the increased dominance of tribal ‘traditions’ in light of the weak role of law authorities in Basra.

Depending on the type, scope of conflict, and stakes involved, tribal agreements/settlements and hefty financial compensations (including giving women for marriage as part of the compensation deal) are usually how conflict are (fully) resolved in Basra. Otherwise, conflict could end with confiscations of lands and properties or a chain of assassinations from each party in both urban and rural contexts. The data collected does not reveal if these tribal settlements work differently among certain groups of tribes or which tribes might be more powerful/marginalized than other tribes.

“If the government supported and facilitated increased job opportunities, all youth will refrain from contributing to conflict since they are busy working and earning living”

FGD, Graduate Degrees Holders

4.4.2 Who Has the Power to Resolve Conflicts? There is a clear consensus among KII and FGD participants that tribal authorities have the power to start and/or resolve conflicts. Although this trend holds in rural areas more significantly than within cities, tribal influence and power is

increasingly gaining presence in urban contexts as well. However, the issues and types of conflicts being addressed might be different. For example, in urban contexts, conflicts related to divorce, custody of children, physical assault, fighting among neighbors, etc. might be the focus of tribal involvement rather than disputes over water resources or ownership of oil-rich pieces of land in rural contexts.

The involvement of governmental law enforcement can temporarily stop armed conflicts among tribes. However, such peace ‘truce’ does not hold for so long, in the absence of tribal settlements carried on through traditional tribal settings. Individuals in conflict or dispute could substitute law enforcement with tribal powers to resolve disputes to evade lengthy courts processing and earn considerable amounts of money as compensation through traditional tribal settlements. Tribal leaders involved in conflict resolution get a considerable share of the settlement money. In fact, tribal settlements sessions have become so popular in central and southern regions of Iraq due to customary allocations of ‘stipend’ to those tribal figures meeting to resolve conflicts. That is, tribal settlements have flourished in the last decade as a model of business, although no official data in this regard have been published.

As far as political tensions and conflicts are concerned, these conflicts can only be resolved through high level agreements among leaders of political parties. These agreements are happening more frequently specially around election seasons as political parties seek coalitions to gain more power and representation for its members in the parliament.

“EMPACT provides a new approach that helps youth not only build on tech and language skills but also build confidence among males and females alike.”

KII, International Organizations

4.5 ROLE OF INGOs, LOCAL AND FEDERAL AUTHORITIS, WOMEN, CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS, AND MINORITIES IN CONFLICTS

4.5.1 Role of International Organizations: International organizations and foreign governmental assistance programmes have been vital in supporting the local Basrawi and Federal Iraqi government in providing various assistance and development programmes in Basra as well as other Governorates. For drawing connections in relation to WFP programmes in Iraq, it should be noted that the WFP has been a major player “saving lives, changing lives: supporting the Government of Iraq's social protection work towards Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2: Zero Hunger.”¹⁰ Notably, WFP’s EMPACT (Empowerment in Action) has been successfully implemented in several Governorates to equip “vulnerable Iraqi youth with digital and English

¹⁰ WFP Iraq Country Brief, July 2021.

language skills to help them secure jobs.”¹¹ Likewise, KII participants representing international organizations suggested that program like WFP’s EMPACT could empower youth in Basra and help them build on their skills in technology and enhance their English Language proficiency. According to some KII participants, EMPACT has been proven to be an effective program that builds on the soft skills of participants as it starts with initial evaluation of participants’ skills and follows a set of criteria for selecting participants for each training track.

In Basra, WFP continues to maintain and provide livelihood opportunities in urban areas for individuals and households to “start or develop their businesses in order to help them earn an income and support their food security.”¹² WFP’s assistance programs maintained considerably and closely equal support opportunities for males and females (49% women beneficiaries to 51% male beneficiaries).¹³

KII and FGD participants asserted the important role that International organizations such as the WFP and others play in supporting youth through livelihood and capacity building programs and reduce conflicts through such resilience-building opportunities. The work of such organizations has become more visible to the public.

Two projects of particular interest are currently being implemented in Basra in partnership with Mercy Hands for Humanitarian Aid. The first project, *Enhance the sustainable livelihood and economic recovery for vulnerable people in urban areas in Basra governorate*, has been introduced as a response to the continued economic challenges that Iraq faces. This project aims to address the need for livelihood and employment opportunities and to support the shift from public sector employment to the private sector and SMEs by providing short and medium-term employment opportunities to young men and women. Additionally, the project interventions are addressing the mutually reinforcing challenges of widespread unemployment, youth radicalization and violent extremism. The project contributes to support the economic recovery of most vulnerable social segments, and facilitate the expansion of the private sector in crisis-affected communities. Alhayaniya, Al-Jumhoriya, AlZubair centre and Abo Al-Khasseib center, have been chosen as the targeted locations for implementation. Overall, the project support increased individual resilience and a sense of ownership among the community, leading to stability and social cohesion, a decrease in the risk of negative coping mechanisms, and the possibility for a sustainable, long-term recovery and success.

The second project, *Girls Transition to Lower Secondary Schools in Shat Al-Arab District*, as an extension from School Feeding project in Basra, the WFP and UNICEF in collaboration with Mercy hands for Humanitarian Aid will support the Joint Girls Transition Pilot Project to support the transition of girls from primary to lower secondary education in Shatt Al Arab district in

¹¹ What the World Food Program is Doing in Iraq, Resilience-Building, <https://www.wfp.org/countries/iraq>.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

Basrah. 2,400 adolescent girls and their families will receive cash incentives through the academic year to compensate part of the educational expenses in addition to complementary activities around the importance of education, health and hygiene. The pilot project is hinged on four programmatic axes: Assisting families meet the cost of education (SDG4) and basis needs, in doing so incentivizing the participation of girls through cash payment to households; Raising awareness of the importance of health and girls' education (SDG2,4) – working with schools, parents, pupils and community leaders to promote health, nutrition and hygiene, ensure safe school opening and to sensitize the community as to the importance and of educating girls; Addressing wider barriers, including social barriers, to girls' participation and access (SDG4); and, Gender equality in access to education and future food security.

