

Policy Brief: Community Security Integration Pilot (CSIP-2): Qairawan, Sinjar in Iraq

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In 2019 and 2020, the UNDP Security Sector Reform/Rule of Law Programme designed and implemented its first Community Security Integration Pilot (CSIP) in Qurna, Basra province to address the needs of disengaged former volunteer fighters (FVFs) and their home communities following the demobilization of fighting forces in Iraq. CSIP aims to support disengaged former combatants to increase their skills and emotional resilience, and thereby economic stability, through a combination of training, mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS), and grant support interventions with an emphasis on the Security - Development Nexus (SDN). Informed by the results and outcomes achieved from the CSIP initiative in Qurna, Basra, UNDP extended this pilot initiative to Qairawan in Sinjar (CSIP-2).

UNDP conducted a scoping mission for CSIP-2 in Sinjar in February 2021, which included interviews with local tribal leaders, government officials, as well as men, women, and youth in districts of Qairawan. Two locations (Tal-Kassab, Tal-Banat) were identified for the second pilot as they are geographically close and remain in need of assistance and support.

CSIP-2 commenced in June 2021 with 103 former volunteer fighters (75 male; 28 female). The pilot consisted of 12-weeks of vocational training (electrical, carpentry and masonry for men and tailoring and cooking for women), MHPSS sessions, business training, financial support, a small business grant and community investment schemes.

In November 2021, UNDP also held a ‘champions’ workshop for 22 selected CSIP beneficiaries (18 male; 4 female) from Qairawan, Sinjar and Qurna, Basra. The participants were trained and up-skilled as ‘change agents’ with the intention of forming a CSIP peer/mentor group for their future CSIP peers and facilitating a supportive environment for their reintegration into civil life.

Case Study: CSIP-2 Beneficiary 1

“From this group I gained some positive resources, and I realized I still have a chance to do something with my life, I still have dreams for my future and goals to achieve.”

Beneficiary 1 is a man in his forties who lived in a small village with his wife and 8 children. Like many men in his community and in order to feed his large family, Beneficiary 1 relied on the income he occasionally generated as a daily worker to survive. However, during the ISIS attacks on Ninewa in August 2014, tens of thousands were forced to leave their homes and seek the protection of Sinjar Mountain, including Beneficiary 1 and his family.

Beneficiary 1 and his family spent seven days on the mountain, during which time they quickly ran out of food and water. Beneficiary 1 tried to help as many people as he could, including his two uncles who he had brought with him when he fled his village. In the end, Beneficiary 1 was not able to save his elderly uncles. Eventually, Beneficiary 1 and his family managed to leave the mountain and seek refuge in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, where they lived in a camp for over six years, before they were finally able to return to their village.

To this day, Beneficiary 1 remains haunted by the events that took place on the mountain. Beneficiary 1 used to struggle to go back to places or to meet with people whom he linked with what he had been through. He lived in constant fear and his thoughts were very negative and pessimistic.

After receiving Mental Health and Psychosocial Support as well as business and vocational training, Beneficiary 1 saw an impact on his daily life and well-being. While Beneficiary 1 underlines that he has not fully recovered from everything that happened to his community, he has noticed some great improvements. Although he still has trouble sleeping at night and his life conditions are still challenging, he has noticed the positive impact of the group.

Case Study: CSIP-2 Beneficiary 2

"...when we lose someone or something, we don't give up...Life has to continue, and we have to keep taking care of ourselves to keep going."

Beneficiary 2 is a woman in her fifties who lived in a village in Sinjar with 3 of her 11 children. In 2014, when ISIS attacked Sinjar, Beneficiary 2, along with approximately 250,000 others from the region, escaped with her 11 children. Beneficiary 2's husband could not bring himself to abandon his village and decided, against strong protestations from his wife, to stay and protect their home. A few days later, from the mountain, Beneficiary 2 heard that all the men who stayed to defend the village had been abducted. To this day, it is still not clear what really happened to her husband. She never found his body.

Beneficiary 2 and her family stayed on the mountain for eight days. Very quickly, they ran out of food and water. Eventually, Beneficiary 2's family managed to escape the mountain to seek safety in Kurdistan, where they lived in a camp for over five years. Last year, they finally came back to their home, but their life has not gone back to the way it was, due to the considerable destruction, loss, and trauma.

After the ISIS attacks, Beneficiary 2 started to show some symptoms of anxiety, depression and trauma, and those symptoms impacted her physical health. Beneficiary 2 could not sleep at night. She even sought psychiatric treatment, but it did not help her. She explains that back then, the doctor tried to make her tell him her story, but she could not bring herself to talk about it.

She explains how the group helped her to decrease some symptoms and to better cope with her situation: *"I feel much more comfortable and relaxed, and my sleep improved a lot. The group changed my way of thinking, I realized that nothing would come back the way it was before so we have to build a new life for ourselves, and cope with the situation"*.

