



Implemented by



MHPSS Contribution to Return and Reintegration in Qayyarah

25 March 2025

Project Title:

Strengthening Community-Based Psychosocial Support Services in Qayyarah Sub-District as a Contribution to Local Return and Reintegration Process.

Targeted Locations: The villages of

- Imam Gharbi
- Haj Ali
- Jmisah

In Qayyarah, Mosul.

Project Participants: Victims Families, Returnee Families (including FPAs), Members of the Host Communities.

Project Objectives

- Strategic long term goal: Contribute to the return and reintegration process in Qayyarah.
- Short(er) term objective: FPAs, VFs and HCs have access to and benefit from community-based MHPSS services that contribute to peaceful cohabitation in Qayyarah.

Creation of enabling conditions for peaceful cohabitation by strengthening community-based psychosocial support services and improving psychosocial well-being among vulnerable population groups, with an emphasis on improving coping skills, resilience and social cohesion among FPAs, VFs and receiving communities.

PROJECT RESULTS

1. Individuals and families of FPAs, VFs and HCs affected by mental health and psychosocial problems improved their coping skills and strengthened their social support systems.
1. Mutual understanding between FPAs, VF and HCs is promoted and improved.
1. Peaceful interactions between FPAs, VFs and HCs are fostered on community level.

Theory of Change

The intervention design emphasizes the strengthening of **community-based MHPSS** services to improve **resilience, coping mechanisms, and (capacities for) social cohesion**. A layered and step-by-step structured approach integrates direct MHPSS services within a Community-Based Protection framework for long-term impact.

Activities	Assumption
<p>Individual & Family Level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Individual counseling (and referrals) ● Structured PSS for families ● Consolidation of peer groups 	<p>By providing direct PSS services, individuals and families affected by trauma and long-term stressors strengthen life and social skills, adopt positive coping mechanisms, and gain support from local peer systems. This enhances their capacity to address emotional and social challenges constructively + prepares them for participation in group activities including with ‘opposing groups.’</p>
<p>Group Level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Psycho-education + life skills for peer groups ● Experience-sharing within and between communities ● Dialogue sessions ● Non-structured PSS activities 	<p>Through guided spaces for sharing experiences, individuals develop mutual understanding, counter stereotypes, and build positive collective coping mechanisms. This promotes openness to dialogue and interaction among diverse groups.</p>
<p>Community Level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Community engagement, conflict mapping ● Social and recreational activities ● Community-led initiatives 	<p>By fostering interactions through community-led cultural and social activities, peaceful cohabitation and sharing of community spaces becomes ‘normalized’. Communities are engaged to identify and discuss common challenges. This creates an environment conducive to sustainable coexistence and long-term recovery.</p>

Key Outcomes - Overall Goal

Increased Acceptance of Cohabitation:

- A **24 percentage point increase** in cohabitation acceptance (baseline: 65%, endline: 89%), with 99% of participants expressing openness to coexistence by the project's end.
 - The **most significant improvement** was seen among VFs (from 53% to 89%), with FPAs showing the highest acceptance levels (90%).
 - Project participants recognized INTERSOS as one of the first organizations to create an **inclusive platform for interaction** among community groups, fostering an inclusive atmosphere and practical opportunities to interact.
 - **97% reporting improved inter-group interactions and frequent positive interactions rising to 80%.**
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- Initially, groups avoided social, religious, and recreational activities together. Over time, **MHPSS activities, vocational training, and dialogue sessions** fostered increased interaction and mutual understanding.
 - **Comprehensive Support:** Addressing individuals, families, and groups effectively strengthened resilience and relationship-building skills at multiple levels, improving communication, emotional management, and coping mechanisms.
 - **Vocational training and non-structured PSS activities** (e.g., recreational and sports) provided key opportunities for different community groups to interact in a relaxed setting, fostering **friendly communication and personal connections**, increasing willingness to engage, and promoting **social cohesion**.
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BUT...

- While attitudes and perceptions improved, **structural barriers** to reintegration remain, such as lack of civil documentation, property disputes, and limited livelihood opportunities, particularly affecting FPAs.
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Strengthening well-being and support systems:

Initial **skepticism regarding the relevance of MHPSS services due to pressing material needs and socio-economic challenges**. Some deprioritizing participation in PSS activities in favor of IGAs - due to positive feedback from initial participants, participation and enthusiasm grew over the course of the project.

