Systematic Review
of DIALOGUE EXPERIENCES IN IRAQ

May 2023

Acknowledgments:

Contents

List of Acronyms

BMZ	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development
CIGE	Commission for Investigation and Gathering Evidence
FGDs	Focus Group Discussions
CDSP	Committee for Dialogue and Societal Peace
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
ISIS	Islamic State in Iraq and Sham
ICSSI	Iraqi Civil Society Solidarity Initiative
GIZ	German Agency for International Cooperation
KIIs	Key Informant Interviews
KRG	Kurdistan Regional Government
KRI	Kurdish Region of Iraq
MoP	Ministry of Planning
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UNAMI	United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq

1. Section 1: INTRODUCING THE RESEARCH

1.1. Executive Summary

Iraq is a diverse country with a mix of ethnic and religious groups, each with unique cultural and historical backgrounds. While this dynamic diversity has enriched the country, it has simultaneously burdened it with tensions and conflicts that hinder promoting of stability and peace. Dialogue is seen as an important tool in achieving this goal, as well as promoting understanding and cooperation among divergent groups. Through dialogue, different perspectives can be heard and shared and common ground can be found. Dialogue can also aid in identifying and addressing the root causes of conflicts and thus create opportunities for building trust and resolving conflict. However, effective dialogue can be challenging to achieve in Iraq.

This report introduces key findings of the systemic review of dialogue experiences in Iraq. The report presents an analysis of experiences and lessons learned on the implementation of dialogues by projects of GIZ Iraq, Iraqi state institutions and other international and local organisations. These interlocutors conducted 29 semi-structured interviews with 32 key informants. The report includes an examination of different projects' relevance to the context of Iraq, with a focus on the challenges, success factors, best practices and key lessons learned. The report also offers a set of recommendations and insights to be considered by GIZ and other organisations working on dialogue for future projects. The findings presented in the report are based on desk research and qualitative data collection through key informant interviews. The study followed ethical principles and a "do no harm" approach.

The research found that the social and political challenges facing dialogue in Iraq include political instability, lack of a dialogue culture, mistrust and fragmentation in communities, imbalanced power dynamics and exclusion, a top-down approach, gender inequality and resistance to women's participation. Political instability and fast-changing circumstances in sensitive regions create interruptions in communication, while a lack of willingness to compromise and mistrust between communities hinders dialogue. Imbalanced power dynamics enable those with higher status to control the dialogue and exclude others, while the top-down approach to dialogue creates a lack of coordination that weakens prospective partnerships between civil society organisations and authorities. Women face social, cultural and economic barriers that hinder their participation in dialogue initiatives, leading to their perspectives and needs being overlooked.

Programmatic and procedural challenges were also identified as key challenges to dialogue. These challenges include the incompetence of national facilitation and lack of capacities, insufficient knowledge and commitment of participants and partners, limitations related to project management, safety and security measures, bureaucracy and overlapping and weak coordination and lack of qualitative information. Additional challenges include insufficient implementation of international community-supported dialogues and a lack of ability to translate agreements into actions. The facilitators lacking the necessary skills in trust building, conflict resolution and a solution-focused approach also negatively impact dialogue. Participant selection is a significant challenge, as well as the lack of commitment from participants. Hurdles facing project management measures entail short implementation periods, unrealistic expectations and indicators and budget constraints imposed by donors. The criteria imposed by donors may not always be appropriate or realistic for the local context and may result in superficial inclusivity of specific groups. Security issues can hinder the success of dialogue initiatives. Lack of coordination and collaboration between different organisations and sectors can lead to complex procedures and bureaucratic rules. The limited availability of qualitative information can result in a superficial exchange of ideas and hinder the understanding of stakeholders' perspectives and experiences.

Trust-building, creating a safe and confidential space and ensuring cultural sensitivity are crucial factors in successful dialogue initiatives. Building trust allows for open communication and collaboration, while confidentiality encourages the sharing of sensitive information. Cultural sensitivity shows respect for others and helps avoid conflicts. Genuine inclusion of diverse perspectives and voices is essential for constructive dialogue and addressing the needs of all citizens and stakeholders. Inclusion should include marginalised and underrepresented groups such as ethnic groups, youth and women. Success factors for dialogue initiatives also include local ownership, advancing gender equality and inclusion and maximizing stakeholder engagement.

Local ownership is crucial for building trust, ensuring that the project is seen as legitimate and guaranteeing outcomes are relevant and appropriate for the local context. Advancing gender equality requires a multi-faceted approach that includes engaging diverse groups, increasing women's participation in male-dominated spaces and breaking down stereotypes. Maximizing stakeholder engagement is crucial for including all relevant parties in the dialogue, addressing potential negative influences and moving uninterested parties towards support.

Realistic expectations on potential outcomes and understanding the capacities and influence of stakeholders help to prioritise and avoid over-promising. As determined by many key informants, dialogue must be an ongoing process with good planning and preparation for it to be successful. Clarifying dialogue objectives, devoting appropriate time for engagement and gradually communicating with stakeholders are crucial for success. Segmenting the problem and incrementally addressing it can help avoid hostile reactions from some parties; tracking unintended outcomes can measure the effectiveness of the dialogue and ensure sustainability; supporting established initiatives can be viewed as a win-win for stakeholders who have established common ground.

1.2. Introduction

Iraq is a diverse country with a mix of ethnic and religious groups, each with its own unique cultural and historical backgrounds. This dynamic diversity has enriched the country, but at the same time led to tensions and conflicts in the past, while continuing to be one of the major challenges that needs to be under control in order to promote stability and peace. Dialogue is seen as an important tool in achieving this goal, as well as in promoting understanding and cooperation between different groups. Through dialogue, different perspectives can be heard and shared and common ground can be found. Dialogue can also help to identify and address the root causes of conflicts, thus creating opportunities for building trust and resolving conflict. However, achieving effective dialogue is no easy task in Iraq.

Dialogue does not replace justice, equity policies, inclusive education or any other key interventions towards social integration. Rather, it should be understood and used, as one component of a comprehensive strategy towards creating inclusive and just societies. Dialogue is the process of coming together to build mutual understanding and trust across differences and to create positive outcomes through conversation.[1]

Participatory dialogue is one of the chief mechanisms for encouraging full participation of all members of society, strengthening capacity-building mechanisms and preventing and resolving conflict. A dialogic approach values communication and planning as constituting a process of "thinking together" among a diverse group of people.[2]

The modern meaning of dialogue is primarily defined as a conversation between two or more people characterised by openness, honesty and genuine listening. In contrast to the terms "discussion" and "debate", which focus primarily on the content of a conversation, the word "dialogue" places equal emphasis on the relationship between the persons involved. Another difference is that "debate" often includes a competitive component to underline the superiority of one opinion, while "dialogue" implies mutual understanding and the aim to identify common ground.[3]

Democratic dialogue refers to dialogue that respects and strengthens democratic institutions, seeking to transform conflictive relationships so as to prevent crises and violence and therefore, contribute to enhancing democratic governance.[4]

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1   https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/publications/prtcptry_dlg(full_version).pdf
2   Ibid
3   Norbert Ropers, Basics of Dialogue Facilitation, Berghof Foundation
4   UNDP_RBLAC_Practical_Guide_Democratic_Dialogue.pdf

The UNDP has set governing principles for democratic dialogue which include inclusiveness, joint ownership, learning, humanity, confidentiality, a sustainable long-term perspective and good faith. Inclusiveness ensures all relevant parties are included in the dialogue process and joint ownership ensures commitment from participants. Learning involves listening and reflecting on others' ideas with respect. Humanity emphasises empathy and authenticity. Confidentiality promotes trust and encourages freedom of expression. A sustainable long-term perspective entails achieving lasting solutions and good faith requires integrity without any hidden agendas.

1.3. Rationale

The research aimed to conduct a comprehensive and systematic review of the Promoting Dialogue and Participation in Iraq (PDP) project by GIZ and other projects implemented by GIZ which employ dialogue as a tool and international and local organisations in Iraq. The primary objective of the research was to evaluate and understand the effectiveness of these projects in creating an environment that allowed for inclusive dialogue and participation, addressing the challenges facing Iraq such as poverty, unemployment, corruption and political instability.

In the past four decades of conflict and war in Iraq, the country's socio-political and economic situation has been significantly affected, leaving Iraq facing enormous challenges. From violence, endemic corruption, economic mismanagement and the impact of climate change to a lack of strategic direction in addressing such challenges, Iraq's fragmented political landscape and inefficient institutions have continued to hinder the implementation of much-needed reforms. Furthermore, the Tishreen Protest Movement in 2019 exposed the underlying root causes of the mass movement that remain inadequately addressed by the Iraqi government.

Despite the legitimacy crisis the political system faces, opportunities for participation and space for dialogue remain limited in Iraq. Establishing an environment that allows for inclusive dialogue is urgently needed in Iraq, a fact that became apparent when former Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi attempted to use the positive momentum after a visit by Pope Francis in March 2021 to tackle the multitude of challenges facing Iraq by calling for a national dialogue process.

Against this backdrop, the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) commissioned the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH to implement the PDP project in order to support an environment that allows for inclusive dialogue and participation processes. The Iraqi Ministry of Planning (MoP) acts as the political partner of the project.

To highlight experiences of GIZ projects and to share common challenges and lessons learned, the research team supported the PDP project in gathering information, documenting and systematizing dialogue experiences and drafting this publication.

The aim was to contribute to a better understanding of the challenges and opportunities associated with dialogue and participation in Iraq. By evaluating the effectiveness of these projects, the research aimed to provide recommendations for the design and implementation of future dialogue projects in Iraq. Furthermore, by identifying the common challenges and lessons learned from these projects, we hope to inform future efforts to promote dialogue and participation in Iraq and ultimately, to promote peace and stability in the country.

The report is structured along four sections:
- *Section 1* provides an overview of the Iraqi background, including the political, economic, cultural and legal context
- *Section 2* presents the research methodology, which is based on desk study and interviews with key informants, as well as research ethics and limitations.
- *Section 3* provides an analysis of challenges, success factors and lessons learnt from the implementation of dialogues by GIZ Iraq, international organisations and local organisations.
- *Section 4* includes the conclusion and recommendations.

The findings presented in the report are based on desk research and qualitative data collection through key informant interviews. Overall, the report provides valuable insight for those interested in promoting dialogue and participation in Iraq Overview:

2. The Political, Socio- Economic, Cultural and Legal Context in Iraq

2.1. The Political Context

Iraq's post-2003 political system has been characterised by instability driven by a variety of factors, including, but not limited to, ethnic and sectarian tensions, interventions by neighbouring countries and security challenges created by terrorist groups, militias and gangs and the remnants of the previous regime.[5]

In 2014, the ISIS group was able to successfully recruit, especially from Sunni youths and took an significant hold in Sunni areas around Mosul, Iraq's second-largest city, from 2014 onwards[6]. 2.5 million civilians were displaced within Iraq. In 2015, more than a million people abandoned their homes to find shelter in the Autonomous Region of Iraqi Kurdistan. In 2016, another 700,000 people fled and 1.7 million civilians were displaced in 2017. The population movements were multi-directional: while hundreds of thousands of people left their homes, hundreds of thousands have returned. The pace and scale of the phenomenon of internal displacement have made the Iraqi crisis one of the largest and most unstable in the world.[7]

2.2. The Socio-Economic Context

On an economic level, Iraq faces many challenges that hinder its growth. Despite the growth in financial revenues achieved over the past years as a result of increased oil prices, Iraq has not optimally exploited that situation to overcome challenges.[8]

The patron-client economic system in Iraq and Kurdistan Region dates back to the Baathist Era in the 1970s, after nationalizing Iraq's oil sector. An irresponsible system with poor management of oil-revenue started to use public resources for buying political support.[9]

Over the last decade, oil revenues have accounted for more than 99% of exports, 85% of the government's budget and 42% of its gross domestic product (GDP). This excessive dependence on oil exposes the country to macroeconomic volatility, while budget rigidities restrict fiscal space and any opportunity for countercyclical policy. As of January 2021, in a country of 40.2 million, Iraq's unemployment rate was more than 10 percentage points higher than its pre-COVID-19 level of 12.7 percentage points. Unemployment among the displaced, returnees, female jobseekers, pre-pandemic self-employed and informal workers remains up.[10]

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5   https://www.mei.edu/publications/once-again-iraq-crossroads
6   https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/IRQ
7   https://amman.aics.gov.it/en/iraq-context/
8   https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/amman/16421.pdf
9   https://www.kurdistanc.com/en/details.aspx?jimare=1093
10   https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/iraq/overview

More than 40 million people now live in Iraq, twice as many as 25 years ago and more than four times the population in 1970. According to estimates from the Ministry of Planning, the population will double again in less than a quarter of a century, if current growth rates, which are among the highest in the region, continue.[11]

In recent years, the payroll bill for government employees and contractors has accounted for a significant portion of the Iraqi government's total operating expenses. In 2004 the combined cost of all government employee salaries and pension benefits was less than 4 trillion dinars, or about 12.4% of total government spending which totalled 31 trillion dinars, according to the final accounts prepared by the Ministry of Finance.

Those challenges have created profound negative effects on the local social and economic system, with a consequent progressive deterioration of the living conditions of refugees and displaced persons, as well as host communities and local populations returning to their places of origin freed from the occupation of ISIS conflict and slowing economic growth have led to rising unemployment and poverty rates.[12] In general, since the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003, Iraq has been beset by political unrest and violence.

2.3. The Cultural Context

The subject of dialogue is not new to Iraq, yet the culture of dialogue remains weak due to limited political support. Since 2005, dialogues have failed to build on outcomes, highlighting the need for an inclusive review of the political view of dialogue in Iraq. In 2003, Iraq's societal diversity became evident, necessitating dialogues on differences in society, religions, traditions and rules, as opposed to the perceived unity before 2003 due to suppression. The practice of dialogue in Iraq is closely linked to the country's cultural background. The culture in Iraq is seen sometimes to be hierarchical, exclusive and one that limits dialogue to a select few members to resolve conflicts. Dialogue is viewed as a tool and is primarily utilised within the tribal system or between conflicting political parties. Additionally, it seems that dialogue is a conflict related tool rather than an ongoing process that is used in times of peace.

