A photograph of a rural landscape. In the foreground, a herd of sheep and goats of various colors (white, black, brown) are grazing on green vegetation. The ground is a mix of dirt and sparse grass. In the middle ground, a dirt path winds up a grassy hillside. The background shows a clear blue sky and a few trees on a distant ridge.

THEMATIC DURABLE SOLUTIONS MEETING REPORT

TUZ KHURMATU RETURN CHALLENGES

October 2023

Targeted community/area: Tuz Khurmatu District in SAD

Meeting Objectives

- Increase understanding of protracted displacement in Tuz Khurmatu and recent return dynamics
- Identify key challenges and needs of the conflict affected communities to increase attention by government and humanitarian organizations to speed up and prioritize response, as the location remains one of the more underserved in Salah Al-Din.
- Obtain clarity from government on current and future planning for intervention.

Methodology

The RWG/DSTWG facilitated a durable solutions thematic meeting between local authorities and international organizations to advance solutions in the areas of low or no-return to promote stronger intervention by the government and aid actors with the aim of intensifying interventions and accelerating durable solutions in this district.

Name of Attendees

Government

- Mr. Ismail Al-Haloub: Governor of Salah al-Din
- Mr. Hassan Zein Al-Abidin Naqi: Mayor of Tuz Khurmatu District
- Mr. Khaled Mahjoub: Director of MOMD Salah al-Din
- Mrs. Zeinab Haider: Tuz Khurmatu Municipality
- Mr. Maitham Nouri: Mayor of Amerli District
- Mr. Qaed Jassim: Tuz Khurmatu Water Center

- Mr. Abdul Majid Muhammad: Al-Tuz Khurmatu Sewer Center
- Mr. Mustafa Muthanna: Head of the Organizations Department in Salah al-Din Governorate.

UN Agencies/NGOs

- Mr. Haider Al-Saadi RWG/DSTWG (meeting facilitation)
- Mr. Shawan Waria: Mercy Corps
- Mr. Mishaan Faisal: UNDP
- Mr. Maan Taha: Justice Center
- Mr. Abdul Rahman Najeeb: NRC
- Mr. Miqdad Mohammad: NRC
- Mr. Amin Galal: NRC
- Mrs. Sarah Al Kaabi: IOM
- Mr. Ahmed Al-Jabbari: IOM
- Mr. Omar Safi: IOM
- Mr. Mohamed Daham: IOM
- Mr. Omar Tayes: IRC
- Mrs. Heba Moudhar: IRC
- Mr. Omar Sobhi: ASB
- Mr. Ezzat Karim Saleh: Sorouh Organization
- Mr. Murad Ali: Sorouh Organization
- Mr. Luqman Hassan: UNDP
- Mrs. Shahad Ali: IRC
- Mr. Wissam Rasheed: TAD

BACKGROUND

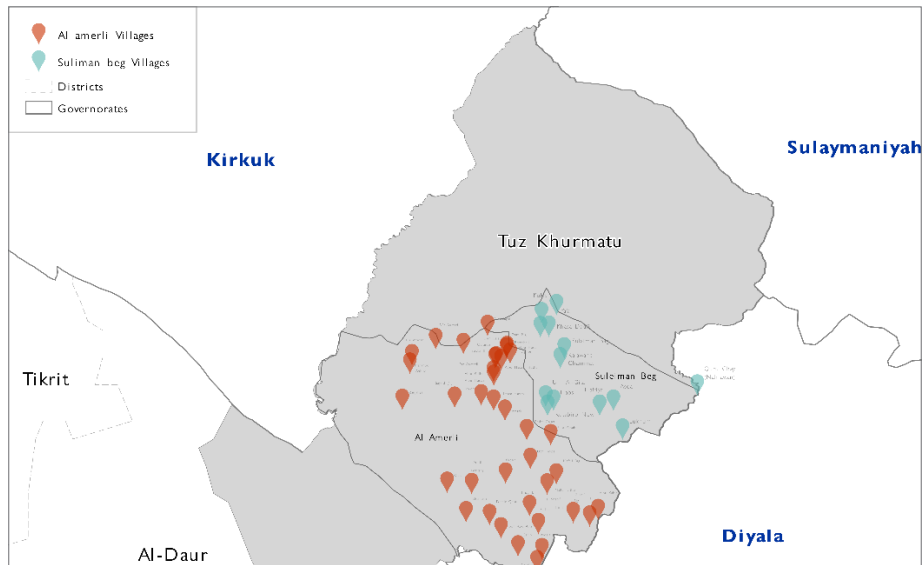
Tuz Khurmatu district is in the north-eastern region of Salah al-Din governorate, administratively under Salah al-Din governorate since administrative amendments were made in 1976, prior to this the district was part of Kirkuk Governorate. Until relatively recently most aid actors accessed the location via Kirkuk. In 2014, ISIS attacked Tuz Khurmatu but did not manage to control it. However, many villages fell under the control of ISIS including Suleiman Beg and Amirli subdistricts. As a result of ISIS attacks and the ensuing military operations, many families from the villages and surrounding areas of Suleiman Beg and Amirli displaced to the center of Tuz Khurmatu, other districts in SAD, as well as other governorates, mainly Kirkuk.