4.5.2 Role of the Local and Federal Government: A considerable number of KII and FGD participants explained that the role of federal authorities in resolving conflicts is very limited and weak. On the other hand, so far, the role of local authorities in resolving and diffusing conflicts has been humble compared to the severity and impact levels of conflicts in Basra. Decentralization has been acting also as tension points between the local government in Basra and the central government in Baghdad. KII representatives of local authorities, business, as well as INGOs indicated that decentralization of governance in Basra will allow local authorities to adopt focused economic plans that can create employment opportunities for youth in Basra. “The absence of decentralized governance impedes efforts to solve employment problems at the micro level to help Basrawi youth,” as expressed by a representative of an INGO. According to this interviewee, “decentralized governance is also critical activate and implement certain regulations specially those related to local governance, the ministries work in Basra, employment of farmers and investing in their lands, etc.”

4.5.3 Role of Women: Although many armed and tribal conflicts are instigated and resolved by men, sometimes women play a role in conflict dynamics. The conservative social norms in Basra, categorize women and/or the involvement of women a highly sensitive issue. On one hand, women or issues related to women, harassment of women, marriage, divorce, custody of children, and inheritance are reasons that could start conflicts in communities. On the other hand, women could be part of conflict resolution through being forced to hand over custody of her children or through being forced into marriage as a sort of compensation to the plaintiff tribe. In this situation, according to tribal norms, women have no choice but to abide by agreements made by heads of disputing tribes to spare lives of her male family members or to be used as a source of compensation to substitute for the exaggerated sums of money unavailable to compensate the disputing parties.

4.5.4 Role of Local Civil Society Organizations: local civil society organizations' role in conflict resolution in Basra is considered by many of those who participated in this study as weak. This role is usually seen as limited because they usually focus on providing emergency relief rather than being focused on high profile issues such as reconciliation and conflict resolution that are handled by tribal leaders or official security forces. But many participants agree that local and civil society NGO's have been successful at least in raising awareness about various topics of interests to the Basri community among Basra residents through workshops and other related activities.

4.5.5 Minorities: Basra is predominantly populated by Shia Arabs and it hosts a considerably small population of minorities. No updated data is available to reflect accurate percentages of minorities who currently reside in Basra. However, a representative of the local government in Basra confirmed that "rights of minorities are observed and their properties are safe. There have been few incidents where private properties of Christian residents have been confiscated by others, but such property disputes have been resolved officially."

We are very much integrated within the society in Basra. However, we feel the educational system needs to raise more awareness about the existence of Christians and Christianity in Iraq especially in primary education.

KII, Minorities Representatives

However, representatives of religious minorities in Basra indicated that although they feel very much integrated into society of Basra from their side, they are not mutually treated as equal partners by the larger community of Basra. Despite the significant cultural and intellectual contributions that

minorities add to the Iraq society, minority groups in Basra feel that they are among the most disadvantaged groups in the Governorate, as expressed by KII's representing minorities in Basra. Minorities representatives confirmed during KII that minorities youth are also suffering from

"NGO's assume big role in supporting and enabling women and their economic participation. However, women's role remains limited if women are not self-enabled!"

KII, Women NGO

unemployment and conflicts in Basra. One KII stated," we believe that we are disproportionately underrepresented in social participation within Basra. We suffer from the lack of acceptance and social awareness about our sect in Basra." All KII representing

minority communities in Basra admitted that, “Conflicts in Basra impacted our youth ability to participate in the labor market and pushed them to pursue immigration at western countries.” That is, the continuous tensions in urban areas of the city and the lack of employment opportunities coupled by hardship of living conditions urges youth of minority groups to pursue better living conditions available to those who immigrated to other countries.

Women are competent society members who can earn living and support their families. Women’s economic participation in society is correlated with the availability of government sponsored job opportunities rather than those in the private sector.

KII and FGD Participants

4.6 WOMEN’S PERCEPTIONS, ASPIRATIONS, AND CONFLICTS IN BASRA

Discussions with identified females for FGD and KII reflected great awareness of women in Basra about the various aspects that govern and shape conflicts in this Governorate. Here, women’s perceptions conformed with those of their male counterparts. The interviewees and discussants agreed that disputes or disagreements, no matter how they are triggered, can lead to unpredictable and uncontrollable or violent conflicts. As far as women are concerned in Basra, tribal norms can gravely impact women’s life trajectories in education, work, and marriage. Although these norms are more relaxed in urban areas, tribal traditions favors early marriage for women and women’s advancement in education or work are frowned upon. For these women, the following are among the leading reasons causing conflicts:

- a) Lack of awareness about conflict resolution
- b) Lack of decent social, educational, and medical services that push community members to fight over these limited sources, if found.
- c) Holding to the culture of tribal affiliation as a source of protection rather than a weak role of law, as perceived by many community members.
- d) Poverty in Basra city, which can lead to heighten resentment among the different socioeconomic classes.
- e) Lack of equality and employment opportunities which can lead to youth dissatisfaction or push youth to subdue to addiction or illegal activities to earn living.

All female KII and FGD participants believe that increased women economic participation can improve livelihood for their families and communities in Basra. Such participation can increase women’s role in public life supporting healthy socioeconomic environment in Basra that includes all its male and female members. However, these participants explained that inequality between

men and women has impeded Basrawi women's ability to assume higher economic participation in Basra.