This culture of hierarchical structures and limited dialogue can create challenges in addressing conflicts and building relationships between individuals and groups in Iraq. Without an open and inclusive dialogue, it may be challenging to identify and address the root causes of conflicts and develop sustainable solutions that benefit all parties involved. Additionally, the lack of dialogue in non-conflict situations may limit opportunities for collaboration, innovation and growth.

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11   https://www.mei.edu/publications/once-again-iraq-crossroads
12   https://english.aawsat.com/home/article/3880721/kadhimi-urges-dialogue-overcome-iraqs-most-difficult-crises

Iraq's cultural background is shaped by the complex relationships among its diverse community members. The country is made up of a variety of ethnic groups, including Arabs, Kurds, Turkmens and others, each with their own distinct languages, customs and traditions. Another factor that shapes relationships among community members in Iraq is religion. The majority of the population is Muslim including Shia and Sunni, as well as smaller numbers of Christians, Yazidis and other religious groups such as Kaka'is, Baha'is, Zoroastrians, Sabians, Mandaeans and Jews. Language also plays a role in shaping relationships among community members in Iraq. Arabic is the primary language spoken in the country, with Kurdish and Turkmen being widely spoken as well. There are also many dialects spoken throughout the country.

One significant influence on dialogue in Iraq is the tribal system, which has deep roots in Iraqi culture. The tribal system is hierarchical and can limit dialogue to a select few members, if it is limited to the positions of power or authority within the tribe. This can make it challenging for the general public within the tribe and from outside the tribe to engage in meaningful dialogue or negotiate solutions to conflicts.

Another influence on dialogue in Iraq is religion. Iraq is predominantly Muslim, with both Sunni and Shia populations. Religious differences can impact the way dialogue is viewed and practiced, with some groups viewing dialogue as a way to promote unity and others viewing it as a means of defending their religious beliefs and practices. It is important to note that political polarisation in Iraq often revolves around sectarian differences, with political parties and groups primarily drawing support from a given religious community. As a result, political parties and groups in Iraq often draw support primarily from either the Sunni or Shia communities. This has led to political polarisation, with different groups promoting their own sectarian interests and agendas. This sectarian divide has been a significant barrier to effective dialogue and reconciliation efforts in Iraq, as individuals and groups may be reluctant to engage with those from the other sect.

Language is closely tied to national identity and this relationship can have significant implications for dialogue initiatives. Language is often seen as an essential component of a community's cultural heritage and identity. Furthermore, it can be used as a defence mechanism by different ethnic and religious groups, which can hinder dialogue efforts. In some cases, language can be used as a way of asserting one's identity and distinguishing oneself from others. This can lead to the use of language as a way of protecting one's community or culture and can make it more difficult to engage in open and inclusive dialogue.

Honour and shame are key components in Iraqi culture and can impact the way dialogue is viewed and practiced. Individuals may view dialogue as a means of restoring honour or reputation. Honour and shame can be both a motivator for individuals to engage in dialogue, but can also be a barrier if individuals feel that their participation could bring shame or dishonour to themselves or their group or if the subject of dialogue itself is related to what is being seen as an honour issue by the community.

Gender roles also significantly influence dialogue in Iraq. Men and women may have different expectations and opportunities when it comes to engaging in dialogue. Women, in particular, may face significant barriers to participating in dialogue due to cultural and societal norms that limit their mobility and social interactions.

Education can also impact the way dialogue is viewed and practiced. Individuals who have had access to higher education may be more likely to value dialogue and see it as a means of solving problems and building relationships. On the other hand, individuals with limited access to education may view dialogue as a foreign concept or may lack the skills and confidence to engage in productive dialogue. Education is highly valued and individuals who are highly educated are often seen as having greater knowledge and expertise. As such, they may be given a higher rank and are more likely to be listened to and respected by their community when it comes to dialogue. Iraq has a long history of foreign influence, including colonisation, invasion and occupation. These international influences can impact the way dialogue is viewed and practiced, with some individuals viewing dialogue as a Western concept that is at odds with Iraqi culture and traditions. In addition, there are still several cultural challenges to dialogue in Iraq related to the lack of understanding of different cultures and customs, taking into consideration the past experience of tension among the different components of Iraqi society, leading, in turn, to different levels of power dynamics.

2.4. The Legal Context

The constitution of Iraq provides a framework for protecting the rights of citizens to participate in public affairs, to express themselves freely, to form and join associations and to enjoy freedom of thought, conscience and belief. The constitution is considered a significant document in promoting dialogue and peaceful coexistence in the country, as it outlines the rights and responsibilities of citizens and establishes the framework for a democratic government.

One of the ways in which the constitution promotes dialogue is through its commitment to the protection of minority rights. The constitution, in its preamble and other articles[13], recognises the rights of ethnic and religious minorities, including the right to participate in the political process and to practice their own culture and religion. This is significant as it ensures that the voices and perspectives of minority groups are heard and respected in the political process.

The right to freedom of expression enjoys protection in the constitution. When citizens have the right to express themselves freely and to participate in public affairs, they are able to engage in open and honest dialogue about the issues that affect their lives. This is essential for building a strong and inclusive society where different perspectives and opinions can be heard and considered. The constitution promotes dialogue by protecting freedom of speech and press. Article 38[14] states that the constitution guarantees the right of freedom of expression and the press, allowing citizens to express their thoughts, opinions and ideas without fear of censorship or repression.

The freedom of assembly and peaceful demonstration is also guaranteed by Article 38, which allows citizens to come together and voice their concerns in a peaceful and orderly manner. This helps to ensure that the voices of those who may not have other means of expressing themselves are heard. Moreover, the freedom to form and join associations and political parties, as guaranteed by Article 39[15], allows citizens to come together and organise around common issues and causes. This is an important step towards building a strong and vibrant civil society that can help to promote democracy, human rights and good governance in Iraq.

The freedom of communication and correspondence, as guaranteed by Article 40[16], allows citizens to freely exchange ideas and information with one another. This is essential for building an informed and engaged citizenry that can participate in the democratic process. The freedom of thought, conscience and belief, also guaranteed by Article 42[17], allows citizens to think, believe and practice what they want without fear of persecution and thus promotes diversity in thoughts and opinions which is essential for dialogue.

This constitutional framework for dialogue is complemented by other regulations, such as laws and administrative orders. Under Order No. 128, the Permanent Higher Committee for

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13   Articles 3 and 4

14   Article 38 The State shall guarantee in a way that does not violate public order and morality: First. Freedom of expression using all means. Second. Freedom of press, printing, advertisement, media and publication. Third. Freedom of assembly and peaceful demonstration and this shall be regulated by law.

15   Article 39 First The freedom to form and join associations and political parties shall be guaranteed and this shall be regulated by law. Second It is not permissible to force any person to join any party, society, or political entity, or force him to continue his membership in it.

16   Article 40 The freedom of communication and correspondence, postal, telegraphic, electronic and telephonic, shall be guaranteed and may not be monitored, wiretapped, or disclosed except for legal and security necessity and by a judicial decision.

17   Article 42 Each individual shall have the freedom of thought, conscience and belief.

Coexistence and Community Peace was founded in 2014 with the intention of strengthening social cohesiveness in opposition to ISIS.[18] In 2019, this committee was merged with the Committee for Follow-up and Implementation of National Reconciliation, which was established in 2006 and a new committee was formed under the name of the Committee for Coexistence and Community Peace (later renamed the Committee for Dialogue and Community Peace), with a set of responsibilities including working on the political file for national reconciliation and dialogue with the Iraqi political parties.

In addition to being protected under the Iraqi constitution, freedom of expression that prospers dialogue is also guaranteed by international conventions and declarations. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), adopted by the United Nations in 1948, guarantees the right to freedom of expression in Article 19. This includes the right to hold opinions without interference and the right to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media regardless of frontiers.

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), adopted by the United Nations in 1966, also guarantees the right to freedom of expression in Article 19. This includes the right to freedom of expression, freedom of the press and freedom of access to information.

Additionally, the Arab Charter on Human Rights, adopted by the Arab League in 1994, guarantees the right to freedom of expression and the press in Article 32.

These international conventions and declarations are essential components of the legal frameworks as Iraq has ratified and committed to respect them and thus is held accountable for any breaches of these rights.

Additionally, the Security Council resolution 2522 (2020) mandates UNAMI to advise, assist and support the people and Government of Iraq on inclusive political dialogue, national and community-level reconciliation, electoral and constitutional assistance, regional dialogue, security sector reform, human rights (including minority rights, conflict-related sexual violence, child protection and gender equality.[19] The UNAMI Office of Political Affairs (OPA) carries out its responsibilities in close coordination with the Government of Iraq, the Council of Representatives, leaders from all segments of Iraqi society, the UN Country Team and the international community at large.

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18   https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/migration/iq/UNDP-IQ–Social-Cohesion-Report-AR-.pdf

19   https://iraq.un.org/en/133480-unami-mandate

It is important to note that while there are relevant articles in the Iraqi constitution and international treaties related to dialogue and inclusivity, there is often a significant gap between the constitutional provisions and the reality on the ground in Iraq. The implementation of these provisions may be hindered by a range of factors, including political instability, sectarian tensions and a lack of resources or capacity. Additionally, cultural and societal norms, as discussed above, may limit the extent to which these provisions are upheld in practice.

In general, dialogue is essential to promote peace and stability in the country. This has been seen in the efforts of the Iraqi government and the international community to bring different parties together to resolve their differences and find common ground. In recent years, there has been a significant push for dialogue as a means of resolving conflicts and addressing the underlying issues that have led to instability in the country. This has included efforts to bring together diverse groups for talks, as well as initiatives to promote understanding and cooperation at the grassroots level. Some examples include:

- The National Dialogue Conference, which was held in 2006 and aimed to bring together a wide range of political and civil society leaders to discuss key issues facing the country. The conference brought together representatives from various ethnic and sectarian groups, as well as political parties, to discuss and address issues related to the country's political and security situation. The conference aimed to promote national unity and reconciliation and to help resolve disputes between different groups. It was held in Baghdad and was organised by the Iraqi government with the support of the United Nations. The National Dialogue Conference resulted in the adoption of several agreements, including the National Compact, which outlined a vision for a unified and democratic Iraq. However, the conference was criticized for not achieving significant progress in resolving the country's ongoing political and security crisis.

- The National Reconciliation process, which was begun in 2008 by the Iraq government and is a gradual process towards addressing the root cause of the civil war. The initiative brought together the various ethnic and sectarian groups in Iraq, including Sunnis, Shiites and Kurds, in an attempt to promote national unity and stability. The process included a number of political, economic and security measures, such as the passing of a new national oil law, the integration of Sunni tribal leaders into the security forces and the release of thousands of detainees. Despite these efforts, the reconciliation process did not achieve its ultimate goal of fully resolving the country's sectarian divisions. Some Sunnis felt that the process did not go far enough in addressing their grievances and violence persisted in many parts of the country. Additionally, tensions between the central

government and the Kurdish Regional Government over issues such as oil revenues and territorial disputes continued to simmer.

- The Iraqi Civil Society Solidarity Initiative (ICSSI)[20] initiative, established in 2009, aims to promote dialogue and understanding between different factions within Iraq. It does this through a variety of programs, including training for civil society organisations, media campaigns and community-building projects. This initiative is still ongoing. Several outcomes were achieved so far, including organizing a series of dialogue conferences (the latest was in Sulaymaniyah in 2022) and the establishment of social forums for the government of Iraq, the KRI and at the local level.

- UNAMI's mandate, which promotes political dialogue among Iraq's ethnic and religious communities in order to promote peace and stability in the country.

- The Dialogue and Social Peace Committee, which is a committee formed by the Prime Ministry Council to support direct dialogue between communities and the central government.

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20   https://www.iraqicivilsociety.org/

3. Section 2: Introducing the Research

3.1. Research Methodology, Ethics and Limitations

The report was based on a methodology that is tailored to achieve the specific objectives of the report. The research was conducted in two phases:

3.1..1 Desk Research

The research team reviewed a total of 20 documents from GIZ and relevant non-governmental organisations (NGOs), donor agencies and further online sources.

3.1.2. Key Informant Interviews

A total of 29 interviews for 32 Key Informants (KIIs) was conducted. 12 of the key informants are females (38.5%) and 20 are males (62.5%).

Informants who were interviewed included GIZ staff (8 interviews, 11 key informants), international organisations (6 interviews, 7 key informants), local implementing partners to GIZ (8 interviews, 8 key informants), representatives of Iraqi Governmental Institutions (2 interviews, 2 key informants) and experts on dialogue throughout Iraq (4 interviews 4 key informants).

The international organisations who were interviewed are: Mercy Corps, OXFAM, United nations Development Programme (UNDP), The United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) International organisation for Migration (IOM) and Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS).

Key Informants

- Government
- Giz
- Local
- International
- Experts
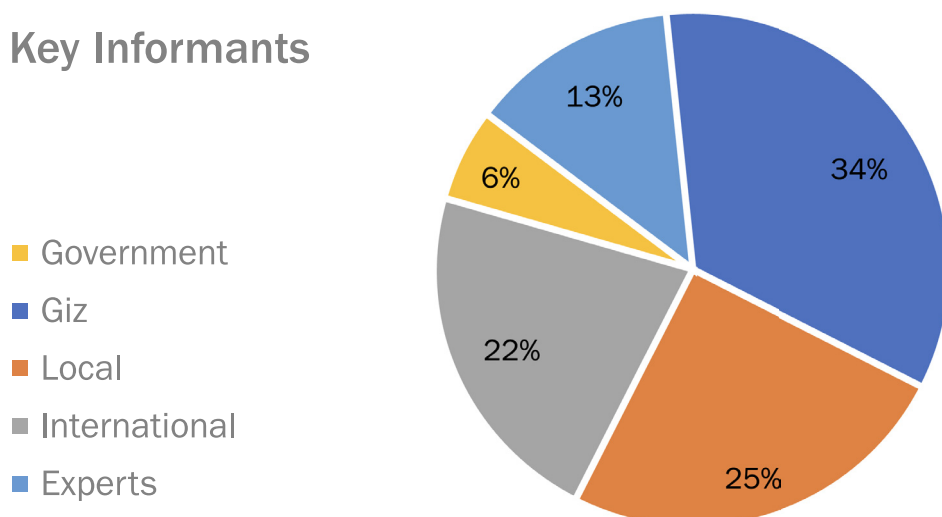
A semi-structured interview format was used. Tt involved using a set of open-ended questions to guide the interview, but also allowing for the interviewer to follow-up on responses and explore areas of interest in more detail to help provide a more in-depth understanding of the perspectives and experiences of the informants.

