



**AGRICULTURE  
LIVELIHOODS, AND  
RETURN INTENTIONS  
SURVEY**

IOM IRAQ 2020

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## INTRODUCTION

This study explores the interest of a programme that links the return of IDPs to supporting rehabilitation of destroyed agricultural assets. The initial hypotheses are as follows:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agriculture was the primary source of livelihoods prior to displacement for the targeted households;</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agricultural assets have been damaged on a large scale during the last conflict, particularly in some areas;</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If supported, these families would consider returning to their areas of origin, since they currently cannot rehabilitate their agriculture businesses due to lack of capital.</li> </ul>

Supporting the rehabilitation of agriculture infrastructure cannot be done through the traditional modes of intervention of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) Returns and Recovery Unit (RRU), nor through integrated location assessments (ILA) because the cost of such support would be higher than 1,700 United States dollars (USD), nor through the Enterprise Development Fund (EDF) due to the destruction of these businesses and current lack of profitability of some agriculture businesses. RRU would thus facilitate expanding agricultural businesses in Iraq by supporting their rehabilitation through this new mode of intervention. The main aim of the project would be to support the rehabilitation of agricultural livelihoods, which would in turn facilitate returns. This study explores the communities' interest in such scheme and its feasibility.

## METHODOLOGY

To test the validity of the three hypotheses, the study took a mixed method approach where quantitative data established trends and qualitative data provided explanations for the trends established by the survey, along with background information.

Focus group discussions (FGD) with host communities explored the situation of those who have returned or are currently living in areas of interest to the programme. These discussions included community leaders or current residents working in agriculture (or previously working in agriculture). FGDs explored demographic changes, barriers to return, main sources of livelihood in the community (including details on agricultural livelihoods), main agricultural activities, needs for seasonal workers employment, available support, water availability, status of agricultural assets and the associated costs for potential repairs, effects of asset loss on inter-community tensions, and potential for re-displacement due to asset loss.

FGDs in IDP settings explored IDPs' understanding of the situation in their areas of origin and the conditions they identified as conducive to their return. These included community leaders and/or those involved in agriculture (currently or in the past). The FGDs explored the same issues as the FGD with host communities outlined above.

A household survey was administered to IDPs to explore the interest in the programme in agriculture being supported. Specifically, the survey inquired about land ownership, the type of water used, asset loss, intentions to return in general and intentions in case support would be granted, costs for recovering agricultural livelihoods, potential personal contributions, and the potential for restarting a viable agricultural business in the area of origin.

## SAMPLING

In the beginning, communities matching criteria such as agricultural livelihoods, asset losses and displacement were pre-identified. Names and contacts were afterwards collected from community leaders (Table 1).

## LIMITATIONS

The cost per one livelihood (that is, creating one job) was difficult to establish since the survey did not include variables capturing the size of the land, number of workers employed in the past, their salaries, and their length of engagement.

**Table 1. Sampling details**

Type	Description	Number of people
FGD host community	Hatimiya and Qaposiya	6
	Tel Banat	6
FGD IDPs	Out-of-camp IDPs from Tel Banat now residing in Khanke	6
	IDPs from Tel Banat residing in Qadia camp	6
	IDPs from Hatimiya residing in Seje (out of camp)	5
	IDPs from Qaposiya residing in Chamsimo village in Zakho	6
Household survey	Hatimiya	32
	Qaposiya	19
	Tel Banat	55
<b>Total</b>		<b>141</b>

Survey participants are currently located in Erbil (4), Dohuk (71), and Ninewa (31).

## BACKGROUND

A recent paper published by IOM, based on panel data from almost 800 farming households, determined that the percentage of returned farmers, among those who were farming before displacement, was still low.<sup>1</sup> For **returned former farmer households**, public jobs, private businesses, agriculture and informal labour were the four primary sources of income. The percentage of farmer households who depend on agriculture as the primary source of income has increased from nearly 4 per cent in Round 2 to more than 20 per cent in Round 5, the same report finds. The study also established that in recent times, more farmer families have depended on public jobs as their primary source of income. The importance of private businesses and informal labour as the main source of income for returnees has decreased over time, potentially indicating a progressive attainment of stability but also a lack of capital, the same report states. Findings also suggest that, on average, nearly 78 per cent of land is used for agriculture by farmers who returned to farming. The report concludes that as such, only 50 per cent of households' income comes from agriculture.