Labor market returns in education tend to be low for women. In fact, unemployment among women is 13% higher than that for men. Plus, women's economic participation in the labor market is three times lower than that for men. There are many factors contributing to this low level of participation, for example the private sector in Basra is limited and does not provide the job security and appropriate employment conditions that adhere with the conservative environment of Basra and for which Basrawi women aspire to have in order to actively participate in the labor market while observing the conservative social norms toward working women.

Moreover, multiple KII as well FGD female participants asserted that the conservative nature of Basra prevents higher participation of females in development and resilience-building programs sponsored by INGOs and civil society organizations in Basra. Male and female participants alike reiterated that sensitivity to this issue is critical to boost women's participation in such development programs. Throughout KII and FGD it was recommended that the set-up of programs offered by any authority or INGO be more contextually sensitive in ways that secures the privacy of participating women and their families. For example, training workshops could be offered in women's-only spaces or offered virtually. This specific issue was clearly raised by an INGO representative interviewed for this study. The representative stated that, for example:

In Anbar, we had some challenges in this regards. There were giving sessions to the females separately to [sic] the males....Given the context of the south and center (of Iraq) and to get rid of this (issue) we need to increase more centers or rooms for different classes different for females and males if the (program) implementation is physical. (KII, INGO Representatives).

4.7 PMF and Other Fighters, Reintegration, and Impact on Conflict in Basra

Due to its strategic geopolitical and economic impact, Basra is known to have strong presence of Popular Mobilization Forces as well as other armed groups and/or militias. However, this topic remains a highly sensitive one. Due to the political and security circumstances that govern this governorate, no direct related questions were raised with the KII and FGD participants. Nevertheless, most participants in this research highlighted that armed conflicts in urban are championed by uncontrollable spread of weapons, in general reference to armed militias operating in Basra cities.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This conflict analysis study revealed high correlation between conflict and unemployment in Basra. KII and FGD participants with their different backgrounds and perceptions confirmed that unemployment is a major factor that can contribute to increased conflicts in Basra. As detailed above and throughout this report, unemployment is impacting youth financially, socially, and psychologically. The heightened sense of frustration among youth and residents of Basra decreases tolerance and encourages tendencies to heightened levels of conflicts instead of reconciliation and conflict resolution. Various players can play roles in conflict dynamics that are likely to be managed through tribal influences and traditions. At the same time, the various types of challenges that dominate everyday life in Basra significantly hinder Basra residents' ability to obtain employment opportunities and maintain livelihood for themselves and their families. This dilemma forces Basrawi youth to be lost in a vicious circle if no serious steps are taken by all concerned partners to impact positive change in the various districts of Basra (whether low or high income). Among other things, it was widely expressed by participants, that stability and settlement can be achieved in Basra and the southern parts of Iraq through better public services that are inclusive and fair to all residents of urban districts in Basra. Appropriate distribution of public services and (natural) resources can significantly lessen disputes and conflicts among residents and communities in Basra. The availability of jobs and employment opportunities coupled with increased local and foreign investments in Basra can eventually create better socioeconomic environment in Basra's urban areas.

In addition, this analysis is particularly important as it allows to develop programmatic recommendations that stem from the understanding of the current social interrelations and helps identifying the types of capacity-building needed to strengthen the role and effectiveness of those groups (i.e. NGOs, CSOs, activists, governmental bodies) engaged in the resolution or transformation of the conflict.

5.1 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING PROSPECTS FOR PEACE AND STABILITY IN BASRA

Based on the thorough discussions with residents of Basra, representatives of various business sectors, government officials, as well as local and international organizations operating in Basra, the recommendations provided below can inform future programming supporting more peaceful communities, resilience, and livelihood by WFP as well as other International development and assistance agencies.

1. Youth development programming should be focused on enhancing a sense of national identity among youth as a unifying basis rather than the tribal identity, as expressed by the majority of participants of this conflict analysis. Upholding national identity over tribal or political affiliations enhances respect of national laws and security forces on one hand, and promotes respect for democratic governance values and good citizenry among residents where each and every one has rights and responsibilities.

- On the contrary, focusing on tribal identities instills divisions among community members and strengthens the use of violence over reason and law to resolve disagreements and conflicts.
2. Soft skills, communication skills, teamwork, and conflict resolution skills have been cited by most KII participants as the skills youth in Basra currently need, not only to be competitive on the job market, but also to be able to manage conflicts and diffuse confrontational situations. EMPACT, among other development and resilience-building programmes, can serve this purpose and help Basrawi youth attain the comprehensive set of skills that can help them be productive society members who are socioeconomically involved in building their urban communities.
 3. Corruption has been frequently cited as a reason for unemployment and conflicts. Therefore, establishing for E-Government systems can increase employment opportunities for youth not only in Basra but throughout Iraq as well. Although it should not be assumed that the government is the sole responsible for absorbing the work force in Basra's urban areas, the public sector can benefit from active government projects that can directly or indirectly provide employment opportunities for qualified Basrawi work force.
 4. A national project like the one mentioned above will increase demand for tech savvy employees. Hence, EMPACT and other tech training programs can be of great use to empower individuals as well government authorities to counter corruption and lessen conflicts in Iraq.
 5. Women aspire to play a larger role in conflict resolution. Being educated about conflict management and resolution, they will be able to produce generations aware of the impacts and implications of conflicts on society in Basra. However, any attempts to resolve this issue without involving men will be unsuccessful. Therefore, designing conflict-awareness programs that specifically target both men and women have the potential of reducing conflicts and paving ways for peace and resilience among communities in Basra.
 6. It was widely accepted among KII and FGD participants that the labor force in Basra, especially women, looks for employment in the public sector for reasons related to job security. These jobs are also viewed as more appropriate for women's employment in the conservative culture of Basra. Therefore, resilience-building programs done in collaboration with local authorities might attract higher participation by women through assurances that such development programs are recognized and valued by the government and local authorities.
 7. Designing resilience-building and training programs that can accommodate for separate centers for women and those that can encourage e-participation for women can increase women's presence in such programs. This could be supported by a push for increased virtual learning opportunities due to restrictions related to COVID-19 and safety considerations. Local NGOs such as Mercy Hands for Humanitarian Aid

are embracing plans to increase virtual training programs implemented through MH's specialized centers. For example, MH has established women computer center in Shat-Al Arab area in Basra as a pilot approach for intervention. Virtual learning initiatives could eliminate social inhibitors and increase women's involvement in resilience-building and conflict management programs. However, it is critical to understand that without targeted social cohesion and social norms change components, virtual

learning could even lead to women being even more secluded or kept away from active participation. Basically, the best approach to increase women's positive involvement in conflict resolution in urban areas

