Policy brief: Reintegration of Former Volunteer Fighters

Community Security Integration Pilot (CSIP) - Al-Qurna, Basra
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1. INTRODUCTION

The Community Security Integration Pilot (CSIP) was implemented in Al-Qurna, Basra governorate to reintegrate Former Volunteer Fighters (FVF) once territories occupied by the “Daesh” or the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) was regained by the security forces of the Government of Iraq (GoI). CSIP was developed under the Forging Iraq’s Path to Sustainable Peace and Development Project (FIPSPD) funded by the Government of Japan. The pilot implemented between 2019-2020 aimed to do this by providing FVFs skills to better access economic opportunities, through a combination of vocational training, mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) and grant support interventions to strengthen their resilience to better reintegrate into their families and communities.

The pilot also aimed to better understand the security and development nexus (SDN) in the context of Al-Qurna. This was done by trying to understand the perceptions of FVFs themselves, tribal leaders from the area, community members as well as female family members of FVFs. Some of the key topics covered included:

- The reintegration needs of FVFs and how they are adjusting to civilian life in the community and with their families
- Individual and group sentiments on security in their communities and security providers
- Perceptions of the most trusted actors from the differing perspectives in the community
- The development priorities in the local context from the point of view of community members, tribal leaders as well as family members

2. UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXT

2.1 The development context in Basra

Basra’s economic and development potential has been in decline over decades despite containing a significant amount of Iraq’s oil reserves, as well as the port of Umm Qasr is the country’s only shipping hub. In 2019, Basra’s oil exports constituted around 98% of Iraq’s federal revenues with a monthly average of around $6.5bn. Despite this massive oil export, waves of conflict since the 1980s, corruption, the levels of poverty and lack of access to basic services fuelled the protests that took place in 2018 and 2019 which led to the resignation of the then Prime Minister.

2.3 % of the population of Basra governorate were in severe poverty, and 8.8 % were vulnerable to poverty in 2019. Basra city itself, the capital of the governorate, is the third largest city in Iraq. The percentage of people living under the poverty line of $2.5 a day in the governorate of Basra is higher than the national average. The population in Basra city itself is estimated at 4 million, with another 1 million in the rural areas. The population growth rate, the rural to urban migration driven by climate change, the drop in global oil prices and the impact of COVID-19 is likely to have further impacted the situation in Basra.

Because of the dominance of the oil industry, employment opportunities in southern Iraq, including Basra, are limited resulting in an out-migration to Baghdad, with people moving

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4 World Bank. 2014. Where are Iraq’s Poor? Pg 57
5 European Asylum Support Office. September 2020. Key Socio-Economic Indicators for Baghdad, Basra and Erbil. Pg 38
in search of economic opportunities.\textsuperscript{6} Oil only contributes to one percent of the labour force nationally with oil companies preferring better trained foreign workers.\textsuperscript{7}

A study conducted in 2018 in Basra found that residents perceived unemployment to have worsened in recent years and armed groups were ‘often the only employer’.\textsuperscript{8} This study also noted that it was extremely hard to find employment, even in day labour.\textsuperscript{9} Corruption was identified as one of the main impediments to youth employment as well as employers’ preference for foreign workers to nationals in the oil and private sector,\textsuperscript{10} lack of skills among youth, customs and traditions, and lack of national production.\textsuperscript{11}

### 2.2 The security-development nexus in Basra

The security context of Basra is equally complex. Basra was the scene of heavy fighting during the Iran-Iraq Wars as well as the two subsequent Gulf Wars. The Iran-Iraq war centred around control of the oil fields straddling the border between Iran and Basra. By the late 2000s, the Al-Mahdi Army linked to the Shi’a leader Muqtada al-Sadr had built a stronghold in Basra. After 2003, governance-related issues deteriorated further with Basra witnessing some of the fiercest fighting for control and heightened sectarian divides. With increased tensions in relation to the responsibilities of the local and federal governments, Baghdad blocked investment in Basra turning it into Iraq’s “poorhouse”.\textsuperscript{12} In 2008, the Iraqi Government launched an operation to put an end to sectarian fighting. This resulted in Muqtada Al-Sadr to call a ceasefire at the end of March of 2008.