The same data also shed light on the **reasons for not returning to agriculture**. Most (70%) of farming households lost between 80 and 100 per cent of their agricultural assets. This massive destruction in farm assets explains why farming households are not returning to agriculture the same report states. Lack of access to seeds, animals, feed or equipment was the first reason mentioned by 40 per cent of farmers, followed by problems related to land access (25% of farmers). In addition, 10 per cent entered a new profession and 7 per cent think it is cheaper to import than to grow, and 4 per cent lack access to labour. Three per cent mentioned water scarcity or drought.

Among the farmers who returned to agriculture, 86 per cent reported experiencing challenges in practicing their agricultural activities. These included low prices offered for agricultural products (36%), lack of access to seeds, animals, feed, or equipment (33%), little or no access to irrigation (21%), with smaller percentages mentioning insecurity (3%) and poor/lack of market access (2%). The report determines that compared to the situation before displacement, "low prices offered for agricultural products" represents a new challenge, caused by lack of control on imported agricultural products and little or no irrigation. The same report suggests that preliminary results of estimated models reveal - that safety/security, the extent of perceived belonging to the community, ownership of property in the place of displacement, access to agricultural

<sup>1</sup> IOM and FAO, *Why Displaced Farmers Do Not Return to Agriculture? A Close Look at Iraq's Experience*, April 2020, internal document.

land, and the extent of losses in farming assets are the five most important factors affecting the decision of farming households to return to the area of origin. According to the report, there are three pull factors: security/safety, ownership of property in area of displacement and loss of farming assets; and two push factors: access to agricultural land and degree of perceived belonging to the community.

## STUDY AREA OVERVIEW

Prior to the conflict, 340 individuals lived in Hatimiya – it now has 300 residents. Five thousand lived in Qaposiya, where currently only 250 residents were reported by the FGD participants. Tel Banat, including the old and new part, had a population of 18,000–20,000, but only 470 nowadays (IDPs, on the other hand, mentioned 200 families or 1,000 individuals) with returns recorded daily.

Prior to displacement, almost 90 per cent of survey respondents derived their income from agriculture. According to FGDs, about 80 to 90 per cent of people derived their livelihoods from agriculture in Hatimiya (75% nowadays), 50 to 60 per cent in Qaposiya, and 70 to 80 per cent in Tel Banat (with 60 out of 94 families working in agriculture at the moment). One FGD with IDPs from Tel Banat mentioned that 40 per cent derive their income from agriculture (which appears to be tied to a specific tribe that also owns all the land, according to these IDPs).

Agricultural activities included planting vegetables such as tomatoes, cucumbers, eggplants, in addition to watermelon in summer and potatoes and onions in winter. Wheat and barley are also cultivated in the area. In all three locations, artesian wells represented a source of livelihoods (27 in Hatimiya, although IDPs mentioned 12, with 10 to 15 workers in each, 12 to 15 wells in Qaposiya, and 12 in Tel Banat with 3 families working in each); ranching also was a source of livelihoods. FGD respondents reported that farmers own sheep, goats and chicken. Some work for the government as well, especially in the security forces, in addition to some who engage in more than one activity, in line with the findings from the IOM paper mentioned earlier. An assessment conducted in 2015, which also included Sinuni, determined that activities are frequently combined in one household, with crops comprising about 75–80 per cent of agricultural activity and animal husbandry 20–25 per cent.<sup>2</sup> In Tel Banat, small businesses (that is, food preparation, tailoring, photography shops and beauty salons) were also reported.

Seasonal workers were also employed, returnees explained. Owners of artesian wells tend to plant vegetables – where each owner, depending on the size of the land, hires at least two or three families (or 10 to 15 individuals) for seasonal help. On the other hand, farmers who plant wheat and barley (again depending on the size of the land) hire at least one driver and a worker. Workers on artesian wells start working in March–April, until the end of October, whereas workers on farms cultivate the land and plant crops in February and March and harvest and store the crops in May and June. Returnees from Hatimiya and Qaposiya mentioned that one or two workers are required in each wheat and barley field.