“The local government in Basra should be a critical player to provide additional support in addition to civil society [organizations].”

KII, International Organizations

of Basra is to urge societal change to accept women's presence in the public space.

8. As recommended by minority representatives interviewed for this conflict analysis, educational teaching and curriculums should include more information about the minorities of Iraq and raise social awareness about their roles and contributions throughout the history of Iraq. Teaching and instilling the value of coexistence among residents regardless of their religion or race will emphasize stability and strengthen societal peace that is based on respecting each member's rights and responsibilities with Basra's urban contexts.
9. Although oil production signifies the industrial nature of Basra, this Governorate is a hub that serves many more sectors of local, governmental, as well as international companies that provide various services for those operating in Basra. Therefore, supporting the diversification of labor-force skills through the private sector has the potential to meet the needs and demands of the diversified local Basrawi market.
10. There is a dire need to focus governmental and non-governmental efforts on tolerance education and for increased workshops focused on conflict management and conflict resolution to emphasize the importance of coexistence and respect for law as the appropriate way to resolve disputes and conflicts among community members.
11. Along with tech and language training, international organizations and civil society can support women empowerment through targeted intrapersonal skills workshops promoting self-confidence.
12. International agencies and organizations are encouraged to maintain two directions for supporting vulnerable Iraqi youth and public. One direction could be enacted through direct implementation of programmes through civil society and local organizations. The second direction needs to be enacted through collaboration with

- various local and federal authorities to adopt appropriate policies and laws that can support and enhance the livelihood of communities in Basra and throughout Iraq. That is, policies need to be put in place that support the private sector or foreign investment, which could then in turn lead to more job opportunities. Both directions are equally critical for changing the current challenging socioeconomic hardships experienced by various Iraq communities.
13. All KII and FGD participants agreed that increased local and foreign investment various sectors in Basra is a major solution for all problems of the Governorate including unemployment, livelihood, and could eventually eliminate poverty and conflicts. KII and FGD participants shared one unified recommendation, which is to encourage investment and development projects through feasible practices and policies that can make Basra attractive to local and foreign investors again.
 14. Although this conflict analysis sought to identify insights related to conflict in urban areas, participants of this study reiterated the need to address conflicts in rural contexts to warranty peace among the various communities in Basra. For rural areas, conflicts usually arise among farmers over the limited water sources that can significantly impact agricultural production. A large population of Basra residents and authorities recognize the critical impact of water shortage on the Governorate as an agricultural area. Therefore, increased agri-business opportunities could assist in reducing such water-related conflicts.
 15. There is a significant need for workshops and awareness campaigns for all age groups in Basra that specifically promote societal peace and stability to reduce conflicts in a Governorate like Basra which plays a critical role in maintaining stability and welfare of Iraq.
 16. It was suggested by various representatives interviewed for this study that resilience-building programs implemented by WFP and other organizations need to continue to adopt further studies of needs and motivations assessments to help build more targeted programs for each of the districts of Basra. These assessments should seek to listen to men and women, recognize inequalities and respond to these inequalities in order to empower and enable Basrawi men and women alike.

Annex 1: Consent Form

Informed Consent Form For Participants
Title of Project: Improving prospects for peace and stability in vulnerable & food insecure communities, in Southern Iraq – Urban Conflict Analysis and Market Assessment

Name of Principal Data collector

Name of Co-Data collector (s)

Name of Organisation

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. The purpose of this document is to provide you with more information about the study, which will be discussed with you.

Your continued participation in this research is voluntary and refusal to take part will involve no penalty to you or loss of any benefit to which you were otherwise entitled. You may withdraw from the research study now or at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You will be informed of any significant new findings developed during the course of participation in this research that may have a bearing on your willingness to continue in the study. The Data collector may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which makes this necessary.

CONSENT TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY

I have carefully read the consent form noted above about this study. All of my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I know that I may refuse to take part in or withdraw from the study at any time. **I freely give my consent to take part in this study.** I understand that by signing this form I am agreeing to take part in the study. I have received a copy of this form to take with me

Name of Subject

Signature of Subject

Date

Name of Legal Representative

Date

Or Parent/Guardian (*If applicable*)

STATEMENT OF PERSON OBTAINING CONSENT

I certify that I have fully explained to the person taking part in the study the nature of the above research study, the potential risks and benefits and I have offered to answer any question that he/she may have.

Signature of Principal Data collector /Designate

Date

Name of Principal Data collector /Designate

INFORMATION SHEET

The research aims to establish the feasibility of WFP's programmes expansion in the field of resilience building for food insecure and conflict affected communities in Basra Governorate through an assessment of the main socio-economic conflict drivers and market opportunities amongst youth/adolescents, and the entry points for potential livelihoods interventions.