Now, it is easier for Beneficiary 2 to complete her daily tasks, she is less startled, and her blood pressure has returned to a normal level. However, she still gets scared sometimes. When she gets nervous, she now has tools to help her calm down: she tries to get busy to distract herself, or she talks with her family members, which is something she could not do before. She also uses the breathing exercises that she learned in the group and finds it very soothing. When asked about how she sees her future, Beneficiary 2 says that hopefully things will get better: *"we will be spending our days peacefully and everything will go well"*.

Key Findings

As part of CSIP's monitoring and evaluation framework, six (6) surveys were conducted with disengaged former volunteer fighters, training instructors, community leaders, and family members of FVFs who participated in CSIP-2. This section sets out the key findings from these surveys⁸.

¹ CSIP was developed under the Forging Iraq's Path to Sustainable Peace and Development Project funded by the Government of Japan (2019).

² The majority of FVFs were under the age of 25 years and literate, with higher literacy rates among males.

³ Vocational training was delivered by CSIP-2 partner, Stars Orbit Consultants, at Sinjar Training Institute, a government facility.

⁴ Individual and group psychosocial support sessions were delivered by CSIP-2 partner, Action Against Hunger (ACF).

⁵ Business skills training was delivered by CSIP-2 partner, Stars Orbit Consultants.

⁶ Financial support consisted of a stipend of USD200/month for the three months of training.

⁷ The schemes involved the rehabilitation of Al-Fagr Aljadeed and Alduha primary schools for boys and girls, located between Tel-Qassab and TalBanat. The rehabilitation work includes rehabilitation of school structures, as well as sanitary and electrical works. These projects are intended as a long-term contribution to the community and aim not only to improve access to much needed education for existing residents but also to encourage internally displaced persons to return to their areas of origin or where they feel safe.

⁸ Community Security Integration Pilot (CSIP-2), Qairawan, Sinjar: Key Findings and Lessons Learned Report, December 2021

 Vocational Training	 Psychosocial Support
<p><u>Former volunteer fighters</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 87% of FVFs reported that the vocational training and psychosocial support were very good or excellent. ➤ Almost all FVFs agreed that the training was well organized (95%) and that instructors presented ideas and concepts clearly (99%). ➤ A majority of FVFs agreed that the practical rooms were well-equipped (75%), the equipment was useful (88%) and that the time allocated for the course was sufficient (82%). ➤ The majority (93%) of FVFs are not currently working, and of those who are, all are working in either part time or occasional work. ➤ 100% of FVFs responded that their knowledge had increased as a result of the course and 95% thought that the vocational training course would be helpful in getting or keeping a job. <p><u>Instructors</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The trainees of the tailoring and cooking courses participated effectively and were engaged and interactive during the class. However, the trainers of the electricity and carpentry courses reported that the trainees were not equally engaged in the course due to differences in educational qualifications and capacities of the trainees. ➤ Most instructors responded that the time allotted for the vocational training course was sufficient, although one trainer from the electrical course and one trainer from the carpentry course thought that the trainees needed more time. ➤ Most instructors reported that none of the elements of the curriculum were too challenging for trainees. However, trainers from the electrical course and tailoring course did identify aspects of the curriculum that were challenging for trainees. 	<p><u>Former volunteer fighters</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 84% of FVFs found the psychosocial support sessions helpful, reporting that it improved communication with their spouse (68%), family members (82%) and community members (83%). <p><u>Family Members</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 73% of family members agreed that communication with their spouse has improved. ➤ 72% of family members agreed that communication between their spouse and children has improved. <p><u>Community/Tribal Leaders</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ A majority (70%) of community leaders reported that the FVFs had been more helpful and peaceful members of their communities since the beginning of the CSIP program <p><u>MHPSS Experts</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ MHPSS experts from Action Against Hunger (ACF)⁹ noticed an improvement in how the trainees interacted with each other and with the trainers during the vocational training period. ➤ In relation to challenges trainees faced in interacting with each other and the trainer, ACF staff noted some trainees did not perceive the importance of mental health and others did not think they needed psychosocial support. ➤ ACF staff recommended the inclusion of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) support in MHPSS sessions.

⁹ Action Against Hunger was UNDP’s selected service provider to assist with MHPSS in CSIP-2.

 Community reintegration and support	 Perceptions of safety
<p><u>Community/Tribal Leaders</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ A strong majority (96%) of community leaders responded that it is the right time for FVFs to reintegrate to civilian life. ➤ The majority (83%) of community leaders disagreed or strongly disagreed that there are sufficient government resources available to FVFs. ➤ The majority (65%) of community leaders also do not think that there are sufficient tribal resources available to support FVFs. 	<p><u>Community/Tribal Leaders</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 83% of community leaders always feel safe in their communities. ➤ Unemployment, access to services and public health were the top community concerns highlighted by community leaders. ➤ Local Police, followed by the Iraqi Security Forces(ISF)/Army and family members were the most trusted enablers of safer communities according to community leaders. <p><u>Family Members</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 83% of family members always feel safe in their homes. ➤ 85% of family members always feel safe in their communities. ➤ Unemployment, access to services, and public health were the top community concerns highlighted by family members. ➤ ISF/Army and Local Police, followed by family members were the most trusted enablers of safer communities according to family members. ➤ The majority of family members reported that there were no acts of violence in the area.