- **Improvements in psycho-social well-being** (Warwick scale score increased from 62% to 78% - 90% of participants reporting good well-being)
- **Stigma surrounding MHPSS reduced** through continuous awareness, engagement, and trust-building: Community members became more open to talking about MHPSS issues in group settings + increased male support-seeking was registered towards the end of the project
- **Improved family dynamics** as positively contributing to their well-being + gave them confidence to participate in activities with groups outside of the household.
- **Peer support groups built empathy and personal connections**, fostering solidarity and assisting each other in addressing daily challenges.
- Considering the **limited availability of specialized MHPSS services** in the area, participants recommended investing in local capacity-building through training programs (e.g. PFA and basic counseling skills) to ensure the sustainable delivery of MHPSS services in the future.



Promoting Mutual Understanding and Social Connections

- **Expanded Social Networks:** Peer group interactions enhanced community bonds and encouraged participation in mixed group activities like **non-structured PSS sessions, vocational training,** and experience-sharing.
 - **Vocational training** (e.g., sewing, barbering) fostered personal connections and peaceful interactions among mixed groups, encouraging collaboration and shared experiences.
 - **Inter-community experience-sharing sessions** inspired positive peer influence, particularly between high-tension communities like Jimisah and supportive ones like Imam Gharbi.
 - **Dialogue sessions** conducted towards the end of the project - when groups were 'used to each other' - emphasized shared hopes for a peaceful future combined with some personal testimonies. HCs acted as 'neutral party'.
 - Practical interactions through **non-structured PSS and vocational training** fostered gradual empathy and reduced hostility between groups (likely higher contribution to mutual understanding than dialogue sessions)
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- **99% reported improved perceptions of and among other groups**, with 91% demonstrating positive shifts in their views on other identity groups (FPAs: 91%, VFs: 92%, HCs: 91%).
 - Imam Gharbi achieved the highest perception improvement at 94%, showing the importance of proactive community leadership.
 - 16% of participants highlighted the restoration of relationships and participation in social events as key drivers for improved inter-group perceptions.
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Fostering Peaceful Interactions at the Community Level

Positive Participation Across Activities:

- **Proactive community leadership**, particularly in Imam Gharbi, facilitated community mobilization, with participants overcoming initial reluctance and engaging more actively in joint activities.
- **HCs and positive deviants from peer groups** played key roles in encouraging participation in joint activities
- **Non-structured PSS activities** and **community-led initiatives** were highly regarded, with 95% (FPAs), 98% (HCs), and 97% (VFs) rating interactions as positive. **85% of respondents** considered initiatives "very effective" in building connections.
- **Snowball effect** - participants appreciated activities and encouraged friends and neighbours to participate
- **Especially women** were very active participants - appreciating opportunities to form intergroup connections. **Children** were less prejudiced and were 'first movers' in non-structured PSS activities.

Community-Led Initiatives:

- Activities like sports tournaments, cooking, and tree planting were organized collaboratively, empowering participants and building ownership of peaceful joint efforts.
 - While the project deliberately supported ‘replicable’ initiatives to strengthen existing connectors, requests for **expanded initiatives** to address structural needs, such as **rehabilitation of communal spaces** and **schools**, were highlighted during final workshops.
 - **CACs facilitated community discussions on common concerns** (limited access to education, child marriage, etc.) - underscoring shared challenges and interests. More CBP (not focused on intergroup relations) could be strengthened in future projects!
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The Community-Based Approach: *THE* Enabling Factors

Role of CACs (Community Advisory Committees) in Facilitating Unity and Community Ownership

- **CACs as a Positive Example of Cooperation:** Comprised of leaders and members from FPAs, VFs, and HCs, CACs legitimized inter-group dialogue and collaboration.
 - Their **active encouragement** of joint participation reassured community members and fostered confidence to engage in activities. Community members expressed increased willingness to participate when observing **CAC members interacting across groups**.
 - CACs played a critical role in enhancing the **sense of ownership** and sustaining engagement throughout the project.
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Strength-based and consultative approach:

- Building on and furthering **existing connections** among and between groups consolidated and expanded existing support systems.
 - Leveraging and empowering **positive deviants** was key to promoting social acceptance of direct interaction and mutual acceptance among groups.
 - **COVs** provided valuable insights regarding the type of activities most relevant to the community and were very active in mobilizing community members to engage in the project activities.
 - **Communities were given an active role** in defining and planning the type and timing of the activities they believe is more beneficial to the community
 - Choosing **proper community led initiatives** to enable joint participation of all the community groups together positively impacted the engagement and positive perceptions of many community members who were initially reluctant to participate.
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Football tournament as a community-led initiative in Haj-Ali with the participation of all community groups (FPAs, VFs and HCs)



Picnic to Mosul as
Community-led
initiative for
participants from all
the three centers
and from all the
three community
groups(FPAs, VFs
and HCs)

Conflict sensitivity

Due to the high level of tension in the target communities, we developed an elaborated CS framework designed to avoid creating tension or escalating already existing conflicts.

Overall successful:

85% reported the project had contributed to resolving tension (creating environment for dialogue, restoring relationships).

99% confirmed the project had not created or exacerbated existing tensions.

- Initial context and conflict analysis at project design stage + very elaborated risk matrix with mitigation measures
 - All project staff trained on conflict sensitivity and trauma sensitivity
 - Conflict and stakeholder analysis conducted by location to identify main conflicts and stakeholders (spoilers / alliances) + existing dividers and connectors
 - Participatory conflict mapping with project participant to further inform specific community engagement strategies and activity planning
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Community level strategies:

- Careful **consultation and awareness** raising at inception stage - on project scope and activities, beneficiary selection criteria
 - **Inclusive targeting** - engaging VF, FPA, HC equally - prevented 'support jealousy' + created trust in the project
 - **CACs**: Initial reluctance towards the structure - but proved to be a significant entry point for community mobilization + contributed to a perception of the project as unbiased. CACs played active roles in encouraging joint participation + had symbolic effect demonstrating collaboration across groups
 - Identified and empowered '**positive deviants**' - amplifying local voices rather than imposing an external vision to not 'force the process upon the communities'
 - Participatory **reflection and co-creation**: Key moments built into the process before launching new activities. Piloting new activities with smaller target group before scaling up.
 - **Bottom-up approach dilemma**: - accommodating personal interests of community leaders / + managing 'spoilers' (weak point)
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Limitations and challenges

In general, based on INTERSOS experience from community-based projects in Iraq and the region, **‘deep’ community-driven projects require ideally two years as a minimum to engage, empower, and hand over to communities.**

- **Pilot project focused on direct service provision rather than capacity/system strengthening:**
 - Community-based MHPSS fills an important gap vis-a-vis the lack of mental health care provision at local PHCCs - strengthening the government MHPSS response in tandem would be ideal scenario.
 - Replication and scale-up could include a training component for community members, PHCC staff, teachers, etc. on FPA, basic counseling, inclusive facilitation, etc.
- **Contextual factors / basic needs may continue to negatively impact MHPSS and social cohesion:**
 - Underscoring importance of linking MHPSS interventions to other services addressing structural barriers to reintegration (legal services, case management, LIVELIHOOD)
 - Discriminatory actions of government / community institutions could re-escalate tensions (stronger link to structural / top down peacebuilding processes and conflict resolution mechanisms)
 - Accelerated / ‘less controlled’ returns from Al-Hol and worsening security situation in general could increase local tensions

Sustainability

- Activities focused on **strengthening resilience among individuals, families and groups** - individuals improved coping skills and support systems were strengthened (and stigma reduced). Likely to be sustainable based on individuals' motivation
 - **Community structures** (CACs, 'positive deviants' from peer groups) were very proactive and are likely to continue advocating for peaceful coexistence and mediate tensions in the context of ongoing returns
 - Focus on **strengthening existing connectors and community-based activities** - groups/communities may be unlikely to continue with formally organized group activities (dialogue sessions, etc.) but an atmosphere was created where individuals from different groups feel welcome to attend existing community social, cultural, and recreational activities
 - Non-structured PSS and vocational training activities were particularly impactful with potential for scale-up - those can be continued by community structures themselves (currently exploring handover of materials to CBO) at minimal cost
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