Almost half (46%) of the surveyed farmers own land, 22 per cent are tenant farmers, and 18 per cent are daily workers.<sup>3</sup> In Hatimiya, there are a total of 4,000 to 5,000 dunams of land; each plot is between 50 and 80 dunams (12,5 to 20 hectares) and are mostly owned (except for two plots, which are rented). In Qaposiya, there are a total of 5,000 dunams and each plot consists of 50 to 80 dunams; FGD participants said that all are owned. There are about 5,700 dunams in Tel Banat, with farm sizes between 70 to 100 dunams (or 17,5 to 25 hectares), mostly owned (only 2 rent the land). The sizes reported are somewhat larger than the average (calculated at less than 10 hectares) which is common among 80 per cent of farmers in Iraq.<sup>4</sup> Survey respondents reported that about 40 per cent have a tapu – or land registration.

Almost 70 per cent of the farmers surveyed mentioned using rainwater and 31 per cent irrigation water. All surveyed farmers who rely on rain said that water quantity was insufficient. Only a small number of farmers who relied on irrigation water mentioned not having enough water (13%) whereas others mentioned it was sufficient. FGD participants reported that wheat and barley are rainfed and the water source for vegetable

<sup>2</sup> UNDP, FAO (May, 2015: p. 10). *Recovery and Stabilization Needs Assessment for Newly Liberated Areas in Ninewah Governorate – Zummar, Wana, Rabiya, Sinuni.*

<sup>3</sup> Does not apply to the remaining.

<sup>4</sup> IOM and FAO, *Why Displaced Farmers Do Not Return to Agriculture? A Close Look at Iraq's Experience, April 2020, internal document.*

farms was artesian wells. None of the agricultural businesses in Tel Banat ever used any irrigation system, whereas it is nowadays used in Qapusiya FGD participants explained (Table 2).

**Table 2. Water sources**

Water source	Water source N	Water source %
Irrigation water	23	31%
Rainwater	51	69%
<b>Total</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>100%</b>

## THE IMPACT OF THE CONFLICT

Before the conflict to retake the area from the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), the government was providing agricultural inputs, machinery and later on was also buying wheat and barley directly from the farmers, FGD participants explained. However, some respondents complained that these government purchases were always delayed. Returnees mentioned currently relying on very limited support from the local government in terms of seeds, fuel and fertilizers, delivered with delays (and therefore not provided in the right season). Returnees commented that nongovernmental organizations support is not available either. In Hatimiya, returnees reported receiving support for 20 artesian wells, including a generator and transformers. Qapusiya does not receive any kind of support.

Due to displacement, 63 per cent of survey respondents were prevented from cultivating their land. About 60 per cent of surveyed farmers also mentioned losing their assets, either machinery or irrigation systems. Losses per area appear to be higher in Tel Banat, with the lowest reported in Hatimiya (Table 3).

**Table 3. Losses**

Machinery/equipment losses	Hatimiya	Qapusiya	Tel Banat	All Areas
No losses reported	53%	42%	33%	41%
Losses reported	47%	58%	67%	59%

When asked specifically about the assets lost, 67 per cent mentioned losing their machinery (tractors) and equipment, with a few mentioning losing equipment only (such as ploughs). Some also mentioned losing more than one machine and/or equipment. Generators, pickup trucks, cars, and water tanks also represent common losses, in addition to pipelines or entire irrigation systems. Transformers and electrical wiring losses appear to have affected almost one fifth of the surveyed farmers (Table 4).