2.1.3. Conference on Dialogue Experiences in Iraq: "Dialogue Experiences in Iraq: Exchanging Lessons Learned Conference" that took place on March 19 & 20, 2023 at The Station in Baghdad. The conference was attended by a diverse range of participants, including government representatives, practitioners, academics and representatives from non-governmental and international organisations. The two-day event provided a unique opportunity for attendees to discuss the main findings of this report, exchange ideas and experiences, explore best practices and learn about current challenges in the field of dialogue. The conference also served the purpose of validating some of the findings and adding missing challenges or success factors to the report.

3.2. Research Ethics

The study was guided by principles of accountability, utility for multiple stakeholders, adherence to best practices and recognised standards of excellence in evaluation and research ethics such as do no harm and respect for persons.

The researchers took the "do no harm approach" and took care to minimise any potential negative impacts on the key informants and were respectful of their autonomy, privacy and confidentiality, while also working to ensure that the study's findings would be useful and beneficial to multiple stakeholders.

3.3. Research Limitations

Timeframe of projects: The majority of projects examined have recently started and the extent of their impact is therefore not yet clear. As such, it may be difficult to determine enough concrete achievements of the projects at this time.

Limited accessibility to Iraqi governmental representatives: The changes within the government of Iraq in October 2022 affected the ability to obtain information and perspectives from governmental representatives on their experiences promoting dialogue and participation. This made it difficult to gain a comprehensive understanding of the current state of government measures aimed at fostering greater engagement and communication between state actors and the community.

These limitations and factors may need to be taken into account when interpreting the findings and making recommendations based on this research.

Duplications in Findings: A significant constraint of the project was identifying redundancies in the results provided by various key informants. Such redundancies result in overlapping outcomes in implementation efforts and are reflected in the identification of challenges, success factors and lessons learned. To address this, findings were carefully merged, evaluated and analysed while considering the information source.

4. Section 3: Challenges, Success Factors and Lessons Learned

4.1. Challenges

This section enumerates the challenges identified by key informants. These challenges were classified as social, political, programmatic and procedural and content challenges that have a substantial influence on the success of dialogue programs and initiatives and their capacity to generate positive impacts.

4.1.1. Social and Political Challenges

Political Instability and Volatile Circumstances in Sensitive Regions

Political instability presents a significant challenge in maintaining continuity in dialogue despite frequent changes in government. The instability of decision-makers in their positions and the frequent turnover of government personnel causes interruptions in communication and a lack of an effective dialogue flow. As one key informant stated:

> We went through about three different governors during the 12 months of the project. We were able to meet with each governor as soon as they were appointed. But the lack of continuity of the governors in their respective positions and the frequent changes of governors hindered the communication and execution processes.[21]

This instability reflected in dynamic or fast-changing circumstances in sensitive regions such as Sinjar, Ninawa and Kirkuk created additional challenges in the implementation of dialogue projects such as delays or obstacles. Additionally, the tense political environment, marked by disagreement among political parties, hinders dialogue, as it becomes more difficult to reach agreements or results that are acceptable to the parties during dialogue activities. This tension affects the work of state institutions such as the parliament and complicates the decision-making process, which requires changing strategies to adjust to the changing priorities and approaches of each new government.

The Absence of Dialogue Culture

A lack of willingness to compromise is a significant barrier to achieving consensus and resolving disputes. The absence of a culture that fosters meaningful dialogue and consensus-building is a key challenge for dialogue-related decisions to be accepted and implemented effectively. "By fostering a culture of dialogue and working to build consensus, it may be

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21   Key informant from an international organisation.

possible to create the conditions for lasting peace and stability in Iraq"[22]. When individuals or groups are unwilling to consider alternative perspectives or make concessions, it can be difficult to find common ground and reach mutually beneficial solutions. Private disputes also hinder dialogue, as personal conflicts or grudges make it difficult for individuals to work together towards a shared goal.

Mistrust, Fragmentation and Polarisation in Communities

The political situation in Iraq is marked by conflict and polarisation of sub-identities. People have become more attached to their sub-identities (mainly those sectarian and ethnic in nature) as a means of finding community and belonging. This causes such individuals to be more fiercely protective of them. Mistrust between communities is also a significant challenge due to these conflicts, varying ethnicities and a history of tension. Such polarisation hinders dialogue by leading to rigid views, increased hostility, spread of misinformation and distrust, conformity to group views and suppression of dissenting opinions and a lack of trust between different groups. "The gap between the government and citizens increased the disintegration of the social fabrics of Iraq and led to the emergence of certain multi-identities that took precedence over the national identity."[23] This status quo can make it difficult for individuals to consider alternative viewpoints, establish and maintain respectful dialogue, reach a common understanding and find common ground. These fragmented communities, with a broad spectrum of views, pose an additional challenge especially when working with communities that are diverse and have different backgrounds and opinions. Even when efforts are made to be inclusive, there may be complaints from individuals or groups who feel left out or misrepresented. As highlighted by a key informant:

This is especially true for groups like the Yazidis and Tishreen activists, who may have a range of political views and backgrounds that make it difficult to include all voices in a meaningful way. Maintaining a coherent discussion while also being inclusive can be a challenge, as there may be many different opinions that need to be considered[24].

"Mistrust between communities can significantly impede meaningful dialogue, as when people are distrustful of one another, they are less likely to open up and share their honest thoughts and feelings". This lack of trust is also reflected when civil society works with local authorities. As stated, "[t]here is a feeling on the part of the CSOs that they were not taken seriously by the local authorities.

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22   Key informant from an international organisation.

23   An Iraqi expert

24   Key informant from an international organisation.

This may have stemmed from a lack of understanding or familiarity between the two groups, or possibly from past negative experiences."[25]

The challenge of creating meaningful dialogue has been also hindered by a lack of a clear national vision with a focus on political negotiations rather than addressing societal issues. As part of its efforts to tackle divisions and polarisation through dialogue, the Iraqi government established the Committee for Dialogue and Societal Peace (CDSP) to facilitate dialogue and reconciliation among different parties and community components. The committee-led initiatives were intended to be comprehensive, but ultimately fell short in producing dialogue that addressed the root causes of security crises and other issues facing the country. The committee faces several challenges that may impede its success. First, the committee is viewed as representing the government's point of view, which can hinder its credibility as a platform for meeting multiple viewpoints. Despite the committee's efforts to include a wide range of perspectives, the perception persists that it is a government committee. Second, the committee has not effectively coordinated with civil society organisations to promote dialogue activities, which may limit its reach and impact. Third, political and governmental instability has negatively affected the committee's work, creating an environment that is not conducive to productive dialogue. Finally, criticisms have been raised regarding the selection of participants in the committee's dialogue activities, with some arguing that the selection process is not objective. "The work of this committee is challenged by a set of conditions and circumstances making it difficult to initiate a dialogue on fundamental issues which address the real problems facing Iraqi society, such as armed conflicts, corruption, quotas, and polarisation over sub-identities".[26] Another key informant stated, "[i]n my opinion, we have not yet had a genuine national dialogue that could effectively address these issues and deal with the root problems in our society. Without this kind of open and inclusive dialogue, these problems will become more severe and entrenched, making it difficult to find sustainable solutions".[27]

Imbalanced Power Dynamics and Exclusion

Imbalanced power dynamics is one of the challenges that hinders the dialogue process, where people with a higher social status control the dialogue and direct it according to their vision without opposition from others. As one key informant stated, "participants are intimidated by people who are deemed to be more superior, or they come from more senior positions.

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25   Key informant from an international organisation.

26   An Iraqi expert

27   Key informant from a local organisation.

So sometimes an open discussion can be quite difficult to achieve."[28] Due to these power imbalances, dialogue participants may not necessarily represent the entire social spectrum within society is another challenge. Often, dialogue is limited to those who hold power or have connections to the power structure and not necessarily represent the entire society. This can result in the exclusion of a considerable number of particular groups, such as women and minority groups and perpetuate inequities and power imbalances within society. As stated by key informants:

> [E]xerting the customary law in areas being controlled by ISIS, or in areas where the state is unable to exert its power […] tribal leaders have had a role in filling the customary law gap which resulted from the absence of governmental control over the areas liberated from ISIS, which gave them the power to influence the local communities. When navigating these power dynamics, tribal leaders should not discredit the voices of those marginalised such as youth and women. [29]

Due to this inequity, an increase of feeling of powerlessness and a lack of agency is perceived among the general population, creating a barrier to meaningful dialogue and engagement as people may feel that their voices and concerns are not being heard or addressed by those in positions of power.

Top-Down Approach and Lack of Coordination by Iraqi Governmental Institutions

In a top-down approach to dialogue between decision-makers and the community, decisions and policies are made by the authorities and then communicated to the people, rather than being developed through a collaborative process involving the input and participation. As highlighted by one of the key informants:

> This can be problematic since it leads to a lack of trust and legitimacy in the dialogue outputs, as the people may feel that their voices and concerns are not being heard or taken into account. It can also lead to a lack of buy-in and support for the policies that are implemented, as the people may not feel that they have a stake in the decision-making process.[30]

This approach also weakens the partnership between Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and the authorities, minimises their meaningful involvement in the planning and decision-making process and creates a feeling of limited impact and influence of the CSOs in their communities.

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28 Key informant from an international organisation.
29 Key informant from a local organisation.
30 Key informant from an international organisation.

This situation challenges the CSOs in their effective collaboration with authorities and may hinder their ability to bring about positive change. As laid out by a key informant, "[i]t is essential to be mindful of the dominance of specific political parties or organisations, since this might result in the exclusion of particular perspectives and experiences in dialogue, such as ethnic or religious minorities that are being excluded."[31] In addition to the top-down approach, there is also a lack of coordination between actors operating on the national level and those operating on the local level. This also continues to persist in different levels of government, such as the regional, governorate, district and subdistrict levels, where there is no synergy or support by the authorities on the national level, although they are involved in the dialogue process on the local level. "This lack of coordination between entities can create duplication of efforts and lead to problems and difficulties in the implementation of dialogue initiatives on the ground,"[32] as highlighted by key informants. An example of this lack of coordination was articulated by a representative of a local organisation thusly:

As we were engaging in dialogue to facilitate the return of internally displaced person (IDP) families to their villages in one of Ninewa districts, the federal government unexpectedly made the decision to close the IDP camps without consulting with relevant local stakeholders, including ourselves as dialogue facilitators. This unexpected decision put pressure on us to hasten the process, potentially compromising its quality.[33]

Gender Inequality and Resistance to Women's Participation

A key challenge facing initiatives in Iraq is trying to ensure gender representation, specifically the inclusion of females. "While efforts are made to achieve a 50-50 balance between males and females, this is not always possible due to various social, cultural and economic challenges".[34] Gender inequality is a significant issue in the participation of women in dialogue activities, particularly in rural areas, where men dominate society and decision-making positions.

When we started our first workshop on creative writing in the south of Iraq, female participants were accompanied by their fathers or husbands. We were asked who we are and who the donor is. Participants were brought and picked up every day. In addition, many women bring their husbands to meetings and they frequently defer to or let the husband speak for them.[35]

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31   Key informant from an international organisation.
32   Key informant from an international organisation.
33   Key informant from a local organisation.
34   Key informant from a local organisation.
35   Key informant from an international organisation.

The weak participation of women in dialogue activities leads to limiting the number and diversity of voices that are included in the dialogue. When women are not adequately represented in these dialogue activities, their perspectives, experiences and needs are often overlooked.

"When it comes to religious and tribal leaders, the openness to talk about women's involvement, women's rights and more gender equality is often limited,"[36] This can lead to results that do not address the needs of all members of the community. When it comes to promoting social cohesion or peace processes, men continue to dominate. This can further restrict the ability of women to participate in dialogue and contribute to the dominance of men in peace processes and discussions of social cohesion. "I believe it is crucial to diversify these groups and include women from various backgrounds in these peace dialogues, to ensure all voices are heard and the needs of all community members are addressed."[37]

Resistance to Women's Political Participation is also a significant challenge, as members of society may view women's political participation as breaking social or traditional boundaries. "For example, doing dialogue programs to encourage women's political participation was something a bit unusual for the society in the South as it breaks the social and traditional boundaries. It was challenging to encourage participants to actually take part in these dialogue programs".[38]

4.1.2 Programmatic and Procedural Challenges

Incompetence of National Facilitation and a Lack of Capacities

A dearth of capacities within civil society organisations and partner NGOs is another challenge facing the implementation of effective dialogue activities. Lacking the necessary skills and knowledge affects the ability to facilitate productive dialogue, build trust and identify common ground among diverse groups. It also makes managing conflicts and tensions that may arise during the dialogue process much more difficult. The inability of facilitators to manage dialogue effectively, in turn, leads to ineffective meetings. Facilitators should be familiar with trust building and conflict resolution, able to set the tone, keep the conversation on track and mediate disagreements. If the facilitator lacks these abilities, they may not be able to manage the dialogue effectively, resulting in confusion and disruption.These facilitators and moderators must be able to facilitate dialogue sessions in an outcome-focused, solution-focused, pragmatic and sensitive manner. Another challenge can be seen in the incapacity of

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36   Key informant from an international organisation.

37   An Iraqi expert

38   Key informant from an international organisation.

NGOs to network and engage with local communities, governments and other stakeholders in a constructive and effective way. In addition, this lack of expertise in specific topics or areas, such as peacebuilding, transitional justice, water management or economic reform is also a challenge, as these capacities are essential for addressing complex topics, which require in-depth knowledge and understanding of the specific issues at hand in order to provide valuable insights and recommendations for addressing them.