Mercy Hands for Humanitarian Aid will produce an urban conflict analysis and a linked market assessment. The activities will be implemented in conjunction with WFP and other local actors partnering with WFP in Basra to avoid duplication and build upon existing work. The findings will be shared with WFP and will inform the strategic planning of future initiatives as well as

establish the potential impact of urban livelihoods programmes in the area. Particular emphasis will be placed on evaluating whether the activities implemented through the EMPACT programme (WFP) would be in line with the market requirements and if its duplication in Basra Governorate will result in an improvement of the type of skills required by the local employers.

SAFETY AND ANONYMITY

The confidentiality of participants will be protected at any point during data collection for the Mercy Hands for Humanitarian Aid by the careful treatment of personal data. During data collection, provision of information shall be done in confidence and the right to privacy will be respected. Participants will be informed about the scope and limits of confidentiality to understand their own, other participants' and the researchers' respect to not disclose any shared information. To ensure confidentiality of collected data, each participant will receive a unique identifier that is linked to the specific data collection phase, date, and place of data collection. All information collected will be de-identified, kept confidential and stored at the Mercy Hands for Humanitarian Aid premises for five years before they are destroyed. Sensitive information will not be able to be traced to its source. The data will only be used for the purpose of the Mercy Hands for Humanitarian Aid in a way that participants will not be identifiable in any publication and dissemination of findings. Further, if the participants' name must be mentioned (specifically the case of organizations and communities involved in the data collection process), official permission will be sought and granted.

Additionally, all research personnel will abide by the three core ethical principles:

1. Respect for subjects: protecting the autonomy of all people and treating them with courtesy and respect and allowing for informed consent. Researchers must be truthful and conduct no deception.
2. Beneficence: The philosophy of "Do no harm" while maximizing benefits for the research and minimizing risks to the research subjects. Subjects are treated in an ethical manner not only by respecting their decisions and protecting them from harm, but also by making efforts to secure their well-being.
3. Justice: ensuring reasonable, non-exploitative and well-considered procedures are administered fairly — the fair distribution of costs and benefits to potential research participants — and equally to each person an equal share.

All hard and soft copies of data collected for the Mercy Hands for Humanitarian Aid will be kept secure in a cabinet within the office for hard copies and password protected and backed on a

server and on an extra hard drive for soft copies, all of which are secured, locked, and away from the public access or anyone outside the research team.

CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

In communicating about any research activity for the Mercy Hands for Humanitarian Aid, each researcher/data collector will observe a set of responsibilities. The objectives and purposes of any data to be generated for the WFP will be predetermined before data collection takes place. The set objectives will specifically be developed in a matter that they do not infringe upon the rights and privacy of the participants to be involved in the data collection. In addition, the realistic potential benefits of those participating and the larger society to which the Mercy Hands for Humanitarian Aid wants to serve will be clearly defined.

By signing this agreement, you agree to maintain **Strict Confidentiality** regarding both yours and others performance, whether seen in real time, on video or otherwise communicated to you.

Due to copyrights, intellectually property rights, and to maintain optimal simulation experiences for the other learners you are to maintain **Strict Confidentiality** regarding the specific scenarios and/or questions asked, and what happened during the research activity.

_____ **I agree** to maintain **Strict Confidentiality** about the details of the scenarios, participants, and performance of any participant(s).

_____ **I authorize** the Mercy Hands for Humanitarian Aid to use the information provided for research and study purposes.

Full Name: _____ Date: ____/____/____

Signature: _____

Annex 2: Sample Semi-Structured Interview Questions
Annex II: Questionnaire – Urban Conflict Analyses

for all interviewees and focus groups)

Mercy Hands (MH) is undertaking a survey for a project funded by WFP aiming at assessing the main socio-economic conflict drivers and market opportunities amongst youth/adolescents to help identify potential entry points for potential livelihoods interventions.

I am speaking to you today as part of study conducted by the World Food Programm and Mercy Hands exploring local community dynamics and the impact that access to livelihood and economic opportunities may have on youth and social tensions in Basra's urban areas to better inform WFP and partners' resilience prgramming. I would like to speak to you to gain more details on the conditions in your area related to social relations and dynamics and economic opportunities. This interview is not intended to directly provide in-kind assistance to you but is an opportunity for us to learn from you and listen to you to better inform interventions and policies that improve resilience and economicProgramming. The interview should take up to 90 minutes. Thank you for your participation in this survey. Your participation is voluntary, anonymous and confidential. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to and can stop the interview at any time. If you have any questions, please feel free to ask; if not, may we begin?

The interviewee has been informed before of the duration of the interview: 1 hour to 1 hour and a half

Important notes for the enumerators:

- Don't be embarrassed by silence, don't fill it with the following question. Leave needed time for participants to consider the question and their views.*
- During the whole interview, you relaunch if silence, or if some aspect has not been approached by the interviewee but always with **her/his own terms** " you told me that... , could you explain/could you tell me more/could you precise....*
- Relaunch (R)*

Section one- Conflict profile (for all interviewees and focus groups)

1- What comes first to your mind when we talk about conflict in Basra today?

(R) How would you define it?

(R) What are the most prevalent manifestations of conflict in Basra city?

(R) How do you personally perceive or understand tensions/disputes/disagreements? Is it a form of conflict?

2- What type of issues are causing conflict in your communities?

- i. Are there resource shortages (water, food, grazing land) in Basra city? ? How do these shortages affect you and your family? Do these shortages affect you differently than they affect others around you? How so? Have these resource shortages increased in recent years?
- ii. Do all children (including girls) in your community attend school? Until what age? If not, why not?
- iii. Are there unemployed young people in your community? Why do you think they cannot find work? What problems does unemployment cause?
- iv. What kind of employment do most young people in your community engage in? is it daily work or more sustainable?
- v. Is there conflict over water in your community? Why? Do certain people get more water? If yes, who and why?
- vi. Is there conflict over land use or land ownership in Basra, especially after discovering the oil fields? If yes, what happens when there is a conflict? To which extent did it contribute to decreasing or raising the prices of lands?
- vii. How does inheritance contribute to conflict in Basra, especially after the discovery of the oil fields?
- viii. Are there tensions in your community over health and education?