Lessons Learned

As the second pilot project, CSIP-2 generated a number of learnings, which have been summarised below. The lessons learned from CSIP-2 will be used for future likeminded programmes in Iraq.\

Operations and Management	
	<p>Expand initial data collection process to inform beneficiary selection process</p> <p>The grantee identification, vetting and selection process required several follow-up data collection and verification efforts to complete placement. Lessons learned on documents from CSIP 1 and 2 have been integrated into a candidate vetting tool for use in future programming in Iraq.</p>
	<p>Anticipate challenges of remote implementation and unstable security/public health environments by fostering use of virtual platforms</p> <p>COVID-19 interruptions impacted all facets of programming in the target area. Remote planning and coordination from multiple locations across different time zones in implementing a range of activities are highly time sensitive and challenging in comparison to in-country implementation. However, CSIP-2 was able to move forward with coordination with multiple vendor agencies through virtual platforms. There were a few challenges in terms of coordination with vendors during scoping, marketing assessment, and surveys.</p>
	<p>Data Sharing Agreements</p> <p>Privacy and data security considerations are increasingly important. CSIP-2 was not able to have data sharing agreements with international organizations, NGOs and other UN entities operating in Sinjar. Although ultimately not needed, the process identified the need to endorse and implement data policies early in the implementation process.</p>

MHPSS Needs	
	<p>MHPSS needs of FVFs in Qairawan remain high</p> <p>The support services provided by the MHPSS service provider with trained local MHPSS specialists have significantly decreased the severity of mental illness. While there are challenges remaining for FVFs to share their experiences, the service provider is confident that these concerns can be addressed over time and that more time is required in order to build trust within communities.</p>
	<p>MHPSS assessment conducted by the service provider found that women FVFs reported less mental health concerns than men</p> <p>75% of female and 89% of male FVFs were severely suffering in terms of their mental health. The perception of suffering of both genders reduced to 0% after engaging in support sessions. Women found their mental illness to be lower before ACF's intervention than men. The data does not suggest that women actually experienced a lesser degree of trauma at the hands of ISIS. Instead, this likely highlights social and family pressures for women to continue at a high functioning level in spite of experienced trauma. Specialized services across the genders needs to be customised accordingly to ensure equitable treatment and outreach across the genders. Improving coping mechanisms not only reduces vulnerability to radicalization but improves these communities' professional and livelihood outcomes.</p>
Programming Considerations	
	<p>Effective monitoring and evaluation to monitor outcomes</p> <p>There is a need for effective monitoring and evaluation to monitor the outcomes of CSIP interventions for at least a 12-month period after project end/conclusion of all activities. Impact tracer studies are required to monitor small business grants and ensure that they are being effectively utilized by FVFs in their business. The tracer study will assist in determining whether the beneficiaries are successfully using the vocational training they received to either start up a business or to acquire employment despite the challenges posed by COVID-19.</p>
	<p>Selection of vocational or other trainings be connected to market analysis</p> <p>There were no vocational training centres in Sinjar, with the closest one being some 200km away in Tal Afar. It is therefore recommended that future CSIP scoping missions include market analysis or opportunity mapping that can also inform course design and identify possible institutions which could provide much-needed vocational training on a sustained basis in the future.</p>
	<p>DDR Programming can be designed around the knowledge, skills, and abilities of a disadvantaged beneficiary pool</p> <p>From the two pilots in Sinjar and Basra, CSIP explored the opportunities for addressing the needs of a beneficiary pool selected based on time of service without filtering out those with limited education or work experience. CSIP beneficiaries self-reported literacy rates of around 60% with a majority reporting elementary and middle-school levels. However, in CSIP-2 there was a small target group having university degrees. Going forward UNDP will work with service providers to develop curriculum in line with national standards, customized to the local context. Early decisions to commit to a comparatively long vocational training program of more than 12 weeks is also critical for allowing beneficiaries time to receive new information and skills in an accessible format.</p>
	<p>Identification of 'Change agents' or 'Champions' to inform the scaling up of the Community Security Initiative</p> <p>UNDP organised a Champions Workshop under CSIP-2 in Erbil, Iraq. A selected number of project beneficiaries from the pilots in Qairawan and Al-Basra were identified as 'change agents' or 'champions' to inform the scaling up of the pilots, and to establish a platform for dialogue, particularly around social cohesion, peer support, identifying possible joint engagements, and also to promote north-south social cohesion /community relations. The project will continue to find innovative ways to draw on these "champions" and absorb them into some of the interventions in Community Security Initiatives (CSI).</p>