Difficulty to Select and Engage Civil Society Participants

One of the most significant challenges, as well as one that consumes a significant amount of time, is the selection of participants for the dialogue. It is possible that the dialogue will not be successful if there are participants present who are not knowledgeable about the topic being discussed during the dialogue or who do not have the skills required to successfully participate in a dialogue. In some cases, topics discussed during the dialogue are considered challenges because they are considered sensitive topics by the participants.

For example, "[39] In addition to this, selecting dialogue partners from within civil society presents a significant obstacle. It is not possible for all organisations to not only organise the dialogue, but also to take the results and sustain them. [40]   Once selected, another challenge was faced, related to the lack of commitment. Reflected in the participants' absence from the dialogue activity after they confirmed attendance and thus leading to flaw in representation. [41] [42]

Difficulties for government partners to commit to participate and be open to listen to CSOs.

Challenges facing partners of the Iraqi government to engage in dialogue with civil society organisations (CSOs) can be attributed to several factors. Ongoing instability and changes in government can significantly affect the institutional framework and functioning of government, which can in turn hinder cooperation and collaboration between the government and civil society organisations (CSOs) in dialogue processes. In addition, the lack of clear policies and regulations for engagement with CSOs may create confusion and uncertainty for government partners. Moreover, the lack of clear communication channels and platforms for engagement can make it difficult for both parties to connect and engage effectively, which can, in turn, lead to missed opportunities for collaboration and partnership between the government and CSOs. The absence of institutional frameworks for effective engagement and cooperation

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39   Key informant from an international organisation.
40   Key informant from an international organisation.
41   Key informant from an international organisation.
42   Key informant from a local organisation.

between the government and CSOs can also hinder progress of effective ongoing dialogue. The government may have certain priorities and interests, such as security, economic development, or foreign relations, that may not align with the priorities of some CSOs, who may be more focused on issues such as human rights, social justice or environmental protection. The difference in thematic priorities makes it difficult to find common ground for dialogue and collaboration between the government and CSOs. Additionally, some CSOs may represent specific communities or groups that have historically faced discrimination or marginalisation and may require specific governmental attention and support.

Limitations Related to Project Management

Requirements of project management can also present a challenge to the dialogue activities. For example, if the period of implementation is short, it will difficult to achieve results. Another challenge is the lack of understanding of the local context on the level of headquarters or donors, which results in having intangible project objectives, as well as unrealistic expectations and indicators. Reporting can be also a challenge, because the focus is then placed on the reporting itself rather than addressing the challenge(s) on the ground. Plus, there is the fact that proper reporting requires extensive time, which comes at the expense of sound implementation of dialogue. The focus may be more on meeting reporting requirements and deadlines even if the underlying challenges on the ground need more time and efforts to be addressed. Budget restraints can be another challenge that limits the ability to organise the dialogue activities that respond to the community's needs.

> *When it comes to reporting using our own reporting mechanisms, there's much more attention on the outcomes, what are the achievements, what did this whole dialogue process bring, we should work at least for a year to actually bring some real achievements that we can report on, there is time pressure to implement and we have to achieve these indicators to some extent and it takes time, It's not something you can do in a couple of months.* [43]

Another limitation lies in the criteria Imposed by donors that needed to be met during the implementation of dialogue projects. Imposing some standards can be detrimental if they are not realistic or appropriate with the dialogue's context and objectives.

> *Usually, donors insist on a certain profile or criteria such as the percentage of women or youth participating in a dialogue session, without taking into consideration the local context or the oriented results of the dialogue activities… there should be no engagement conditions in place before conducting context and stakeholder analysis[44].*

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43   Key informant from an international organisation.

44   Key informant from a local organisation.

For example, in some cases, inclusivity may be superficial. Parties may include specific groups to the dialogue (such as women, youth and minorities) simply to meet expectations of the international donor, rather than genuinely including and empowering these groups to participate. "Aware of the necessity to include women, youth and minorities, they include these groups to appease us; yet, women do not speak up or speak very little. And the dynamics reveal that these groups are not actually engaged."[45]

Insufficient implementation of Outcomes of International Community-Supported Dialogues

While it is possible to achieve results if the dialogue is well-planned, the difficulty lies in translating the outcomes and agreements into action that can be implemented on the ground. One major issue is the insufficient implementation of these agreements, as they may lack concrete mechanisms for implementation. As elaborated by one of the key informants, "this lack of implementation is exemplified by the Sinjar agreement, which has not been properly implemented, leading to a lack of security and proper governance for the internally displaced people to return home"[46]. Additionally, significant portions of these inputs may be influenced by the international community rather than being driven by national and local actors, as a result, the effectiveness of these dialogues in bringing about real change is questionable. Furthermore, it highlights that the Iraqi political establishment has been shown to be unresponsive to bottom-up input and feedback.

> While it too organisation came to the area and worked there for less than a year and produced 10 peace agreements. These agreements were just ink on papers, none of the stakeholders took them seriously because they were not a result of serious dialogue. Donors expect local organisations to implement a dialogue project and achieve impact in one year and this is unrealistic.[47]

Safety and security measures

Security issues can prevent or delay the implementation of dialogue projects or activities and exert pressure on the partner implementing the project. It can be challenging to ensure that the activities can be conducted safely and effectively and that the organisation is concerned with mitigating any potential security risks or threats. "We are concerned with mitigating any potential security risks or threats and are collaborating with local partners and authorities to ensure that the required precautions are in place to protect participants in dialogue sessions"

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45   Key informant from an international organisation.

46   Key informant from a local organisation

47   Key informant from a local organisation.

Organizing staff movement, access, arranging travel, obtaining the necessary approvals and finding safe and secured spaces to organise the dialogue activities are examples of these challenging measures. "In some cases, organizing the activities was not possible because there was no security service provider or because the project staff were not able to access a certain area due to the organisation's strict security regulations." As explained by one of key informants, "we haven't had a security provider for the last six months, so we were not able to travel to other areas than Mosul. Telafar, Sinjar and South Mosul were mostly off guard for us. So, we either had to gather people in Mosul or in Erbil." "When it comes to access, I think this is the main issue that we're facing due to the security situation on the ground, but also due to very rigid security regulations that we have."

Bureaucracy

Complex bureaucratic procedures and rules can make it difficult to implement dialogue activities effectively, as they hinder the success of dialogue initiatives and limit opportunities for all involved. "There are also numerous rules and complex bureaucratic procedures that make it difficult to collaborate with institutions such as universities, which is viewed as a significant barrier for students to completely comprehend their potential, studies and how to prepare for the private sector"[48].

Overlapping and Weak Coordination

Overlapping and weak coordination can occur between local organisations and donors, as well as between donor organisations leading to confusion, inefficiency and miscommunication, which can stifle the progress and productivity of the dialogue process. It can also lead to the unnecessary duplication of efforts and resources, potentially causing waste and the misallocation of resources. "We had several coordination meetings to agree on division of work and responsibilities to avoid overlapping… in most cases the results of these meetings were not implemented"[49]. The lack of coordination led to some serious problems on the ground. "Our published figures on the number of returnees differed from those provided by a donor organisation since the reporting standards were not similar, causing confusion and frustration among the stakeholders".[50]

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48   Key informant from a local organisation.
49   Key informant from a local organisation.
50   Key informant from a local organisation.

Lack of Qualitative Information

Most of the available information on dialogue topics is quantitative information, which, when solely relied upon, can lead to a superficial exchange of ideas. "Most stakeholders do not want to participate in lengthy interviews, nor do they like to provide extensive responses to the questions asked and this affects the quality of the information acquired"[51]. The lack of qualitative information is a significant challenge in conducting dialogue on various topics. Quantitative information, such as statistics and data, can provide a broad overview, but it does not give a complete picture of the situation. Qualitative information, on the other hand, such as personal narratives and in-depth interviews, can provide a deeper understanding of the perspectives, experiences and motivations of different stakeholders. Without this type of information, it can be difficult to identify underlying issues and develop effective solutions. Additionally, qualitative reports on dialogue subjects are not always publicly available.

4.2 Key Success Factors and Lessons Learnt

Navigating the Crossroads of Trust, Confidentiality and Cultural Sensitivity

Building trust, creating a safe space and embodying cultural sensitivity are crucial for successful dialogue initiatives. Establishing a level of trust between the dialogue parties including citizens and officials and citizens themselves, enables parties involved to engage in dialogue and assures their mutual commitment to meaningful participation. This trust among different parties allows for open and honest communication, which in turn leads to more meaningful and productive dialogue. Furthermore, trust is a vital component in facilitating effective collaboration and problem-solving. In the words of one key informant, "trust has to be built from an early stage, before the dialogue process starts. This is done through actually making them engaged in a sense where they feel belong to the process and their voices are heard."[52] In addition to trust building, it is essential to establish a safe space that prospers confidentiality where all parties feel comfortable sharing their perspectives and ideas without fear of suppression or threat.

To build trust and create a safe space for successful dialogue in Iraq, practitioners should engage with citizens and officials early to establish relationships. They can create a safe space by developing a set of ground rules and using techniques such as small group discussions and one-on-one meetings to promote open and honest communication. A safe space is key to dialogue as by creating such an environment, participants feel comfortable to share their

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51   Key informant from a local organisation.
52   Key informant from an international organisation.

thoughts and feelings without fear of judgment or reprisal. One such measure is to hold the dialogue in a neutral location, such as a community centre or a library. Practioners of dialogue should also be transparent about their intentions and goals, while also being willing to listen to and address the concerns of the people they are working with. It is also important to create ground rules for the dialogue that emphasise respect, openness and listening.

Confidentiality is also a crucial factor in the success of dialogue as it encourages open and honest communication, particularly in cases where a small number of individuals are involved. "In a confidential setting, participants may feel more comfortable sharing sensitive information and expressing their true opinions, which can facilitate the achievement of real results."[53] Confidentiality fosters the creation of a safe space for dialogue as it allows individuals to express their thoughts, ideas and concerns and to engage meaningfully in discussions. "This can help to build consensus, find common ground and can lead to more effective and sustainable solutions. By fostering open and honest communication and dialogue, it is possible to build strong relationships and work towards a shared goal."[54] Creating a safe space for reflection and expression is a key component to creating a positive environment that breaks the ice to engage a group of people who normally do not engage. "It was the first time that they were capable of sitting at a table with the local authorities to talk to them like equals."

To ensure confidentiality practitioners can develop a code of conduct that all participants agree to, which emphasises the importance of confidentiality and outlines the consequences of breaking it. Practitioners can also create an environment that encourages a non-judgmental and non-threatening atmosphere where participants can feel safe to express their thoughts, ideas and concerns without fear of retribution or stigma. Dialogue's practitioners can also use anonymous surveys or feedback mechanisms to gather input from participants. They can also make use of secure communication channels and technologies that protect the privacy and confidentiality of information shared during the dialogue process, which might include using encrypted messaging systems or secure online platforms that allow participants to share their ideas and feedback without fear of it being intercepted or accessed by unauthorised parties. Practioners should be discreet to avoid sharing any information about the activity with people who are not involved, e.g., use pseudonyms, keep records confidential and refrain from sharing information with external parties. Practioners can also use Chatham House Rules as an effective way to ensure confidentiality in a dialogue process. Chatham House Rules allow participants to express their views and opinions freely, while protecting

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53   Key informant from an international organisation.

54   Key informant from an international organisation.

the identity of the speaker and the specific context in which the views were expressed. Under the rules, participants are free to use the information shared during the dialogue process, but they are not allowed to reveal the identity of the speaker or the specific context in which the information was shared.

Trust, confidentiality and cultural sensitivity are interconnected to create a positive environment that embraces diversity and promotes mutual understanding. Cultural sensitivity is an important factor in building trust in dialogue because it demonstrates a respect for the beliefs and values of others. When individuals or organisations display cultural sensitivity, they show that they are willing to understand others, which in turn creates an environment of mutual respect and trust. Cultural sensitivity also helps to avoid misunderstandings and misinterpretations that can lead to conflicts, which can undermine trust and thus the dialogue process as well. Practitioners should emphasise cultural sensitivity by acknowledging and valuing diverse perspectives and experiences and by creating an inclusive environment for engagement. Cultural sensitivity can be embodied by being aware of the cultural norms and values of dialogue parties and being respectful of those norms and values, while also making dialogue more culturally appropriate. Cultural sensitivity is important throughout the entire process of a dialogue project, from design to implementation. When designing a dialogue project, it is important to take into account the cultural context in which the project will take place.

Recognizing and respecting cultural differences among dialogue participants is essential for creating a positive and inclusive environment. This can help foster a sense of belonging and help to eliminate feelings of exclusion or marginalisation. Additionally, conducting a structured conflict analysis and regular update throughout all stages is a key success factor, this includes the adaptation of the Do No Harm Approach in order to avoid any negative impact that might occur from the implementation of the dialogue activities. "We recruited female surveyors to conduct surveys with female respondents to take into consideration the traditions and cultural sensitivity within the community." "In rural areas, people are very suspicious of someone knocking on their door. So, we made sure that we had females, half the surveyors."[55]   For example, in tribal societies, despite male dominance, women have their own platform for dialogue and decision-making, which can be described as a "parallel structure." [56] [57]

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55   Key informant from an international organisation.

56   Key informant from a local organisation.

57   Key informant from a local organisation.

Cultural sensitivity can be approached in several steps. Practioners need to educate themselves about the cultural backgrounds of the individuals they will be interacting with, (understand their beliefs, values and attitudes to avoid misunderstandings or causing offense). They need to avoid assumptions about people based on their appearance or cultural background. Practioners also need to use inclusive language that can have a significant impact on how people feel and participate. Cultural sensitivity also requires an environment that encourages open communication where diverse perspectives are respected and active listening is practiced to foster acknowledgement for different points of view. Practioners must also consider nonverbal communication such as facial expressions and body language, which can vary significantly across cultures. In designing a dialogue project, it is important to carefully consider the content of the dialogue and be aware of how to discuss topics that include sensitive issues to avoid potential sources of conflict. In this sense, cultural diversity and sensitivity should be protected and the dialogue should be designed with a deep understanding of the cultural and social norms of the participants.