**Table 4. Type of losses experienced by farmers**

Items	Number of mentions	Percentage (among those, who reported losses)
Machinery/equipment (tractors, harvesters, equipment in general)	46	67%
Cars/pickup trucks	19	28%
Generators	19	28%
Water tanks	17	25%
Water pipelines and/or entire irrigation systems	14	20%
Transformers, distributors, etc. (in addition to poles, cables, etc.)	12	17%
Shelter	8	12%
Animals (mostly sheep)	6	9%
Water Pumps	5	7%
Seeds	4	5.7%

FGD participants also reported that in addition to machinery and other equipment losses, in Qaposiya about 95 per cent of wells were destroyed and 5 per cent were partially destroyed (there were 12 to 15 wells in total). In Hatimiya, about 20 wells were damaged (80% totally and 20% partially destroyed) with all the machinery and tools stolen or damaged. In Tel Banat, 90 per cent of the wells are completely and 10 per cent partially destroyed. Respondents also mentioned that only 50 sheep are alive today (out of the 5,500 living sheep and goats before the conflict) in Hatimiya and Qaposiya.

Respondents reported that the damage or loss of irrigation systems, wells or agricultural machinery did not cause tensions within the community or with the neighbouring communities, nor did it cause people to leave the area. Nonetheless, one FGD raised the importance of programmes supporting peaceful coexistence between Muslim and Yezidi communities.

## RETURN INTENTIONS AND BARRIERS

All IDPs reported living in a difficult situation, as daily paid jobs were lost during the lockdown to contain the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. This situation was reported by both respondents living out of camps and in camps, as all suffered from a reduced support from NGOs. IDPs originating from Tel Banat mentioned that a reduced support from NGOs prompted many families to return to Sinjar. There are no tensions with host communities and within camps.

**Twenty-two per cent of survey participants mentioned they would return to their area of origin in the coming three to six months.** These respondents were able to cultivate their land during displacement and were not affected by the damage or loss of irrigation systems, wells or agricultural machinery.

**Obstacles to return** to the area of origin identified by the survey respondents mostly include poor infrastructure, lack of financial means, lack of shelter and insecurity (Table 5).

**Table 5. Obstacles to Return**

Return Obstacles	Number of Farmers	Percentage
Poor infrastructure	32	30%
Lack of financial means	28	26%
Lack of shelter	22	21%
Lack of security	18	17%
Trauma and fear	1	0.9%
Lack of health care	1	0.9%

FGD participants provided a more nuanced picture on the barriers to return. According to them, barriers include destroyed infrastructure, lack of public services, poor access to water, and road-block challenges, such as the road connecting Sinjar to Dohuk (mentioned by the host community in Tel Banat). One IDP focus group (from Tel Banat) mentioned destroyed housing, which was estimated at 40 per cent, with an FGD from Hatimiya estimating destruction at 50 per cent. IDPs also mentioned lack of education, especially lack of Arabic and Kurdish curricula in the schools. Distrust in the different security actors competing for power on the ground was also raised – namely the Sinjar Resistance Units (YBS), Popular Mobilization Forces and Iraqi Security Forces, to name just a few, ultimately leading to a sense of insecurity. One FGD group explained:

**“If something happens in the area there is no one you can ask for support, if you go to the police, they will lead you to YBS and if you ask YBS they may lead you to the Iraqi Security Forces... and at the end you will just get tired.”**

Arrests of people by unknown groups was also reported as a daily struggle. In addition, the IDP focus group originating from Tel Banat mentioned that many families have ties to the Peshmerga and the Kurdistan Region in Iraq (KRI) in general, and that these ties would prompt them to stay. Overall FGDs with IDPs, when asked about return, did not mention destroyed agricultural businesses or livelihoods in general

(except one) as a major barrier to return. On the other hand, FGDs with returnees mentioned destroyed agricultural businesses as a barrier to return; returnees from Tel Banat explicitly mentioned that it was a major barrier to return.

IDPs originating from Qaposiya mentioned that Yezidis are accusing residents of Qaposiya of siding with and joining ISIL, which was considered a barrier to return.<sup>5</sup> Participants also mentioned that “some people belong to certain parties who want to cause tensions between Yezidis and Muslims in Sinjar” without further specifying, likely referring to some groups exploiting community tensions for their own gains.