While there was relative security after 2008, years of neglect, disruption and destruction of the physical and social infrastructure has meant that the local economy and development indicators have been in rapid decline in Basra. Finally, when urban services and infrastructure collapsed in 2018, there was a threat of a cholera epidemic when over 118,000 people were hospitalised due to the poor-quality water, leading to the deadly violence of 2018-2019. The protests, which then extended beyond Basra was the culmination of longstanding grievances towards political corruption, government neglect and unemployment, as well as the socioeconomic impact of a chronic water crisis.\textsuperscript{13}

The southern governorates, particularly Basra provided a significant number of recruits to the fighting units in response to the fatwa issued by the Shia cleric, Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani to respond to the threat of Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in the northern and western governorates in June of 2014 by enlisting in the army.\textsuperscript{14} Days later, rather than join the national army a loose coalition of existing militias (estimated at between 60 – 90 different militia groups) announced the formation of the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF or Hashd al-Shaabi). The militias were officially incorporated into the Iraqi armed forces in 2016, however some continue to operate outside of the state’s control. CSIP targeted FVFs who chose not to remain in the PMF’s and returned to their communities.

Given the pre-existing development challenges, FVFs were seen to be susceptible for further recruitment into illegal armed groups if not provided other livelihood opportunities. This group was also seen to be vulnerable due to the psychological impact of conflict, concerns

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\textsuperscript{7} The National. April 19, 2018. *In Iraq’s oil-rich Basra, shanty towns flourish.*


\textsuperscript{10} In response, the government approved a regulation that requires that 50 % of oil workers employed by foreign companies are Iraqis


\textsuperscript{12} UN-HABITAT. October 2020. *Basra Urban Profile*. UN-HABITAT. Pg 12.

\textsuperscript{13} Norwegian Refugee Council. August 2018. *Basra Fact Finding Mission report #1.*

about substance abuse due to a lack of economic opportunities and a culture of violence and militarisation given their participation in the offensive against ISIL.\footnote{UNDP Iraq: Rule of Law/Security Sector Reform Programme. Proposal for FY2018. JSB 2018. Pg 7. UNDP Iraq.}

**2.3 Why Al-Qurna Qurna?**

The central sub-district (nahiya) of Al-Qurna Qurna, has a poverty rate of around 15%—and was the a primary source for volunteer fighters. 70\% of the CSIP beneficiaries drawn from Al-Qurna Qurna and surrounding sub-districts, reported no monthly income for the month preceding enrolment. These numbers suggest both that there are pockets of extreme poverty hidden in areas with moderate average poverty rates—and that these pockets were possibly target areas for recruiting volunteer fighters.

Despite initial promises by recruiter during the crisis, neither the FVFs nor their home communities had or has received any assistance from the government. There was strong support for this effort from former volunteer fighters, government officials led by the Mayor of Al-Qurna, and tribal laders, who maintain a central role in community affairs in Basra Governorate. There are some views that the return of FVFs to Basra to poor services and lack of livelihood opportunities added to the mounting pre-existing frustrations particularly in the context of oil-rich Basra.

UNDP/Iraq Crisis Response and Resilience Programme (ICRRP) also selected Al-Qurna for its livelihoods project, which was implemented by the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC). This allowed for potential coordination and collaboration for better impact in the Al-Qurna context.

**3. ABOUT THE COMMUNITY SECURITY INTEGRATION PILOT**

The Community Security Integration Pilot (CSIP) was informed by a bottom-up approach and is centred around developing a locally defined process for reintegrating FVFs in Al-Qurna, Basra Governorate. The pilot, or CSIP aimed to inform the development of a model for the reintegration of FVFs throughout Iraq, and to test approaches to assist this target group to break out of cycles of violence, and to address the underlying economic issues that encouraged them to take up arms in the past.