3- Can you share any examples of disputes between neighboring tribal communities that have become violent? If yes, how and why did the conflict escalate? Was it resolved eventually, and how?

- i. How do these tensions impact the social and economic factors?
- ii. Can you share examples of disputes that did not become violent? Why do you think these did not turn violent?

Section Two - Conflict causes (for all interviewees and focus groups)

4- Which current triggers or challenges do you feel could contribute to the outbreak of new conflict or the escalation of existing disputes and conflict?

R- How does this differ within the community and at higher levels (city and governorate)?

5- To which extent is the lack of economic opportunities and social stability causes conflict in Basra?

R- In what ways does the lack of livelihood opportunities impact social stability, conflict, and tensions in Basra? How does this manifest itself? How does this affect communities or youth? Has this changed in the last few years?

6- To which extent the youth in Basra city could be affected by poverty, lack of livelihood opportunities?

7- What factors can contribute to peace and social stability in your district (for interviews: in Basra city)? *E.g., communication channels between opposing parties, demobilization process, reform programmes, civil society commitment to peace, anti-discrimination policies.*

Section Three - Resolving Conflict and main actors (for all interviewees and focus groups)

8- Have you noticed a change over time in how your community deals with disagreements? In which way?

9- What authorities deal with disputes in your community?

R- How does the local government contribute to mitigating or resolving conflicts?

10- Are there conflict mitigation or resolution programmes or international assistance programmes operating in your community? What effects do they have on the community and especially on youth?

11- What roles does civil society play during the conflicts, especially in supporting the socio-economic situation in Basra?

12- What are your recommendations to improve the economic situation in Basra? What are your recommendations to improve the social stability in Basra?

Section Four – Gender (for all interviewees and focus groups)

13- How would do you describe the economic participation of women in Basra? How could this be improved? How does the level of economic participation of women affect them and their families?

14- Could the increase in women’s economic participation lead to social instability?

R- Please could you explain how?

15- What roles do women play leading up to and during the conflict and the conflict resolution process and direct aftermath?

Annex 3: Sample Additional Questions for KIIs

Additional questions for the KIIs

Dean of the College of Administration and Economics, Dean of the Vocational Institute, and Head of the Marine Sciences Department.

- From your perspective, how would you describe the socio-economic situation in Basra, its current and upcoming challenges, and potentiality?
- Do you have any academic material you would be able to share with us supporting your perspective on this topic?
- What type of analysis of the local and international market requirements is usually conducted to ensure the vocational and educational training effectively supports the absorption of youth in the job market?
- What is the rate of employment at 3,6, 12 months from college graduation? How is this monitored?
- Would you say that specific topics/fields/skills are guaranteeing an overall higher chance of employment? Are the necessary college courses or vocational training available in Basra to capture this trend and provide youth with tailored content?
- In which fields do you think that youth in Basra should receive better orientation and/or support to compete at the national and international level with peers?
- Overall, do you think that a better-qualified youth, through an improved set of educational and vocational contents, has better chances to be employed, or do other structural issues in Basra play a major role in defining the type and number of jobs accessible?
- If the latter is the case, do you think that the dissatisfaction of higher qualified youth still struggling to access the job market can result in exacerbating- rather than alleviating- the violent outbreaks?
- Is there coordination between the University of Basra and the competent authorities to draw a clear plan to employ young people, create job opportunities and reduce poverty and unemployment rates?

Director of Tourism, Director of Antiquities and Heritage, and directors of the two most important hotels in Basra

- What is the relevance of the touristic sector in Basra? Do you think that the local archeological heritage and nature are sufficiently utilized and publicized to attract tourists?
- What has been the impact of wars and socio-political instability in Basra, and has this affected the touristic sector?
- In which ways has the government supported the sector to counter the effects of conflicts and instability? For example, would you say that youth has been involved or taken into consideration in this process and how?
- How do you evaluate the level of tourism and hotels in Basra ?Does it meet the needs of investors, especially foreign ones?
- Overall, would you say that there is sufficient investment in training and supporting youth to find employment in the tourism sector? If not, what do you think the main gaps in terms of skills, expertise, and availability of jobs are, and how could they be tackled?
- How could major investment and promotion of the tourism sector reduce social tensions by attracting foreign capital and fostering employment?

Heads of the Basra Chamber of Commerce and Industry

- Could you describe the main challenges the Chambers of Commerce and Industry faces in creating opportunities to absorb the unemployed youth in Basra? What kind of support is needed and from which authorities?
- From your experience, have you observed a considerable mismatch between job offers and demands, and has this affected the capacity to attract capital in Basra?
- Similarly, have you noticed a mismatch between demands from employers and the available workforce?
- What are the main obstacles for local and foreign investors, and how has the Chamber of Commerce supported them/is supporting them? What else needs to be tackled and by whom? How do these obstacles impact commerce and investments in the area?

- Overall, do you think an increased employment rate among youngsters would reduce societal tensions and violent outbreaks? To which extent? And why?

Basra Operations Commander and Police Commander (ONLY FOR UCA)

- How do you evaluate the security situation in the province in general? And how is the Basra community's response to your security plans?
- How do you evaluate the security situation in the province in terms of its suitability for investment and reconstruction?
- Would you say that protests and violent outbreaks in the Governorate correlate to the high unemployment rate among youth? To which extent? How do these issues affect and influence each other? Which social groups (age, status, class) are usually more involved in such episodes of public violence? How does this affect the communities these groups originate from?
- To what extent do you think the tribal or community conflicts and disputes affect Basra's public life?
- To what extent do you feel the occasional disruption of businesses due to violent outbreaks contributes to or affects foreign and national investors.
- How is the BOC operating to try and safeguard their presence and activities?
- What else do you think needs to be done to deescalate tensions in the area, and by whom?