**Sixty-three per cent mentioned they would return if their agricultural assets were restored** (and the remaining mentioned they would not). All those who self-identified as daily workers were not willing to return, whereas only a small number of landowners and tenants would not return. Respondents from Tel Banat appear to be the most willing to return if assets are restored and those from Hatimiya the least (Table 6).

**Table 6. Potential returns if agricultural assets restored**

Return if assets restored	Hatimiya	Qaposiya	Tel Banat	Total
Would not return	41%	37%	31%	34%
Would return	60%	63%	69%	63%

IOM field teams observed that Tel Banat and Qaposiya are the most vulnerable communities whereas Hatimiya showed more resilience as many mentioned they would restart their agricultural businesses even without support.

About 83 per cent think that upon return they will not be able to restart a viable agricultural business, with the most optimistic from Tel Banat and the least from Qaposiya. However, it remains unclear whether the conditions of receiving support were considered when answering the question (Table 7).

**Table 7. Potential for restarting business**

Communities	Hatimiya	Qaposiya	Tel Banat	Total
Potential for restarting a viable agricultural business upon return	16%	10%	20%	17%

On average, those who mentioned they would return on condition of restored assets, would require on average about USD 30,000, which roughly falls within EDF grant sizes. The majority (65% among those who would return if supported) would be also able to contribute to the amount required. Overall, the average amount required (considering those who could contribute towards recovering the lost assets and those who cannot) is **USD 27,000**. The highest average needs are in Qaposiya (where the amount required ranges from 10,000 to 330,000, where 3 out of 12 farmers surveyed require more than USD 100,000, which was not recorded in other areas). In Hatimiya the needs range from USD 6,000 to 72,000 and in Tel Banat from 4,000 to 54,000 (Table 8).

**Table 8. Needs**

Community	Average needs for recovering lost assets (accounting for potential personal contributions) in USD
Hatimiya	21,353
Qaposiya	63,750
Tel Banat	18,287
<b>Average All</b>	<b>27,037</b>

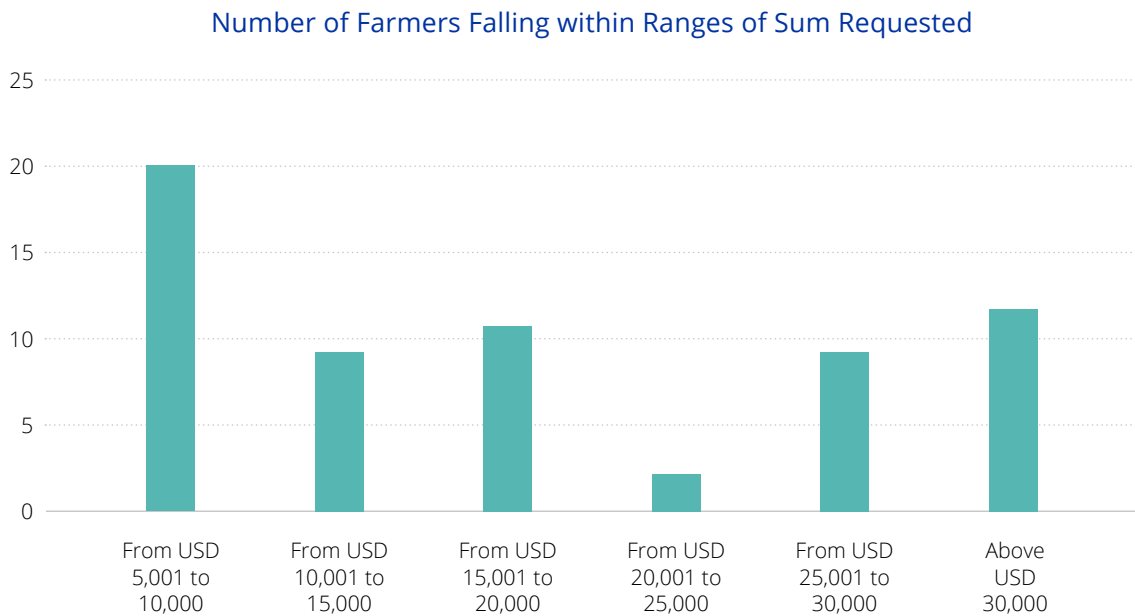
Overall, about 77 per cent of farmers (or 53) who would return if supported, would require up to USD 30,000 of support. The remaining 23 per cent mentioned requiring USD 35,000 and above. The most requested