Genuine Inclusion and Balance of Power Dynamic

Inclusive dialogues that involve a diverse range of perspectives and voices is a crucial success factor for the dialogue process, as it helps to foster trust and improve relations among stakeholders. Inclusion becomes a necessity, especially with working in a fragile, challenging and politically sensitive context. Success depends on the openness to genuine inclusion and inclusion readiness to collaborate by all the different relevant actors.

For inclusion to be genuine, it needs to embody different social stakeholders being engaged in different communities including marginalised groups and disadvantaged or underrepresented groups such as ethnic groups, youth and women. "There is a growing interest and recognition of the importance of including women, young people and minorities. Being inclusive is to effectively address the needs of all citizens and stakeholders, including "the silent majority" and traditionally excluded groups who are particularly vulnerable"[58]. By involving the stakeholders in various stages of the process, there will be a greater possibility to foster constructive discussion and work towards finding solutions to complex issues and creating a more cohesive and progressive-thinking society. Bringing people together and fostering dialogue and understanding between individuals with different perspectives creates a healthy and functional dialogue. This inclusion was highlighted in one of the projects, "in education, we try to bring all the relevant stakeholders from government, international NGOs and representatives of the international community in Iraq, universities, national entities, private

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58   Key informant from an international organisation.

sector companies, NGOs." In addition, direct beneficiaries are included such as students, "as they are the people in need of this development to give their voice and include them in the dialogue."

Inclusive dialogue platforms also need to be neutral and distinct from problems being discussed. "Due to our impartiality, we were able to bring together a diverse group of people for an open and constructive dialogue, including Christians, Sunnis, Shia, Kurds and Assyrians"[59]. This is only possible because the platform is seen as being separate from the issues being discussed, but still has access to all relevant stakeholders.

Informal discussions are also an additional key factor for inclusion, especially those that take place over coffee or during breaks, as they can greatly enhance the dialogue process by fostering a relaxed and open environment where honest and candid communication can take place. Encouraging informal discussion can create a space that is inclusive, welcoming and conducive to productive dialogue for all participants.

One of the lessons learnt was that genuine inclusion and participation can help governments better understand people's needs, create efficient policies and enhance policy implementation. It also helps dialogue participants understand how policies are designed, strengthens public governance and promotes trust between citizens and government. The greater the inclusivity and participation of stakeholders, the higher the chance of strong support from all stakeholders. Involving government officials at different levels in the design, preparation and implementation of dialogue projects, is a key success factor that contributes to the success of dialogue activities. An example of this engagement can be seen in one of the projects where senior officials, such as "the head of district Kaymakam and head of water department were involved in the early stages of the project. This new relationship strengthened trust and built a new social contract between policy makers and citizens based on equality and social cohesion".[60]

Inclusion is an important factor to address national issues through dialogue, for example, the government recognised that the drug problem was a significant national issue, one that required a comprehensive and collaborative response. While the government had an important role to play in addressing the problem, it also recognised that civil society organisations could play a critical role in supporting prevention, treatment and rehabilitation efforts. To this end, the government made it a priority to include discussions of drug problems in the committees, recognizing that the input and expertise of civil society organisations would be essential to developing effective solutions.

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59   Key informant from a local organisation.

60   Key informant from an international organisation.

The government was eager to hear from civil society organisations about the challenges they faced in combating the drug problem, as well as their ideas for addressing the problem. By including discussions of the drug problem in the committees, the government demonstrated its commitment to addressing this critical national issue in a collaborative and inclusive way. The government recognised that it could not tackle this issue alone and that it needed the input and support of civil society organisations to develop effective solutions. Moreover, by focusing on the role of civil society organisations in combating the drug problem, the government demonstrated its recognition of the importance of engaging with and empowering civil society organisations.[61]

Another related success factor was determined in finding the right equilibrium and balance of power between stakeholders. Bringing together different stakeholders who have different views or perspectives on their communities and making sure that there is no exclusion due to power dynamics, especially when some dialogue parties hold a very high political or social position, whether as heads of districts, local government or tribal leaders. "There was no actor that dominates the structure or the dialogue process; all members and community segments have an equal and important role to also participate in the whole process equally." A key takeaway was the importance of ensuring actual decision-making power in dialogues through investing in people's points of strength and identifying effective roles and tasks that can be linked to their strengths or their networks. "It requires a lot of sensitivity on how to carefully address specific power dynamics within a group and how to work around those power dynamics." We have observed that finding a common ground among parties or shared objectives in dialogue, eases the process to move forward". [62]

In order to achieve meaningful results, both the ideals of inclusivity and the practicalities of effective decision-making must be taken into account. An example is illustrated by a case study from the Baghdad Erbil Dialogue, in which the international community often expects inclusive dialogues with a broad representation of women, age groups and diverse backgrounds. However, in reality, these ideals may not always align with the practicalities of decision-making. For example, in the Baghdad Erbil dialogue between the two governments, important decisions may need to be made by a small group of key decision-makers in order to achieve concrete results. While including a diverse group of people in the dialogue may meet expectations for inclusivity, it may also dilute the focus and confidentiality of the discussion. As a result, the implementation of these dialogues may have a limited impact. "You cannot have 50 people around the table because you lose confidentiality. You need to have a couple

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61   Governmental key informant.

62   Key informant from an international organisation.

of key people who feel comfortable talking to each other in a relatively small setting, for dialogue to produce a concrete outcome. You need to do it with very few decision makers, not an inclusive group"[63].

A key lesson learnt by international organisations is to balance representation, the number of participants and topics and ensure meaningful participation in order to facilitate effective and impactful dialogue. Crucial factors here include having the right number and type of participants and interests at the table engaging in dialogue and ensuring that the right actors are included, or excluded, to promote dialogue. Inclusion of too many topics and stakeholders can overwhelm a dialogue, increase the burden and ensure that little progress is made during a predetermined period. Furthermore, the international community should also be mindful of the quality and quantity of representation, ensuring that marginalised and underrepresented groups such as women and young people are not only present but also have meaningful participation in the process. The absence of meaningful participation can lead to frustration and dissatisfaction. To ensure the success of dialogue initiatives, international organisations should collaborate closely with local partners and authorities, while also working to empower grassroots organisations to drive the dialogue process.

Local Ownership

A deep understanding of the context and a willingness to adapt and customise the dialogue to meet the needs and expectations of the individuals involved is essential to the success of dialogue. Local partners are a key success to dialogue as they have strong relationships within the community and their involvement can help ensure that the project is seen as legitimate and accepted by the local community. "Local partners are a key to success, they are well connected on the ground, have good networking, expertise and skills to develop and implement the dialogue initiatives in a way that is culturally appropriate and effective".[64] Local ownership also ensures that the outcomes are relevant and appropriate to the local context and needs. It also helps build trust among the parties involved, which is crucial for long-term sustainability and success of the dialogue process. "In Qayyara, we have engaged the local stakeholders in the process from early stages. They participated in planning and later in implementation. Everything that happened was by them and for them". [65] Ensuring local ownership and community engagement throughout the whole process of dialogue fosters transparency for project activities, while simultaneously striking a balance between

63   Key informant from an international organisation.
64   Key informant from an international organisation.
65   Key informant from a local organisation.

external support and national ownership. "Local stakeholders' feedback is being part of the whole process and they are being consulted throughout the whole process and their priorities are also being taken into account and especially when it comes to engaging in conflict and sensitive matters around certain conflicts".[66]

In its dialogue initiatives, the government identified the importance of a regional approach as the primary measure in achieving its post-war recovery efforts. The success was measured by its ability to frame civil society initiatives that were tailored to the specific needs of each region, while avoiding any fragmentation or tension between different groups. To achieve this goal, the government representative worked closely with local organisations and community leaders to gain a deeper understanding of the unique challenges and needs of each region:

By doing so, we were able to identify the areas that had been most affected by post-war societal shocks and prioritise our efforts accordingly. This approach proved to be a key success factor in our post-war recovery efforts. By tailoring our initiatives to the specific needs of each community, we were able to address the most pressing issues and foster a sense of shared purpose and commitment to positive change. Through our collaborative and inclusive efforts, we were able to rebuild communities that had been torn apart by conflict and create a brighter future for all.[67]

A lesson learnt by the international organisations assures the importance of supporting grassroots organisations to be in the driver's seat and implement a bottom-up approach to dialogue and not implement these dialogue projects by themselves:

In many cases, voluntary efforts initiated by local peace committees can face challenges in gaining traction and visibility within their local communities. However, with international support, these efforts can often see greater success and wider recognition. Such support was in the form of funding, resources, or networking opportunities and helped to build momentum and drove the initiatives forward. Overall, international support played a key role in helping to amplify the impact of grassroots efforts and drove positive change on a larger scale.[68]

One of the most important lessons learnt by the government is that ownership of dialogue should be national and that the role of international organisations should be limited to logistical and administrative support. This means that dialogue should take place under the national or local authorities' umbrella, rather than being driven by international actors. "When dialogue is under the international umbrella, there is a risk that the language and demands

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66   Key informant from an international organisation.
67   Governmental key informant.
68   Governmental key informant.

will be shaped by external forces, rather than being grounded in the needs and priorities of local communities"[69].

Localisation requires understanding of the unique situation, considering the local environment and culture, involving local partners who have expertise and connections in the community, ability to tailor the language, content and messaging of the dialogue to the specific cultural context, as well as incorporating examples that are relevant and meaningful to the people:

As an international community, we may have different perspectives about what is best for the community and may not always understand the specific needs and priorities of the people on the ground. Thus, it is important to consider the cultural norms and values to ensure that the dialogue is respectful and does not offend anyone[70].

While addressing the needs of local communities, it is crucial for the international community to be adaptable and responsive to the specific priorities of the local communities, rather than imposing one's own agenda:

It is important to recognise that the needs of the community may differ from our own perceptions and expectations. Listening to the locals is very important because on the ground, their needs are completely different from what we think is good for them or what we think they need.[71]

Strategic planning sessions should also commence with discussing priorities chosen by participants. "We try not to impose or dictate priorities, needs, or even the kind of conflicts or initiatives the working groups are engaging with and how they should address it. This includes also setting the indicators by the participants themselves".[72] The local community is not involved merely at the level of prioritizing and identifying issues, but also working on those issues:

Steering the project activities is not only done by us as an international organisation or our implementing partners, but rather approached in participatory decision that is based on trust building with different stakeholders. So, everything that we decide is not donor dictated or top down, but rather negotiated and discussed on a continuous basis with the stakeholders that we're working with[73].

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69   Governmental key informant.
70   Key informant from an international organisation.
71   Key informant from an international organisation.
72   Key informant from an international organisation.
73   Key informant from an international organisation.

Advancing Gender Equality

Promoting greater inclusion of women in various sectors and advancing gender equality requires a multi-faceted approach, which includes open and respectful dialogue on sensitive topics related to women's participation. As stated in the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, "[w]omen's participation and involvement in all aspects of peace processes remains fundamental to the goal of achieving sustainable peace". One practical example of this approach is the Women, Peace and Security agenda, which emphasises the importance of women's participation in conflict prevention, resolution and post-conflict reconstruction. By facilitating dialogue on sensitive topics related to women's participation in peace and security, practitioners can identify and address barriers to their full participation. By including diverse voices in these conversations, they can build consensus and find common ground on women's issues, leading to more inclusive and effective solutions. Another practical example is the promotion of gender equality in different sectors, including male-dominated spaces and processes. By breaking down stereotypes regarding women's participation and addressing gender imbalances in education and the workforce, greater diversity and inclusion can be achieved. For instance, in Iraq, efforts to strengthen women's participation in the implementation of the national action plan on women, peace and security included increasing the percentage of women in dialogue committees. As one Iraqi stakeholder noted, "[w]e were keen that the percentage of women in the dialogue committees is forty percent".[74] To advance gender equality, practitioners can take concrete steps such as developing targeted outreach and recruitment strategies, promoting equal access to education and training, increasing the visibility of women's achievements, promoting work-life balance and engaging men as allies in promoting gender equality.

Practitioners should be aware of the factors that can influence the extent to which women's voices are heard in a dialogue such as cultural and social norms, power dynamics and the level of support provided to women participants. Addressing these factors, practitioners need to use participatory methods that encourage all participants to contribute equally to the dialogue such as small group discussions, brainstorming sessions and interactive activities that promote equal participation. They may also use various practical tools to ensure that women have equal speaking time and opportunities such as round-robin discussions and structured agendas that give everyone a chance to speak. Another important tool is to set ground rules for the dialogue that encourage respectful communication and active listening. They can also challenge gender biases and stereotypes by revealing positive examples

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74   Governmental Key informant.

of women's leadership and contributions and by providing mentorship and networking opportunities for women participants to support their continued engagement in the dialogue. Technologies such as video conferencing and online platforms can also be used to promote gender inclusion in dialogues, particularly for women who may face mobility constraints or have caregiving responsibilities. Additionally, visual aids such as graphs, charts and pictures can be used to convey information and ensure that all participants, including those with low literacy levels, can understand the content being discussed. Using gender-sensitive language that does not perpetuate gender stereotypes, assumptions or biases is crucial to dialogue. Practitioners should use gender-neutral language wherever possible and avoid using language that assumes gender roles or attributes certain characteristics to specific genders.

Maximizing Stakeholder Engagement

Ensuring that all relevant parties are included in the dialogue and that potential negative influences are addressed, is crucial to dialogue. "By engaging with all stakeholders, dialogue can help to move those who may be negative or uninterested towards being supportive or allied with the cause". There is no specific criteria in selection of stakeholders as every topic has its own approach and sensitivity:

We were keen in the Committee for Dialogue and Societal Peace to include all segments of society, including youth, civil society, tribal leaders, unions and associations. When selecting peace committee members to participate in dialogue, specific criteria such as the dialogue themes and the voluntary efforts, noting that members of dialogue committees were rotated every six months[75].