In the Al-Qurna, context, most of the tribal leaders felt that there were insufficient government resources for the FVFs. In terms of the status of the FVFs in the community, a vast majority of the tribal leaders felt that it would be easy for the FVFs to return to their communities, and that the time was right for them to return to their communities.

This pilot aimed to provide FVFs alternative livelihood opportunities to joining militias or criminal groups, as well as the psychological resilience to better reintegrate into their communities as civilians. The CSIP also aimed to identify and prioritise key safety concerns as well as development priorities in the target location to promote social cohesion. By focusing on both economic conditions of former fighters as well as their psychosocial resilience, CSIP aimed to facilitate a supporting environment for improved stability following the ISIL crisis in the area by addressing root causes that made militia membership an attractive, or perhaps a necessary choice for some individuals. CSIP aimed to do this by the following actions:

1. **Economic Reintegration** of FVFs through vocational and business start-up training
2. **Social and Psychosocial Reintegration**
3. Increasing the understanding of the reintegration environment in Basra.
3.1 CSIP Beneficiaries

CSIP collected nominations in September 2019 for potential FVF from the Mayor of Al-Qurna and tribal leaders in Al-Qurna. 315 names were received by UNDP (220 coming from the Office of the Mayor and the remainder from a designated tribal leader). CSIP interviewed all FVFs and collected or confirmed information, including documentary support if relevant, for 68 demographic data points. Following a series of screening processes, 107 beneficiaries selected. Following some dropouts, there were 87 FVFs enrolled in the CSIP programme. See Figure 1 for a summary overview of the FVFs who were engaged with CSIP.

**Figure 1. Profile of Former Volunteer Fighters**

- **87 former fighters participated** in CSIP.¹
- The **majority** of former fighters were from Qurna in Basra Governorate.
- Former volunteer fighters were selected based primarily on time-in-service as fighters.
- Their educational backgrounds skewed heavily towards having no, or limited, levels of education.
- **Most of the former fighters were above the age of 32 years.**

¹ The numbers shifted during the reporting period, as CSIP worked with partners to address barriers to participation for some former volunteer fighters and one beneficiary left the programme to join the Iraqi Army. CSIP identified 107 former volunteer fighters with partners at the beginning of the pilot, anticipating a 30% drop-out rate. To date, 20 former volunteer fighters (approximately 21%) have withdrawn, leaving 87 former volunteer fighters. CSIP also identified 8 family members of former fighters for small business development training and grants delivered by ICBP/MRC (2 women, 6 men).

3.2 CSIP Approach

Creation of employment opportunities, particularly for FVFs was seen as a key aspect of the approach, particularly to counter violent extremism and reengagement with armed actors. CSIP was launched in Al-Qurna, in Basra governorate, though physically untouched during the ISIL crisis, it was an area of Iraq intensely impacted by the ISIL conflict due to the large number of recruits.

By partnering with government institutions to provide the FVFs vocational services as well as psychosocial support, CSIP aimed to build state legitimacy. CSIP partnered with the Al-Qurna Industrial Preparatory School (QIPS), a government vocational training centre, as well as the Sara Trauma Centre, also a government institution. QIPS under the Basra Directory of Education. In addition, CSIP also invested in infrastructure rehabilitation of QIPS to improve teaching and training capacity across 4 vocational subjects and to develop ICT capacity with the aim of directly contributing to the education of 200 students annually after the end of CSIP.

CSIP also partnered with local partners and hired 10 recent graduates as interns in August 2020 to assist the FVFs during the vocational training itself and business start-up training activities. Given the limited literacy skills of some of the FVFs, three female and seven male graduates supported the FVFs to develop resumes, business plans and grant applications in preparation for the small grant distribution component of CSIP.