<sup>5</sup> Nonetheless, all farmers from Qaposiya mentioned they would return if their agricultural assets were restored (repaired or purchased again).



amounts ranged from USD 5,000 to 10,000 (mentioned by 20 farmers) (Fig. 1). Considering personal contributions, all the farmers willing to return if financially supported, combined, require USD 1,865,600. Excluding those farmers who requested over USD 30,000 (23%), the total amount requested is USD 869,100.

**Fig. 1. Number of participants, who fall within a range of amounts required to restart agricultural livelihoods**

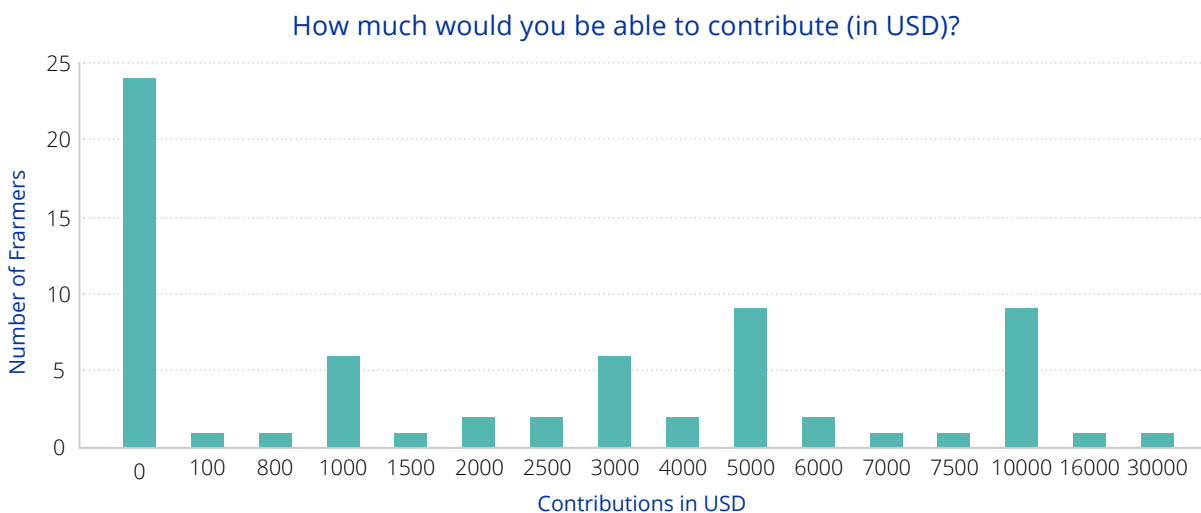


*Note: calculated accounting for personal contributions as reported by the participants*

An estimation of the **cost per livelihood** was also attempted. Looking into restoration of artesian wells only, which represents a vast underestimate of potential livelihoods since it does not consider seasonal workers, drivers and others jobs needed for planting and harvesting wheat and barley for example, 780 livelihoods could be supported.<sup>6</sup> If the total amount needed (1,865,600) is divided by the 780 livelihoods potentially created, the cost per livelihood would amount to USD 2,391. Considering that not all potential livelihoods were included in the equation, the cost per livelihood is likely lower.

The contributions that farmers would be able to provide to the amounts requested also provide information on the **availability of capital among farmers**. Thirty-five per cent were not able to contribute whereas the remaining 65 per cent had such possibility with amounts that ranged from USD 100 to 30,000 (where USD 3,636 represented the average).

**Fig. 2 Potential contribution of farmers (USD)**



<sup>6</sup> The latter is based on FGDs with returnees, which estimated about 15 people working on each artesian well where there are 27 in Hatimiya, 13 in Qaposiya, and 12 in Tel Banat.

The total cost for repairing the artesian wells was estimated by the FGD participants at USD 14,000 to 16,200, including water pumps, generators, electricity cables wires, and transformers. If the artesian well has to be rehabilitated from scratch, respondents estimated that the cost would range between USD 24,000 and 26,000.