Such approaches included mapping and consultations with diverse actors and identifying participants who are open and willing to be engaged, taking into consideration gender balance. "We need to make sure to get people to sit together, move towards a constructive stage that involves engagement of high-ranking officials, then develop concrete recommendations and reports"[76].

The criteria for selecting committee members in the central and southern regions differed from those in the northern regions. We used to focus more on displaced people and conflict-affected groups. whereas in the centre and southern regions, we used to concentrate on protestors and youth. Additionally, we considered the governorate's diversity, for example, in Basra, we selected Shia and Sunni and minorities such as Armenians or Sabean Mandaeans. This diversity was taken into account when selecting the participants"[77].

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75   Governmental key informant.
76   Key informant from a local organisation.
77   Governmental key informant.

Moreover, meeting one-on-one or in small groups among stakeholders is an effective setting for participants to express their concerns and challenges. These meetings create an opportunity for them to feel more comfortable, share their thoughts and feelings without any perceived judgment of others.

Having realistic expectations on potential dialogue outcomes and understanding the capacities and influence of the stakeholders help to determine priorities and avoid addressing topics or issues beyond their reach or their sphere of influence. As long as objectives are clear and realistically feasible and measurable, then stakeholders are able to come up with certain indicators towards the objectives that they were working for. Moreover, for expectations to be realistic they should be based on evidence collected from different methods such as data collection, focus group discussions and key informant interviews. Another key factor to success is a transparent and continuous discussion with stakeholders on successes and achievements, transparency, project implementation, funds, next steps and sustainability is another key successful factor. "Moving forward towards discussing the impact like milestones towards sustainability and impact they want to achieve afterwards. Stakeholders know that funds are not sustainable; they have means and other sources to sustain dialogue activities"[78]

The importance of engaging local stakeholders in dialogue is crucial for governments to effectively address service issues and drive long-term growth and development. To prioritise essential services such as healthcare, education, transportation and public safety, while also ensuring the undertaking of strategic projects, governments must foster open communication with communities and stakeholders:

By actively seeking feedback, developing partnerships and working collaboratively, governments can ensure that the solutions they implement are sustainable, effective and equitable, meeting the needs of all citizens. Engaging in open and transparent dialogue with local communities and stakeholders is essential for governments to build more sustainable societies and address both local and strategic priorities[79].

The process of engaging stakeholders would be more effective provided it utilises vast network resources which leads to the involvement of local governments, civil society organisations and local partners. These resources strengthened the implementation of dialogue projects and increased the outreach to diverse target groups in various regions. "With these networks, strong relationships were built on the basis of mutual understanding and better communication and collaboration. It can help to build a sense of solidarity, which can be instrumental in bringing about positive change".

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78   Key informant from an international organisation.

79   Governmental key informant

Fostering outreach through institutional channels is one of the good governance standards, however it was also strengthened by building positive relationships with key individuals within the targeted institutions. "Taking into account the local context and the complexities of bureaucracy, particularly in the public sector, having professional relationships with key individuals will facilitate communication with these institutions and ease the procedures". [80]

Social pressure through dialogue is a critical aspect in achieving progress and building a more equitable and just society. The involvement of youth leaders and community activities play a crucial role in highlighting important social trends and creating momentum for change:

By establishing strong partnerships with communities, identifying key issues and developing targeted strategies, we can effectively communicate our goals and create a powerful force for progress that decision-makers will find difficult to ignore. By prioritizing meaningful dialogue and engagement, we can build a more sustainable future for all citizens[81].

Dynamic Gradual Dialogue Process

For dialogue to be successful, it must be an ongoing process—not merely a collection of unrelated actions. Effective and structured process is key and characterised by in good planning, organisation, preparation, coordination and implementation. This process also defines key parameters such as theme, agenda, participant selection methodology, form of participation, design and implementation.

Planning is essential for effective dialogue. It is crucial to underline the significance of the planning phase, being flexible with techniques and employing evidence-based and tried-and-true methodologies. In countering bureaucracy, patience and good preparation are required, with determining the steps needed and identifying the people needed to be involved in the planning. It has been learnt that a long-term commitment is crucial for the success of dialogue activities as they take a lot of time while short-term planning can lead to failure. As dialogue is an ongoing process, it needs to be continuously reviewed and strengthened. It takes time and effort to facilitate meaningful dialogue as results are not imminent:

Even small changes can be considered a success, such as making changes to laws or education systems can be considered progress. In some cases, these successes may even be integrated into law. While there is still more work to be done. We have the momentum and agreement that dialogue is the key to success in Iraq.[82]

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80   Key informant from an international organisation.

81   Governmental key informant

82   Key informant from a local organisation.

The gradual approach was also implemented in the dialogue activities led by the Committee for Dialogue and Societal Peace. For example, attending the consultative session was based on a list that had been prepared in advance. This list was compiled in Baghdad through communication with local community leaders, as well as through existing lists of civil society organisations and activists:

> *Additionally, the committee had previously prepared a database of activists and individuals who influence society, but it was not deemed satisfactory. As a result, we opted for a semi-open invitation, which allowed interested activists to attend. This approach proved to be a success factor in our post-war recovery efforts. By including a diverse range of perspectives and voices, we were able to foster a more inclusive and collaborative environment. The lessons learned from this experience highlighted the importance of engaging with a broad range of individuals and organisations and the need to constantly reassess our outreach strategies to ensure that we are maximizing our impact.*[83]

Having a contingency plan is crucial to address any unforeseen occurrences. This involves working closely and being flexible when working with local partners who are familiar with any potential difficulties that may arise. Flexibility in modifying plans as necessary is also essential, such as relocating an activity to a different place or delaying it temporarily. The implementation of discussion activities can be successful if all aspects that may affect the dialogue process's success are considered.

One of the plans implemented is to use a hybrid methodology of in person and online dialogue activity. This was done because the participants who were involved in dialogue activities were busy and had limited time and availability to attend dialogue sessions in person. "Some of the focus groups or the policy dialogs were done offline, some were online especially for people who needed to be joining and couldn't".[84]

One major learning was that to secure necessary approvals and cooperation from the relevant authorities objectives of the dialogue have to be thoroughly clarified, the process should be transparent and topics must be clearly specified. It is very important for the authorities to understand why and how the dialogue is being organised.

It is essential to devote appropriate time to engaging with stakeholders and preparing for dialogue sessions to ensure their efficacy and utility. Furthermore, there needs to be an emphasis on both formal and informal indicators during the implementation of the project. "In addition to the formal measurable indicators developed during the planning phase of the

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83   Governmental key informant

84   Key informant from a local organisation.

dialogue project, informal indicators, such as understanding how people's attitudes have changed throughout the dialogue process". [85]

The process should allow for gradual communication, as well as the assessment and reassessment of priorities, positions and roles of stakeholders. The dialogue process must be fluid and not rigid, while it should also be divided into stages and the timing for conducting each stage must be optimised. On the whole, the process should bring all relevant stakeholders to the table and establish common ground as a starting point for dialogue. Immediately focussing on differences can lead to the breakdown of dialogue, the creation of distrust and overall inconsistencies. Therefore, an effective methodology is to begin by working on commonalities between different actors or stakeholders and gradually addressing differences. This approach helps to build trust and encourage consistent, productive dialogue.

Dialogues aimed at addressing the problem in its entirety tend not to provide measurable outcomes and the dialogue process may not be completed as participants may abandon the group or there may be those that adopt antagonistic positions. To address this, the problem must be segmented and the dialogue must be gradual, with the dialogue about each segment serving as an introduction to the dialogue about the subsequent segment. Additionally, it is important to select the appropriate parties for dialogue at each stage:

> It was not possible to bring all parties together at the same time due to negative and hostile reactions from some of the families of the victims toward the IDP families that have members who are perceived affiliated with ISIS. Instead, the facilitators divided the dialogue into stages and held separate sessions with different groups based on their specific concerns. This approach allowed for more focused discussions and helped to identify common ground and potential incentives for more tough groups. It also illustrates the need to be flexible and adaptable in conflict resolution efforts, as the initial plan may not always be feasible or effective[86].

Before engaging in dialogue in the dialogue committees, a value charter was created to set the mechanism of action and basic criteria for working within the dialogue committees, as well as the general principles:

> One of the key principles that was highlighted in the Value Charter was the commitment to voluntary work. While this principle was initially controversial, it ultimately proved to be a powerful tool for fostering collaboration and engagement within the community. Through our work within the dialogue committees, we were able to identify a range of issues that

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85   Key informant from a local organisation.
86   Key informant from a local organisation.

threatened the societal fabric and social harmony. These included deep-seated grievances, sectarian tensions and a lack of trust in institutions and authority figures.[87]

One important lesson learnt regarding the flow of dialogue is the need to track unintended outcomes, both positive and negative, to measure the effectiveness of the process and identify areas for improvement. In addition, when the dialogue process advances, the focus becomes more oriented towards turning the policy discussions into concrete and actionable policy briefs or papers. Therefore, following up here becomes crucial to effectively monitor achievements through measures such interviews, mentoring, WhatsApp or Facebook groups or yearly meetings, among others. "When the project officially ends and we cannot officially or financially support meetings or bring them together anymore, we discuss to see what kind of ideas they can generate to ensure aspects of sustainability, for example change local venues, invest in facilitators etc."[88]

A subsequent learning was that providing support to an established initiative might be viewed as a win-win situation for stakeholders who have discovered common ground, as developing new dialogue initiatives requires time, effort, resources and the mobilisation of numerous actors:

Some entities, such as government entities, have already begun a project inside the university. For instance, the University of Technology in Iraq has various initiatives for its students and within this effort, it was possible to visit the university, hold sessions for its students and conduct activities within the context in which the initiative was implemented.[89]

"Dialogue-Driven Best practice" as reflected from diverse dialogue projects.

After analysing a diverse array of projects, in which dialogue was the primary tool employed to get divergent groups to open up in an honest and candid manner to address fundamental issues, we have identified productive dialogue processes need to be properly structured. Such a structured dialogue process entails the following aspects.

Prior Preparation to Dialogue: One key factor of success is having a team of professionals with a diverse range of expertise on strategy, execution and legal matters. Additionally, engaging with stakeholders during the preparatory phase contributes to overall success. This engagement should happen before the policy dialogue commences. "For example, in dialogue sessions, education materials are submitted to each person in the dialog prior to the event itself. Thus, participants can come prepared with their ideas."[90]

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87   Governmental Key informant

88   Key informant from a local organisation.

89   Key informant from a local organisation.

90   Key informant from a local organisation.

Finding an Entry Point: Finding an entry point for dialogue is important to address a specific problem or conflict in a structured and productive way. Without an entry point, it can be difficult to know where to begin in addressing an issue and the dialogue may become disorganised or unproductive. By identifying a specific problem or conflict to focus on, the dialogue can be more targeted and effective in finding solutions or resolving the issue. In addition, finding an entry point for dialogue can help to build trust and establish a foundation for ongoing communication and collaboration. There are two ways to find an entry point for dialogue. The first is to conduct research to identify the problem or conflict that needs to be addressed. This research should involve the community to determine the subject of the dialogue and assess the need for third-party intervention. The second way to identify an entry point is for the community or other party to directly request intervention to address an issue or conflict that they have already recognised. For example:

> *in the case of southern / west Iraq the context analysis we have conducted, resulted in finding a conflict topic regarding the return of IDPs who are perceived by the community as having family members affiliated with ISIS and we also received a direct request by the IOM to intervene … so the entry point was identified. […] [T]here is a need to launch a dialogue to address the problem of IDPs return since it is linked to community approval.*[91]

Stakeholder Mapping: By mapping stakeholders, it is possible to gain a more complete understanding of the issue and the diverse perspectives involved. This can help to identify potential points of conflict or disagreements, as well as areas of common ground or shared interests. Additionally, stakeholder mapping can help to identify key individuals or groups that should be included in the dialogue process to ensure that all relevant perspectives are considered and that the outcome is fair and inclusive:

> *The mapping of stakeholders includes an understanding of the nature of the community and even the impact of geography… For instance, Qayarra is located in a dangerous area and is a tribally dominated community; therefore, it is essential to know where we can and cannot work and who the influential tribal leaders are.*[92]

Stakeholder mapping helps to identify and utilise existing structures, for example, "[o]ne of the targeted villages in Qayyara, had a framework in place to deliberate on the subject of admitting the return of IDPs; the victims' families had authorised a committee of 20 individuals to make such decisions on their behalf".[93]

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91   Key informant from a local organisation.
92   Key informant from a local organisation.
93   Key informant from a local organisation.

Sharing Expectations: This is defined as providing stakeholders with information on what to expect and examples of similar situations that have been addressed in the past. This process can help them overcome any hesitancy they may have and ensure that they are well-prepared for the dialogue. This strategy, led by specialised facilitators, helps to ensure that dialogue is productive and successful.

Briefing: The discussion should start with a brief presentation on the research, identification for the main problems, addressing the main fields and themes in need of discussion and suggesting potential solutions. The briefing also includes addressing valuable roles of stakeholders in terms of discussing the problem and solutions.

Facilitation: The session commences with the general questions that are addressed to the participants, with the aim of encouraging them to be engaged in dialogue, making sure that all participants have equal opportunity, space and time to reflect on the questions. "In this way participants feel more encouraged to talk and discuss the issues openly and easily".[94] The next step is to narrow down the questions. This approach was used as a response to the participants' complaints about the complexity of the questions. "We try to narrow down our questions and the discussion to think about the simplest thing that can be done, which can then have an effect on changing the situation".[95] For example, in one of the dialogue sessions, narrowing down the questions was used to simplify the subject of engaging students or preparing them to enter the private sector, which was unclear and undetermined to be measured, as participants saw it was very unlikely to happen. But when the discussion was narrowed down with concrete examples, participants had opportunities to explore possible actions. The questions were moved into more action-oriented results, such as "What are the possibilities of NGOs or private sector companies coming to university and holding a presentation on the private sector?" These then also evolved into more direct questions like "What is the current situation? How can we be ready? How can we apply?" Thus, when narrowing down the scope of questions asked to very simple activities to happen or very simple indirect problems, participation increases. From this, you can then build up to larger-scale issues aimed at discussing an overall vision of how to change things.