The district is one of the disputed areas between the federal government and the KRG, with a diverse demography including Shia Arabs, Sunni Arabs, Turkmen, and Kurds. This added to the complexity of the post-ISIL liberation phase resulting in low return compared to other districts of SAD. According to DTM Displacement Index Round 130, 5,643 families (33,856 individuals) from Tuz Khurmatu are still in displacement. Two families are in Tazade Camp, while the rest are in different governorates including SAD (2,428) and Kirkuk (2,320). According to DTM Return Index round 20, of September 2023, the number of returnees in Tuz Khurmatu district is 10,298 families (61,788 individual) in 46 locations.



CURRENT SITUATION IN TUZ KHURMATU

In 2014, the estimated population in Tuz Khurmatu district was about 120,000 individuals. Before 2014, the number of families in the villages of the Tuz Khurmatu suburbs Amirli and Suleiman Beg was 12,851, while the numbers of returning families is 3,167 which means more than 8,000 families are still displaced including 6,762 families in Tuk Khurmatu center itself according to the local government. More than 20 villages were destroyed, and other villages were heavily damaged. Some villages are still blocked, while a few others have not witnessed any returns due to the destruction and lack of services. The main obstacles to return are the destruction of infrastructure, demolished houses, lack of services, and lack of job opportunities. As housing was identified by local authorities as the key reason behind the delay and slow returns, the inability to rehabilitate houses due to the poor financial conditions of families as well as the slowness in distributing compensations were described as prevailing challenges impeding housing solutions. According to local authorities, no return has been registered in 2023 to many locations that had already witnessed returns previously and this implies that reasons include destroyed houses, tribal issues, and the lack of livelihood opportunities. In addition, there are various security and tribal obstacles that prevent some families from returning which require interventions by government and NGOs.



LOCAL GOVERNMENT EFFORTS TO ENCOURAGE RETURN

The governor of Salah al-Din Ismail al-Haloub spoke about the local government efforts to implement strategic infrastructure and services projects in the governorate. He said that strategic projects have been implemented in other districts such as Tikrit, Balad, Baiji and Shirqat, and at the present time the local government will focus on Tuz Khurmatu. He emphasized that the local government would take over the issue of services such as water, electricity, health, education, roads, debris removal, and other services.

Furthermore, the governor promised to follow up the file of compensations with the aim of accelerating the process and distribution to the beneficiaries. However, the governor stressed the need for international organizations to support the rehabilitation of damaged houses in the affected villages to encourage fast returns, especially to Yankaja village. In addition, the governor stressed the need for the district to implement livelihoods projects to support economic recovery, legal and psychological support, community cohesion, and societal peace programs. The governor directed the managers of the service departments to carry out needs assessments to provide clear results to the international and local organizations to encourage interventions.



MAIN CHALLENGES AND NEEDS

Schools: According to an official assessment carried out by the local government of Tuz Khurmatu, 24 schools have been rehabilitated in the district in 2023, including 11 schools rehabilitated by NRC, Save the Children, and International Vision Organization which include three schools in Suleiman Beg. According to the same assessment, 14 schools in Tuz Khurmatu, Suleiman Beg, and Amirli still need rehabilitation.

Housing and Compensations: As a result of military operations in approximately 40 villages in Suleiman Beg and Amirli, most houses have been demolished or damaged with the destruction level in most of the houses exceeding 80%. The property compensation process is reported as very slow and that the number of beneficiaries who are receiving the compensations in the governorate is very small compared to the huge number of IDPs and returnees entitled to get the compensations. The SAD governor confirmed that he will follow up on the compensation processes by scaling it up to serve a larger number of people. However, the governor emphasized several times during the meeting that international organizations are needed to support in the housing destruction file by implementing housing rehabilitation projects to encourage displaced families to return quickly. Below are the official housing statistics provided by the Tuz Khurmatu mayor office.

Villages affiliated to Tuz Khurmatu.

#	Village names	Numbers of families before 2014	Number of families return to AoO	Destruction rate
1	Haleawa Al Kabeer	765	25	100%
2	Haleawa Al Zageer	175	NA	100%
3	Khashamna	190	NA	100%
4	Zukalbana	75	NA	100%
5	Husayniyah	30	NA	100%
6	Aljyam	50	NA	100%
7	Dehbach	250	NA	100%
8	Yenkahcha	2900	320	100%
9	Al Salam	300	148	100%

Villages affiliated to Suleiman Beg

#	Village names	Numbers of families before 2014	Number of families return to AoO	Destruction rate
1	Markaz Sulaiman Beg	5000	2200	84%
2	Hafreya Kabeer	900	10	100%
3	Hafreya Zageer	65	1	100%
4	Lakoom	250	NA	100%
5	Searat	60	NA	100%
6	Kahsat Daly	500	300	18%
7	Habash	400	140	90%
8	Om AL Khata	75	53	96%