Representatives of foreign oil companies operating in Basra

- What has been the impact of protests and violent demonstrations on the oil sector in Basra? (e.g., relocation of HQ, repatriation of expat staff, etc.) Do you think that the support and protection granted by local and national authorities have been sufficient? Overall do you feel safe working in Basra?
- The oil sector in Basra produces over 90% of central government revenue, but it employs only a marginal 3% of the Iraqi population. In which ways do you think that the sector could be transformed into a more labor-intensive one or encouraged to hire more Iraqis?
- Do local applications have the skills and knowledge to be considered for jobs in your sector?
- Could you give us some examples of how you think the spin-off market (i.e., satellite activities) could be further developed to absorb local unemployed youth? Is there any investment on the side of local or national authorities in this sense?

Director of Basra Sports and Youth and the most important investors in the sports sector

- Sport and youth engagement in social activities is proved to be an effective tool in harnessing the dissatisfaction generated by lack of opportunities. However, do you think that the public authorities have invested a sufficient amount of resources in this sector?"
- What is the size of local and foreign sports investment, if any? Who are the main investors, and what is the specific focus?
- What is your assessment of the extent of the sport's contribution to promoting peace and supporting the economy?
- What is your assessment of the level of regional and international sports cooperation with the Basra and Iraqi sports authorities ?
- How do the tribal conflict and demonstrations affect this framework and cooperation?

Director-General of the South Oil Company and Director-General of Iraqi Ports

- How do you evaluate the impact of foreign investment in Basra's oil fields and its coastal ports in the Gulf regarding its support of the Basra market, provide job opportunities and reduce unemployment and poverty levels in the city?
- Does foreign labor employment (instead of local employment) contribute to creating congestion and perhaps societal violence towards the investing companies?
- Are you planning to support new oil or port investment opportunities to revive the Basra market and provide new job opportunities?
- Are there local and international obstacles such or local conflict and violence that threaten the investment landscape in the city?

Head of the Basra Tribes Council (ONLY FOR UCA)

- How do you describe the reality of the tribes in Basra? What is their role in strengthening the social fabric of the city? How do the tribes work?
- What is the nature and cause of tribal conflicts in the city ?Does it reach the levels of armed violence ?And why?
- Do tribes contribute to supporting popular participation in the elections ?Does it provide support to the entities and individuals nominated in it ?In your opinion, to what extent could such support lead to escalation of tension?
- What is the role of tribes in encouraging local and foreign investment?
- How do the Basra tribes view the participation of youth and women in the economic field and the labor market ?Does it provide a good environment for that?

- Have you witnessed an increased outburst of violence among youth belonging to different tribes or exacerbating tensions between them due to the higher unemployment rate of the last years? How has this impacted levels and impact of conflict?
- What do you think is missing in Basra to remedy the current economic status?
- Do you feel that local and national authorities are doing enough to counter the effects of unemployment?
- To what extent are heads of tribes contributing to the definition of Basra governorate's national and local political strategies and priorities in synergy with public authorities?

Feminist Activists

- How do you evaluate the status of Basra women and their participation in political, economic, social, and cultural life?
- Do you think that the recent protests and violent outbreaks, and the Covid pandemic have affected the condition of women and girls, and how?
- What is the level of participation and engagement of women and girls in defining the local socio-political agenda? Are their advocacy efforts supported or opposed by the general public? Do they receive support from their families, and in which form?
- Do you think that Basra has the potential to include more women and girls in the workforce and what kind of structural and societal changes need to occur to make that happen?
- Overall, do you think that young girls have the same opportunity to access higher education as their male peers? And if equally prepared, do you think that women have equal chances to land jobs than men?
- To which extent is maternity a deterrent for employers to retain the female workforce in their companies? Are there sufficient regulations and incentives provided by the public authorities to sustain women in maternity and encourage employers to retain them?
- Do you think that there are professions still traditionally precluded to women in Basra? If so, do you think there is sufficient awareness raised and support given to organizations supporting women's emancipation? In which ways could governmental and non-governmental institutions sustain your activities?
- The inclusion of women and girls in the workplace in a traditionally gender-segregated society like the one in Basra might result in a double-burden posed to the women themselves to answer their house and childcare duties on top of their work. What solutions do you think should be adopted by companies, governmental and non-governmental institutions involved in providing income-generating opportunities for female workers?

Basra tax manager

- What are the tax indicators indicating the high levels of economic development in Basra ?Are these resources invested in supporting the labor market and providing social welfare for the poorest classes?
- Is your community economically suffering from tax evasion ?What are the solutions to address this defect?
- What is the estimated loss in revenues generated by tax evasion?
- Have central or local laws been enacted authorizing the governorate administration to dispose of some tax resources in the care of sectors and classes in need of additional financial support?
- Is economic inequality generated by tax evasion affecting social cohesion and exacerbating conflicts among groups?

Representatives of main Basra's families

- Can the old families of Basra play the role of acceptable mediator between the parties to the conflict ?
- Do these families engage in economic activities that support Basra markets and create a good economic environment?

Representatives of the most prominent civil society organizations in Basra

- The role of civil society organizations is pivotal to strengthening social cohesion and supporting the local community's cultural development. Do you think that this role has been successfully implemented in Basra?
- Are youth attentive to the local community's needs and involved in volunteering opportunities when they arise? If not, what are the main challenges to attracting youth involvement in community cohesion and community cooperation?
- What is the impact of socio-economic instability on younger people, and how does this affect their community participation? Overall, how do you think governmental and non-governmental institutions could better support youth to become active citizens in their communities?