Effective communication: Aiming to have effective and productive dialogues on important issues, dialogue participants should be trained on practices and basics of effective communication. This includes training on active listening, proper messaging and respectful communication:

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94   Key informant from an international organisation.
95   Key informant from an international organisation.

By preparing attendees beforehand, we are able to set the stage for productive and respectful dialogue sessions on sensitive issues. This preparation emphasises the importance of maintaining an appropriate level of etiquette and avoiding confrontational behaviour, such as shouting or throwing things, in order to foster a constructive and respectful discussion.[96]

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96   Key informant from a local organisation.

Experienced and Competent Facilitators and Partners

Competency of facilitators or mediators is crucial to dialogue as it can significantly shape its process, particularly with respect to how they deal with elites, power dynamics and their ability to reduce tensions during dialogue. Good facilitation skills allow the facilitator to create a safe space for all participants to share their ideas and opinions without fear of judgment or interruption. Thus, it is important to build the capacity of the facilitators during the preparation phase of the dialogue project. In this sense, local facilitators and mediators are more appropriate for local dialogue facilitation and mediation activities. One of the key skills facilitators should have is flexibility, since it allows for an adaptable and responsive atmosphere, where facilitators can address any potential challenges that may arise and tailor their approach to best meet the needs of the group. This enables the creation of an atmosphere of mutual understanding and respect among participants, where they feel safe and comfortable sharing their ideas and opinions.

In addition, working with experienced partners is crucial in achieving a realistic and successful dialogue. For example, in the case of addressing crimes committed by ISIS, it was stated by one of the key informants that:

> [T]he project cooperated with identified partner organisations that have conducted serious investigations into the crimes and provide care for traumatised survivors and family members. This ensures that members of minorities, specifically Yazidis, who were subjected to ISIS crimes receive the appropriate legal advice and psychosocial support.[97]

It is important to note that the local organisation's or its leadership's experience is not enough to ensure the success of the dialogue project. "The team tasked with implementing the project must have the expertise, skills and flexibility to deal with the complex dialogue environment and any developments that arise throughout the execution of activities".[98]

Building the Foundation for Successful Dialogue: Capacity Development and Training

Before any dialogue meeting, building the capacity of the relevant stakeholders is important for its success. Providing the needed training for the stakeholders helps them in improving their dialogue related skills. "Through training and engaging youth leaders, we have enabled them to work with youth volunteers to implement an initiative in collaboration with authorities. This process has fostered dialogue between youth and community leaders".[99] To ensure

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97   Key informant from an international organisation.
98   Key informant from a local organisation.
99   Key informant from a local organisation.

successful dialogues, practitioners need to build the capacity of relevant stakeholders through training, mentorship, coaching and skill-building workshops. These programs can develop specific skills such as active listening, conflict resolution, negotiation and consensus-building. Additionally, gender sensitivity and inclusivity training are critical for promoting gender equality and ensuring that women's voices are heard in dialogues. Organisations that implement dialogue activities should use capacity building to ensure that different stakeholders are capable of being engaged in the dialogue. Finding people who are open to dialogue and then leveraging them is a key factor of success. Organisations must ensure that civil society can engage in dialogues with the government and create a space for open and honest communication. As explained by one of key informants:

> [T]he key to successful dialogue lies in identifying and preparing the right people, setting up and structuring the discussion in a constructive manner, providing capacity development measures and training, building the capacities of private sectors and civil society to engage in dialogues with the government on economic reform topics and creating a space for open and honest communication. Additionally, addressing specific issues such as women's underrepresentation in peace processes, patriarchal systems, lack of social cohesion in communities and providing legal advice and psychosocial support for members of minorities affected by ISIS crimes, are crucial in preparing and addressing the challenges through dialogue.[100]

International visits are also important as a key factor of learning from others and adapting successful strategies and approaches in achieving success. A study trip to Germany was conducted to learn about Germany's experience in dialogue and participation, as well as how individuals can contribute to the decision-making process.[101]

The Dual Role of Dialogue in Addressing Complex Challenges

Using dialogue as both a standalone process and a tool to implement projects can be effective in addressing the complex challenges facing a multi-layered country like Iraq. Bringing stakeholders together to have conversations and address issues can be valuable in itself. Moreover, however, it can also be used as a tool to implement successful projects at a smaller scale, particularly in areas where there are societal and community-level prejudices that need to be addressed. Dialogue can be used to break down these prejudices and help people remember that they have coexisted peacefully in the past, despite their differences. "The main objective of forming the dialogue committees was to open a window to reflect

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100   Key informant from an international organisation.
101   Key informant from a local organisation.

the voices of the opposition to the policy makers and mainly the government"[102]. It can help to refresh their understanding of each other and remind them that they share many of the same problems and needs. "By using dialogue in this way, we can help to overcome misunderstandings and misperceptions that may otherwise hinder progress"[103]. Dialogue programs have proven to be a key factor in the success of peacebuilding and social cohesion efforts, as demonstrated by participant testimonials. Through dialogue, understanding has been promoted, trust has been established and conflicts have been resolved:

> *This came from our experience with a range of dialogue programs in disputed areas such as Kirkuk and Sinjar, as well as in Ninewa, focused on youth, women's political participation, good governance, minorities, interfaith dialogue and the reintegration of families with family members perceived as affiliated with ISIS[104].*

Political buy-in from the government is also key to effective dialogue. It's important that the international community keeps this fact in mind when supporting dialogue and makes sure that their efforts are meaningful beyond just running dialogue. A crucial factor to a dialogue's success, or lack thereof, is a realistic assessment by international organisations of a government's willingness for dialogue. They must ensure that their dialogue efforts are well-planned and have the necessary support from the government.[105]

> *Otherwise, the time and effort put into these efforts will be wasted and the real issues at hand may be diluted. It's important to be honest about the state of dialogue, rather than pretending that it was meaningful when it was not. To ensure the success of dialogue, it's crucial to only engage in it when all parties are truly invested in it[106].*

Without sufficient political buy-in and realistic assessment of the context, dialogue efforts may be ineffective and fail to achieve meaningful outcomes beyond just running dialogue activities.

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102   Governmental key informant.

103   Key informant from a local organisation.

104   Key informant from a local organisation.

106   Key informant from a local organisation.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

Inclusive societies, benefiting from the inclusion of diverse stakeholders towards creating a common future, are more resilient with respect to social tensions and conflicts. Furthermore, they possess the capacities to manage conflicts peacefully through developing a culture of dialogue. What makes societies more resilient to social tensions and conflicts, while others are more vulnerable? Are they structured differently? Are there specific factors, policies, procedures, mechanisms or interventions that promote dialogue and participation and are necessary to build reliance for these societies and make it able to solve conflict through integrated tools?

To answer these questions, it is important to understand the following conclusions that have been drawn from the systematic review conducted with GIZ representatives, international donors, Iraqi civil society organisations, representatives of government institutions and key experts on promoting dialogue and participation in Iraq. These conclusions consider the historical and political context and the key findings.

When systematically reviewing dialogue experiences in Iraq, we have identified 14 key factors to take into consideration.

1. The first key factor lies in addressing the historical and political context of the country. Iraq has a complex history, marked by years of conflict and sectarian divisions. Understanding these factors and how they have shaped the current political landscape is essential for designing programs and initiatives that promote dialogue and participation.

2. The role of national and local civil society organisations in promoting dialogue and participation is not to be understated. These organisations can play a critical role in building trust and bridging gaps between different groups and they often have deep connections to the communities they serve. Supporting and strengthening civil society organisations can be an effective way to promote dialogue and participation.

3. The impact of traditional and religious leaders in promoting dialogue and participation is also key. These leaders can be powerful influencers in their communities and can play an important role in shaping public opinion. Engaging them in dialogue initiatives can help to build support for these initiatives among the public and can also help to build bridges between different groups.

4. The use of technology, especially social media and digital communication can be a powerful tool in promoting dialogue and participation. Digital platforms can be used to connect people from different backgrounds, fostering safe space, discussion and encouraging collaboration.

5. Long-term, institution-backed process is needed to foster a new culture of dialogue that aims to change views and perspectives without assimilating them. Prioritizing focused dialogues with clear objectives and embracing Iraq's diversity as a strength rather than a weakness is essential.

6. Engaging governmental partners early in the dialogue process, creating opportunities for ongoing communication and building trust, setting clear and achievable goals aligned with government priorities, with maintaining balance with civil society priorities and interests and monitoring and evaluating the implementation of agreements reached through dialogue are key factors in gaining government commitment to dialogue outcomes.

7. It is important to acknowledge that the same findings can be interpreted differently depending on the context and unique scenarios in which they are used. The same finding can be interpreted in several ways based on the execution, methods and elements associated with the individual effort. While many informants mentioned inclusivity as a success factor, it can be argued that over-reliance on quantitative inclusivity can lead to a false representation. It was highlighted that where the process may appear inclusive on paper, but the voices and perspectives of marginalised groups are not truly heard and incorporated into decision-making. Another example is that in a dialogue project where women are well-represented, their presence can be viewed as a success element since it ensures that their viewpoints and needs are considered. In another case, women are also represented, but their voices are not heard, thus only satisfying minimum requirements for gender balance in the dialogue process.

To ensure a genuine representation of women in dialogue, it is crucial to build on consultations with all relevant groups, including those from diverse ethnic groups, faith communities and regions. Practitioners should adopt inclusive methods to engage with these groups and seek their input and feedback on the dialogue process.

To promote gender equality in dialogues, they should incorporate participatory methods that encourage all participants to contribute equally and use various practical tools to ensure women have equal opportunities to speak. Setting ground rules for respectful communication and active listening, challenging gender biases, providing mentorship and

networking opportunities for women and using technologies, such as video conferencing, can also promote gender inclusion. Additionally, using visual aids and gender-sensitive language that avoids stereotypes and assumptions is crucial to dialogue.

8. Factors that can influence the extent to which women's voices are heard in a dialogue include cultural and social norms, power dynamics and the level of support provided to women participants. Practitioners should be aware of these factors and take steps to address them. Furthermore, practitioners can use participatory methods, which encourage all participants to contribute equally to the dialogue. This can include small group discussions, brainstorming sessions and interactive activities that promote equal participation.

9. Promote gender inclusion in dialogues, practitioners can use various practical tools. One of the most important tools is to ensure that women have equal speaking time and opportunities to contribute to the dialogue. This can include techniques such as round-robin discussions and structured agendas that give everyone a chance to speak. Another important tool is to promote respectful dialogue among participants. Practitioners can set ground rules for the dialogue that encourage respectful communication and active listening. They can also challenge gender biases and stereotypes by providing positive examples of women's leadership and contributions. Practitioners can also provide mentorship and networking opportunities for women participants to support their continued engagement in the dialogue.

10. Technologies such as video conferencing and online platforms can also be used to promote gender inclusion in dialogues, particularly for women who may face mobility constraints or have caregiving responsibilities. Additionally, visual aids such as graphs, charts and pictures can be used to convey information and ensure that all participants, including those with low literacy levels, can understand the content being discussed.

11. One perspective on dialogue that is a goal of its own accord is creating a safe space for communication and understanding, with the primary purpose of bringing people together. Additionally, establishing dialogue a tool for achieving other objectives is another such goal. These objectives range from problem solving and conflict resolution to addressing specific needs and concerns. Each perspective has its own strengths and weaknesses. Whether dialogue is needed as a goal by itself or as a tool to achieve other objectives, the dialogue process should be inclusive, transparent, well facilitated, empowering, well-structured and well-planned and organised.

12. Including the government of Iraq in any dialogue or negotiation initiatives can present both challenges and opportunities. Despite ongoing political instability and security concerns, the government has the ability to provide a formal and legal framework for dialogue, as well as access to resources and infrastructure. Furthermore, it has made some inroads in recent years towards stabilizing the security situation, tackling corruption and promoting national reconciliation. However, the current situation in Iraq is still complex and fragile, with ongoing economic and political challenges. To effectively include the government in dialogue, it is crucial to carefully plan, build trust and engage with all key stakeholders, including civil society to promote long-term stability, advancing peace and development for the country.

13. The importance of having a coordination mechanism cannot be overstated when it comes to implementing dialogue programs and initiatives. Poor coordination between institutions and within a single institution can lead to duplication of efforts, wasting valuable human and financial resources. Furthermore, it can also cause confusion and conflict among stakeholders. A coordination mechanism can ensure that all efforts are aligned and that resources are utilised in the most effective and efficient manner possible. This in turn can lead to better outcomes and greater success for the dialogue programs and initiatives.

14. To achieve real outcomes while systematically reviewing dialogue processes, it is essential to take a holistic approach to dialogue, taking into consideration a wide range of factors that can impact its effectiveness. This encompasses the dialogue context (such as political stability, economic conditions and social dynamics), the individuals and groups involved (including their perspectives, backgrounds and experiences), the procedures used and the connections and relationships among stakeholders. Furthermore, dialogue should be ongoing—and not just a one-time event—in order to sustain and strengthen relationships among the diverse groups.

5.2. Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on the findings and analysis of the systematic review conducted on dialogue and participation. These recommendations are intended to provide guidance for the various actors involved in dialogue efforts, including government officials, civil society organisations and the international community. These recommendations are focused on improving the effectiveness and inclusivity of dialogue and on identifying strategies for implementing the outcomes of dialogue. It is important to note that these recommendations are not exhaustive and should be adapted to the specific context and needs of each situation.

- Ensuring a productive and successful dialogue process, organise trust-building workshops at the beginning of the dialogue and workshops on negotiation, reconciliation and conflict resolution. Trust-building workshops will establish a foundation of mutual understanding and respect between participants and workshops on negotiation, reconciliation and conflict resolution will help participants develop the necessary skills and strategies to effectively navigate and resolve conflicts that may arise during the dialogue process.

- Guaranteeing participation from a diverse range of stakeholders representing different ethnic, religious, social backgrounds and representatives from the public and private sector for a comprehensive and inclusive dialogue process. This approach will ensure that the dialogue represents the diverse perspectives and needs of the community.