Villages affiliated to Amirli

#	Village names	Numbers of Families before 2014	Numbers of families return to AoO	Destroy percentage
1	Wadi Al Osag	70	80	95%
2	Sarha	100	41	83%
3	Tal-al-Sharaf Zageer	52	9	100%
4	Tal-al-Sharaf Kabeer	90	13	90%
5	Abu Kabeer	40	14	90%
6	Maftool Al Kabeer	165	105	33%

#	Village names	Numbers of Families before 2014	Numbers of families return to AoO	Destroy percentage
7	Maftool Al Kabeer	461	130	75%
8	Bir al-Dhahab	135	50	100%
9	Albo Shaker	75	NA	100%
10	Yesheal Tabah	63	22	100%
11	Albo Redah	55	NA	100%
12	Bir Ahmed Mohamed	500	65	100%
13	Bir Ahmed Ali	250	17	100%
14	Bir Ahmed Mahmood	55	NA	100%
15	Taghleeb	85	10	100%
16	Bestamy	1450	6	100%
17	Sayed	288	15	100%
18	Zangaly	430	NA	100%
19	Abood	300	15	100%
20	Albo Hasan Kabeer	160	NA	100%
21	Albo Hasan Zageer	121	NA	100%
22	Dumbalan Dura Kabeer	240	NA	100%
23	Dumbalan Dura Zageer	145	15	99%
24	Al Nabaa	60	37	87%
25	Bashklan	28	NA	100%

Tribal Issues:

There are tribal issues with sectarian background between different villages in Amirli and villages in Suleiman Beg due to sectarian differences, particularly Albo-Hassan Kabeer village, Albo-Hassan Sagheer Village, and Awaj-Taba Village where return is prohibited. The local government, Sunni Endowment, and MoMD are working to mediate between disputed tribes. One of the suggestions being considered is that Sunni Endowment share compensations (locally called “Diya”) to the victims’ families.

Social Cohesion:

With the demographic diversity of Tuz Khurmatu and the history of conflict on a political and societal level, social cohesion and peacebuilding projects are seen as important in the area. The head of the NGO department of the SAD government said that the national and international organizations and agencies are needed to provide their support with awareness raising projects on topics related to social cohesion, civic engagement, and peacebuilding. However, the mayor of Tuz Khurmatu emphasized the importance of carefully designing and implementing such projects to ensure they do not negatively affect the social cohesion in the community.

Electricity:

Almost 40 villages in the district that are suffering from infrastructure damage resulting from military operations have a shortage in electricity mainly coming from the damaged transformers and cables. The local government has already started implementing rehabilitation projects, but no data has been provided on progress being made.

Water:

The director of the Tuz Khurmatu Water Department pointed out that several water projects in the district had been suspended due to the events of 2014 and that many of the water projects that have been recently approved by the government are still under progress. The water department will prepare and share with local and international organizations the statistics of water projects both suspended or in progress, as well as the potential gaps that would need supportive interventions by UN agencies and NGOs.

Debris Removal:

The municipal representative also spoke of a major shortage of manpower, machinery, and financial allocations, pointing out that debris removal is one of the main challenges being faced by the municipality and other services departments.

Security:

The security situation in Tuz Khurmatu is stable. According to the local government, there is a need to support the governorate in terms of awareness raising sessions on the danger of drugs trafficking and consumption. The NGOs department has highlighted the need to rehabilitate the police station of Tuz Khurmatu district, and the need for peacebuilding projects that would eventually lead to maintaining stability in the district. One of the attending NGOs requested to deploy more security forces in the roads between Tikrit and Tuz Khurmatu to encourage movements between the two districts. Regarding the security clearance to return, the local government affirmed that there are no issues in this regard and normal procedures are being applied for those who want to return. Note: No discussion was raised during the meeting on the presence of multiple security forces on the ground and its effect on the return rate of IDPs.



KEY FINDINGS

- SAD local government will focus on strategic services projects such as water, electricity, roads, etc.
- Houses destruction and damage is a key challenge to return.
- The local government needs the support of international organizations to rehabilitate houses to encourage return.
- International organizations are needed to support infrastructure projects.
- Security challenges and fears of diverse security actors are still seen as a challenge facing returns.
- The financial compensations are very slow and need to be sped up.
- National reconciliation efforts by the government are essential to impose stability and achieve sustainable social cohesion.

ACTION POINTS/ NEXT STEPS:

- Per SAD governor, heads of service departments to provide statistics identifying needs per sector and provide them to the organizations as soon as possible.
- Follow-up on the issue of compensation by the governor to speed up the process.
- Hold other meetings with the heads of service departments in the district to identify needs in the district.
- Support and facilitate access for the staff of the UN agencies and NGOs to scale up their interventions in Tuz Khurmatu.
- NGOs and UN agencies to coordinate with the mayor's office to provide information about their future projects.
- UN agencies and NGOs to follow-up on the possibility of implementing housing rehabilitation projects.
- Governor office to consider the suggestion of deploying further security forces on the road between Tuz Khurmatu and Tikrit.



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