Additional factors that would not allow farmers to restart their previous agricultural business, included: insecurity, which was mentioned especially by respondents from Qapusiya, followed by less frequently mentioned issues such as lack of shelter, financial resources, and jobs, and infrastructure deficiencies. The majority explicitly said that there were no other challenges; therefore 65 per cent among those who would return if the assets were restored do not see any additional barriers for restarting their agricultural business (Table 9).

**Table 9. Factors preventing business recovery**

Factors Preventing Business Recovery	Number of Farmers	Percentage
No other factors identified	45	65%
Insecurity and lack of safety	11	16%
Infrastructure deficiencies	3	4.3%
Lack of shelter	3	4.3%
Lack of financial support	3	4.3%
Lack of jobs	3	4.3%

One focus group with IDPs from Tel Banat explicitly raised the issue of the need to support sectors other than agriculture, as it is mostly landowners who engage in agriculture, and they are considered a more advantaged group.

## CONCLUSION

The findings confirmed that agriculture was the primary source of livelihoods prior to displacement and agricultural assets have been damaged on a large scale. Despite the many barriers to return identified, 63 per cent of farmers would return to the area of origin if financially supported. The amounts required (including personal contributions) mostly align with EDF grant sizes, as a small percentage require above USD 30,000. Considering that the team in the field estimated that about 10 per cent of respondents somewhat inflated their losses and consequently requests, it could be concluded that the average required could be reduced even further with appropriate mechanisms for verification of the lost assets.

As to other factors that might prevent return, many did not identify any additional challenges, which is a positive finding pointing to the fact that with financial support alone, much could be achieved in the studied communities. Less than USD 1 million could prompt the return of at least 57 households and with slightly less than USD 2 million, 69 households would be ready to return. It is worth noting that about one fifth of the surveyed farmers intend to return in the coming months.

In addition, agricultural businesses also have potential for job creation. About 10 respondents mentioned security and safety would pose additional challenges to restarting businesses, but these two factors cannot be addressed by an international organization. Nonetheless, 10 respondents is a relatively low number and it does not appear they referred to land mine contamination, which could point to the fact that demining activities are not needed in the area. The sizes of plots are above the Iraqi average, which is also a positive finding that highlights the issue of land fragmentation as a major obstacle hindering the agricultural sector's development might be less pronounced in Sinjar, at least compared to other areas of Iraq where land is more fragmented.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support the repair (or purchase) of agricultural assets, including machinery/equipment, generators, transformers, water tanks, pickup trucks, cars, shelters, seeds and fertilizers, and with animal restocking.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Because of the financial support needs, the EDF rather than the ILA modality might be more appropriate for funding the recovery of lost agricultural assets.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The rehabilitation of infrastructure, housing, and services is also important and should be considered in parallel to the rehabilitation of agricultural assets. Ensure data collection differentiates between needs related to agricultural asset recovery and infrastructure rehabilitation.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Future studies should also more precisely capture asset prices.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>While low prices of agricultural products due to lack of import control were not raised by survey participants, low prices are a major concern in Iraq in general. In the panel of household surveys administered by IOM, 36 per cent of farmers who have returned to agriculture raised this issue as a major challenge. Future studies should therefore capture the potential for agricultural diversification as the same crops might become less relevant/profitable upon return from displacement.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To uphold the principle of do no harm, avoid funding only destroyed agricultural businesses, as interviews suggested that land ownership is that of a specific tribe; and supporting other types of businesses as well, possibly simultaneously, should be also considered.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Inquire about the relationship between landowners and daily workers as tensions were reported in some other areas, which will require additional attention in terms of do no harm. In general, the social cohesion aspect should be captured more in detail in future surveys.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In order to improve the calculation of cost per livelihood, the survey should also capture the dunams of each farmer, past number of workers, potential number of workers, salaries paid, and the length of their involvement.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In addition, for those who do not want to return, some follow-up questions should be administered to better understand their reasons for not returning.</li> </ul>

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