- Maintaining a balance between achieving efficiency in the discussion and the decision-making process, while simultaneously being inclusive of all relevant parties and perspectives. This supports the founding of a legitimate and productive dialogue. Efficiency is important because it allows for quick and effective problem-solving, but if this is achieved at the expense of inclusiveness, the dialogue and its outcomes may not be accepted or supported by all parties involved. On the other hand, being overly inclusive can lead to prolonged discussions and decision-making processes that may not be efficient, but will help to ensure that all perspectives and concerns are considered. Therefore, finding the right balance between efficiency and inclusiveness will help to ensure the legitimacy of the dialogue and the successful implementation of its outcomes.

- Establishing thematic working groups focused on specific issues related to the main objectives of the dialogue to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of dialogue. These groups can operate in parallel to the main discussion, allowing for in-depth exploration of specific issues. This approach will ensure all relevant stakeholders have a chance to contribute to the dialogue and that all important issues are thoroughly addressed.

- Organising multiple dialogue series on specific topics such as the Iraqi constitution, climate change, water scarcity or economic diversification, which target specific issues and bring together key stakeholders who are able to implement possible solutions.

- Including a new social contract between the government and society, fighting corruption and developing a national perspective on transformational justice that goes beyond financial compensation, focusing on social relationships while prioritizing youth and women's issues.

- Ensuring an equitable and effective policy-making process, it is important to acknowledge and address power dynamics, particularly when working with community groups that may have different experiences or perspectives. This can be achieved through strategies such as facilitating dialogue and communication, promoting inclusivity and fairness and addressing any systemic barriers that may hinder the meaningful participation of certain groups. Important tools would be building partnerships with grassroots and local civil society organisations, engaging local experts in the dialogue process design, conducting mapping and assessments to understand different stakeholders and providing training and capacity-building to enhance the meaningful participation of underrepresented groups.

- Ensuring meaningful and inclusive participation in the dialogue and policy-making processes and proactively seeking out and implementing innovative ways to engage vulnerable groups. This may involve developing new methods for outreach and building trust over time. Consistent efforts to include these groups not only foster their trust and participation in the short term, but also lead to the development of lasting relationships that enable more meaningful and ongoing engagement.

- Increasing engagement and participation in the dialogue process by utilising the online digital world as a platform, particularly given the high level of usage among young people. Additionally, address the issue of online violence, particularly against women who speak out. By addressing these challenges and leveraging the benefits of online engagement, it is possible to create a safer and more inclusive space for dialogue and participation.

- Focusing on effective and inclusive policies and projects that reflect the needs and priorities of the community, prioritising building trust with local communities and actively involving them in the policy-making or project efforts. This can be achieved through a participatory approach that includes listening to their perspectives and experiences. Engage with decision makers and avoid imposing or dictating solutions, as this can undermine trust and discourage meaningful participation. By following these principles, it is possible to create policies and projects that truly reflect the needs and priorities of the community.

- Fostering a deeper understanding of dialogue. We recommend that higher education institutions incorporate postgraduate degree programs specifically focused on the study of dialogue. Such programs could include coursework on the theories and practices of dialogue, as well as opportunities for practical application and skill-building through

workshops and other hands-on activities. By providing students with advanced training in dialogue, these programs can help to produce professionals who are well-equipped to facilitate productive and inclusive conversations in various settings and contexts.

- Investing in training and development for staff and volunteers, providing them with the necessary skills and knowledge to ensure the effective implementation of dialogue projects.

- Utilising resources and expertise of universities, social clubs and the private sector to enhance and support dialogue efforts.

- Focussing on dialogue initiatives that are specifically designed to address the needs and issues of women to reduce gender inequality. This can be achieved by ensuring the presence of women in leadership roles and involving at least half of the participants in any dialogue efforts. Addressing the needs and issues of women is crucial for building peace and security

- Fostering youth engagement in dialogue by focusing on issues that are particularly relevant to their experiences and concerns, such as education, business regulations and entrepreneurship opportunities in sectors, like small and medium enterprises and start-ups.

- Incorporating local leadership and facilitation on dialogue projects to boost the chances of achieving successful and positive outcomes, especially on the local level. This approach ensures that the project is tailored to the specific needs and context of the community. Local experts with deep understanding of the community's history, values and challenges, are able to facilitate the dialogue in a respectful, inclusive and effective manner. Thus, to invest more in the capacity-building of facilitators and make better use of existing networks, establishing an online platform and ensuring that most dialogue processes can be Iraqi-led and Iraqi-owned.

- Adopting a well-rounded approach that integrates dialogue results with other mechanisms such as livelihood projects, legal aid and governance to ensure sustainability and practical application of the dialogue outcomes. This approach will guarantee that the desired outcomes of the dialogue are supported and implemented in a meaningful way.

- Coordinating the efforts of organisations involved in dialogue to enhance the effectiveness of dialogue efforts and create synergy across the organisations or even inside a single large organisation. Additionally, a national framework for dialogue priorities in Iraq should be established to align and optimise the efforts of all organisations working in the field.

- For the government, public authorities and policy makers, it is recommended to engage citizens and stakeholders in all phases of the policy cycle and utilise a diverse range of policy instruments. This can be achieved by reviewing the tasks of the Peaceful Coexistence Committee and its tools and developing a roadmap for societal dialogues to promote cohesion, peace and stability in Iraq.

- Focussing on genuine, bottom-up dialogues and facilitate meaningful and impactful dialogue by supporting local organisations and the Iraqi political establishment so that the international community can effectively support dialogue in Iraq. This can be achieved by carefully assessing the specific needs and priorities of each area and involving local organisations in the planning and implementation of activities, avoiding generalizing approaches.

- Ensuring the implementation of the recommendations from dialogue and policy papers by incorporating them into GIZ's agenda, initiatives and programs. This will help to sustain the conversation, ensure the success of these activities and drive future progress by involving GIZ and its corresponding partners in the implementation of the actionable points from the policy papers.

- Calling on civil society organisations, but also governmental institutions to be creative in creating channels and platforms for dialogue between citizens, civil society organisations and state authorities and consider digital solutions and social media.

- Fostering a change in culture, topics such as dialogue, participation, active listening and inclusivity should be integrated into the educational system and be included in curricula of kindergarten, schools and universities. As options for yearly curricula changes are very limited, the process for change will take time.

6. Good Practices

Safe Return of Internally Displaced Persons

Dialogues at the local level have been an effective tool in promoting the safe return of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and peaceful coexistence, while also facilitating the reintegration of people returning from camps, particularly women, into their communities. Despite facing rejection and hostility, these dialogues have helped to create a more welcoming and supportive environment conducive to their return. The involvement of the international community in organizing these dialogues and influencing policy-making was also beneficial, although there were many challenges in implementing the outcomes due to the nature of the Iraqi political context. For example, "Yazidi women, including those who were, more or less, forcibly married to ISIS members, were required to return to their homes. Initially, these host communities were hostile towards the reintegration of these individuals, but dialogues have served to pave the ground".[107] In one of the projects, dialogue concerning the return of IDPs to South Mosul resulted in the formation of a working group tasked with increasing acceptance and negotiating their return. This working group provided a forum for negotiations with host communities, represented by community leaders, to facilitate the case-by-case return of IDP families perceived to be affiliated with ISIS. As mentioned by one of the key informants:

Some families have perceived religious affiliation and faced social barriers to return. So this working group is supporting the return and reintegration of ISIS affiliated families to the southern Mosul sub districts. They managed to talk with the tribal leaders, host community and victims' families, inquiring about their needs and grievances. For the first time our working group members are contributing not only as informed interviews to the conflict analysis, but they are actually facilitating the focus group discussions by themselves to discuss certain new conflict developments in their districts and to also strengthen the whole community engagement and community outreach.

Dialogue initiatives also led to fostering the cooperation and collaboration among stakeholders at the district level which helped in addressing complex and sensitive issues related to conflict resolution. For example, "[i]t led to successful outcomes such as the peaceful return and reintegration of internally displaced persons in specific communities, such as Ayadiyah, Zummar and Qayyarah".[108]

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107   Key informant from a local organisation.

108   Key informant from a local organisation.

Reaching Alternative Solutions: In situations where a complete resolution is not possible, effective dialogue can lead to the identification of alternative solutions that were not previously considered. For example:

During the dialogue in the Qayyarah region to facilitate the return of displaced families to their communities, some families of victims were strongly opposed to the idea. Additionally, there was pressure from authorities to close the camps for the displaced quickly. However, through dialogue, alternative solutions were found, such as allowing displaced families to return to villages or areas near their original homes, even if only temporarily, or allowing IDPs families to sell their properties and use the money to resettle in a location of their choice.[109]

Written and Published Agreement: As a result of the dialogue process in Qayyara, a written framework agreement was produced to facilitate the return of IDPs whose family members were affiliated with ISIS.

This agreement included the terms of return and commitments from both sides - the families of the victims and the IDP families. The agreement was publicly announced and attended by representatives from the Governor of Ninewa Province, the Deputy Minister of Immigration and Displacement and the federal and local governments, as well as the families of the victims, tribal leaders and notables from other areas of the Ninewa Governorate.[110]

IDPs Return: As a direct result of the dialogue process to support the return of IDPs to their villages in Qayyara, "70 IDP families have returned, 40 IDP families have been granted approval to return by host communities and 128 IDP families have been granted approval to return to places nearby to their original villages as an alternative solution." [111]

Dialogue Facilitation Guide: Within the "Voices of Youth" project implemented in cooperation with the GIZ, a dialogue facilitation guide was produced with the aim of enabling facilitators to organise productive and influential dialogue sessions on local policies and to enable community members to have real opportunities in participation in decision-making. This guide can be used for analysing and understanding society issues and the people involved and affected by them, without ignoring their complexity. Furthermore, it can help aid in the exploration of common opportunities amongst the many stakeholders in a particular social issue by investigating their motivations and establishing a shared understanding of each other, developing a firm understanding of the significance of communication between the stakeholders involved in a particular social issue and the impact of communication breakdowns, planning, organizing and analysing dialogue sessions utilising instruments appropriate for all segments of society,

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109 Key informant from a local organisation.
110 Key informant from a local organisation.
111 Key informant from a local organisation.

including young men and women, government representatives and community leaders. Lastly, it can encourage community participation in local decision-making processes via interaction between state legislators, community members and community leaders.

Achieving Justice for Survivors

The Commission for Investigation and Gathering Evidence (CIGE) conducted consultations with more than 200 female survivors regarding reparations. The results were summed up in a policy paper aimed to increase the awareness and the necessity of promoting justice; results were shared by various actors. CIGE has collected one of the biggest repositories of testimonial evidence to date in Iraq. So far, more than 3,000 testimonies from survivors and family members have been collected and 1,400 blood samples were taken. The material is being shared with Iraqi governmental institutions. Information on geodata or specific telecommunication data as well as evidence provided by individuals is transferred to United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/ISIL (UNITAD).

Transitional and Restorative Justice

As a result of the dialogue related to transitional and restorative justice, stakeholders were able to reach consensus on a set of specific and practical recommendations in this field. These recommendations were thoroughly discussed in Baghdad and endorsed by all relevant parties, including policymakers, civil society representatives and local community members. This is a notable achievement considering the sensitive nature of the topic and the fact that it is the first time that such agreement has been reached among these stakeholders. The dialogue on transitional and restorative justice led to stakeholders finding a series of concrete and practical recommendations for this subject. Another related dialogue achievement was the successful implementation and operationalisation of the Yazidi survivors' law as a transitional justice mechanism. Through dialogue and collaboration with relevant authorities and other stakeholders, it was possible to develop and put into practice a legal framework that provides justice and reparations to survivors of the Yazidi genocide and other minority groups affected by the conflict. "By engaging in dialogue and working together to address the needs and concerns of survivors, it was possible to promote a more inclusive and just societyinIraq".[112]

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112   Key informant from an international organisation.

Concrete example for dialogue achievement

Fostering Intergovernmental Communication and Understanding: Dialogue sessions provided an opportunity for citizens to meet and discuss issues with policy makers. Additionally, these sessions allow decision makers at different levels, such as Qamakams, to meet and interact with high-ranking officials for the first time. This interaction led to better communication and understanding between different levels of government which in turn led to more effective policy making.

The flow of dialogue:

The process of dialogue involved a flow from changing impressions to building trust, leading to a better response to action and ultimately sustainability. The following are considered as key achievements:

- **Changing impression, to trust building:** Dialogue led to altering one's initial perceptions or beliefs about a person or situation. It is clear that trust in the government can have a significant impact on its ability to implement reforms. This is demonstrated in the statement made by one of the female dialogue participants, who initially had a negative view of the Qamakamm but changed her opinion after getting to know him and seeing his commitment to working for citizens. "When I met him and realised how much he's willing to work for the citizens, I changed my view completely."

- **Responsiveness of the Qamakamm:** The Qamakamm showed a great degree of responsiveness to the needs and concerns of the community. This included revising the local development plan to more effectively address the needs of youth, women and people with disability, based on the input received during the dialogue meetings. This achievement reflects the Qamakamm's commitment to meeting the needs of their community and being responsive to their concerns.

- **Action taken:** Action taken by the Qamakamm to establish unions for women and youth and hold regular meetings with them to discuss ongoing issues and plan for future projects. This demonstrated a commitment to actively addressing the concerns and needs of these groups and engaging them in the decision-making process.

- **Continuity of dialogue**: Establishment of a foundation for ongoing communication and dialogue between the parties involved. This included both the decision and members of the community coming (Kaymakam and other parties involved) together to have open and ongoing discussions about issues and concerns.

This achievement lays the foundation for future progress and collaboration as it recognises the value of ongoing dialogue and the importance of finding common ground in working towards shared goals. The continuation of dialogue can be seen as a success in itself, as it allows for the ongoing exchange of ideas and feedback and the opportunity to address any concerns or issues that may arise.

Sustainability: digital online platform for continuing dialogue. WhatsApp groups were created between the Kaymakam and the various participants for constant feedback. Some projects' outputs exceeded its objectives. "There were some initiatives implemented by Qamakam and other groups without cost, without any final contribution just by finding a common ground, mobilizing a locally available resource and implementing it."[113]

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113   Key informant from a local organisation.

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