Representatives of the minorities in Basra (Christians and Sabi'aa religious community)

- What is the nature of participation in the public life of these components of Basra life in general ?Are there political, social, or religious determinants that prevent such

participation? If there are challenges, how do these affect the relations and interactions between groups?

- Is the electoral quota ratio the guarantee for representing these components in the local or central government? For example, can this representation guarantee full citizenship rights? If not, how does it affect relations between groups?
- Did tribal conflicts and continued escalation of violence during the demonstrations particularly affect religious minority and what was the socio-economic impact?
- Are local authorities guaranteeing the respect of full rights and dignified treatment of religious minorities in Basra? For example, do they have equal access to job opportunities and education?
- Do these groups contribute to supplying the market and achieving economic development?

Planning manager in Basra

- Could you describe the strategic agenda of the Ministry of Planning to support Basra's economic development and create job opportunities to reduce poverty and marginalization of the most vulnerable social classes?
- Does the Ministry of Planning help involve countries and international organizations in development and reconstruction programmes in the Governorate?
- Do you have any recommendations for improving the job opportunities of youth in Basra in general?

Representatives of UNESCO or UNDP

- What do you think are the main obstacles towards a healthy and inclusive economy in Basra, and are there a way for international non-governmental institutions to proactively support public authorities' efforts in this direction?
- As developmental agencies involved in the economic recovery of the Iraqi territory, do you think that economic instability and a high rate of unemployment among youth have been a major driver of conflict and lack of social cohesion in Basra?
- Which other structural causes are at the basis of the social upheaval of the last years?

The Governor of Basra or his representative for economic and investment affairs and the director of the Basra municipality

- Could you describe to us the plan of investment and the vision to recover Basra's economy and attract external and internal capital into the local market?
- Are there problems caused by the actual slums to the Basra economy? What kind of solutions and approaches has been put in place to help resolve this?
- Tribal conflicts and escalation of violence deeply influence local dynamics and might constitute a deterrent for national and foreign investment in the region. What measures did you put in place to halt the escalation of violence in Basra?

- To what extent do you think poverty and lack of (employment) opportunities among young people constitute a driver of conflict?
- What are the structural causes of the lack of job opportunities in the Basra area?
- What is the Governorate strategy to reduce the effects of poverty and unemployment in the Basra community, especially among women and youth
- Will you subject local and foreign investments to a specific operating procedure as conditions to investing in the region?
- How did you address the recent protests' demands, and do you think the local and national authorities are emphasizing resolving the root causes of dissatisfaction among the local population and youth in particular?
- To which extent the religious and ethnic minorities rights are guaranteed and uphold in Basra? What measures would the Governorate take to ensure their full integration in Basra's local economy and social life?
- Aside from the oil and import/export sectors, is the Governorate planning to expand its investment base to other investments in the cultural/heritage/art sector and promote renewable energies?

Questionnaire KIIs– Urban Conflict Analysis + Market Assessment for all interviewees)

Section one- Conflict profile (for all interviewees and focus groups)

1- What comes first to your mind when we talk about conflict in Basra today?

(R) How would you define it?

(R) What are the most prevalent manifestations of conflict in Basra city?

(R) How do you personally perceive or understand tensions/disputes/disagreements? Is it a form of conflict?

2- What type of issues are causing conflict in your communities?

Section Two - Conflict causes (for all interviewees and focus groups)

16- To which extent is the lack of economic opportunities and social stability a cause of conflict in Basra?

S- In what ways does the lack of livelihood opportunities impact social stability, conflict, and tensions in Basra? How does this manifest itself? How does this affect communities or youth? Has this changed in the last few years?

17- To which extent the youth in Basra city is affected by poverty, lack of livelihood opportunities? Can they be considered one of the main drivers for social conflict?

18- What factors can contribute to peace and social stability in your district (for interviews: in Basra city)? *E.g., communication channels between opposing parties, demobilization process, reform programmes, civil society commitment to peace, anti-discrimination policies.*

Section Three - Resolving Conflict and main actors (for all interviewees and focus groups)

19- Are there conflict mitigation or resolution programmes or international assistance programmes operating in your community? What effects do they have on the community and especially on youth?

20- What roles does civil society play during the conflicts, especially in supporting the socio-economic situation in Basra?

21- What are your recommendations to improve the economic situation in Basra? What are your recommendations to improve the social stability in Basra?

Section Four – Gender (for all interviewees)

22- How would do you describe the economic participation of women in Basra? How could this be improved? How does the level of economic participation of women affect them and their families?

23- Could the increase in women’s economic participation lead to social stability?

S- Please could you explain how?

T- What are the main challenges to enhanced women’s participation in the workforce?

24- What roles do women play leading up to and during the conflict and the conflict resolution process and direct aftermath?

Section Five – Market assessment (for all interviewees)

25- Are there any government policies or other factors that create opportunities for new business growth and might lead to new hiring?

26- What are the main challenges in Basra that the businesses face if they want to expand and hire new people?

27- To which extent do you think that skills training and TVET could support youth in Basra in getting jobs opportunity?

28- What do you think should be done to promote economic development and reduce vulnerabilities in Basra? What role could INGOs play in improving the situation?

WFP:

1. Do you think that the resilience and capacity-building programmes which involve various tribes and groups, such as the ones WFP currently implements, contribute towards reducing/ending conflict situations? Could you share with us experiences of WFP programmes and their achievements in this regard in Iraq and elsewhere?
2. Do you think that replicating such programmes in Basra governorate would lead to achieving similar results? Do you envisage specific, context-related challenges for these types of programmes in Basra?
3. To which extent do you think that projects to empower women that WFP is implementing can create equal job opportunities for both genders? Which governmental policies should complement humanitarian organizations’ efforts to achieving gender parity?