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4. LEARNINGS FROM THE PILOT IN AL-QURNA

4.1 Economic Reintegration

CSIP developed a combination of training and grant support interventions. CSIP developed vocational training and business start-up courses of 12 weeks with QIPS in three subjects (Electrical, Welding, Air Conditioning/Refrigeration). In preparation for the vocational training, CSIP rehabilitated and re-equipped the relevant workshops in the school, with the aim of contributing to QIPS capacity and service delivery to its students. The Electrical training was the most popular with 35 FVFs, followed by Air Conditioning/Refrigeration (28) and Welding (24).

Understanding labour market needs

A survey of around 40 businesses was conducted by the interns in October 2020 to understand labour market needs.17 The majority of businesses were sole proprietorships, and between 1-10 years old. The greatest demand for skills was in the electrical business, followed by air conditioning/refrigeration. The majority of business preferred experienced employees, and preferred employees under the age of 25. The survey also found that there were limited ICT resources in Al-Qurna to support identification of employment opportunities, or completion of applications for grants or loans, or online training.

The importance of practical training

FVFs had different levels of education, with some having had prior professional experience in the areas of instruction.18 Most of the FVFs had poor literacy which presented challenges when it came to course materials which required reading and writing. Instructors indicated that those with professional experience contributed positively to group work activities. A key lesson was to focus on practical skills with repetition as a means for the FVFs to gain confidence.

Using technology for training and coordination

The majority of FVFs were comfortable using electronic devices, including using the internet, social media platforms and apps. Most of the FVFs also had smart phones, with relatively few having access to a computer or tablet. In terms of delivery, FVFs preferred online instruction followed by in-person instructions by an instructor or a combination of both. The final weeks of training were carefully adjusted with partners to accommodate government COVID-19 policies by creating smaller class sizes, staggering classes between sections, and accommodating additional Business Skills Training. A WhatsApp group was established for

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17 The survey was limited due to COVID-19 restrictions.
FVFs from November 2019 to send messages, conduct surveys, provide PSS support, coordinate training and other activities.

**The value of using interns to mentor and support FVFs, and conduct surveys**

The interns played an important role in supporting the FVFs during the vocational training and business start-up training. They not only provided essential support to the FVFs throughout the period, but they were also paid a small stipend over the course of the three months. They gained practical paid work experience as well as contributing to the reintegration process of the FVFs with the moral, technical and peer support. Interns also conducted surveys including the market survey with businesses, and a Government Services Survey.

**Adapting grants to ensure inclusion and enable participation in CSIP activities**

Grant support was adapted to the needs of FVFs so that they could participate in the training and receive the necessary support. On intake, the average income of FVFs was USD 75 per month, with 70% reporting no income. Based on lessons learned from other grant initiatives, CSIP initially adapted its grant offerings into three distinct elements: i) a stipend payment of USD 350 to support transportation and living costs during the entire training process over 13 weeks, which was paid monthly; ii) an in-kind grant of basic tools tailored to each course, which was intended to equip graduates for an entry-level job in their area of focus; and iii) a separate business development grant. The total stipend paid to the FVFs was USD 1850 paid in 5 instalments between January and September 2019. The stipend was based on attendance and reduced if days were missed the amount was reduced on a pro rata basis. Due to government Covid-19 crisis related restrictions on travel and business, CSIP did not provide in-kind grants to beneficiaries at the end of vocational courses. The target group were supported in identifying their tool and equipment needs which were then supported through the business grant.

**Business training was an important part of the package**

Incorporation of financial literacy and business management to enable the target group to have the necessary skills to manage their own business was of great interest to the FVFs. Lessons learned from related efforts suggested that CSIP grantees, who generally have not had access to formal education, would require additional training on how to develop a business plan and other basic skills to run a business. CSIP therefore adapted its implementation plan to include business skills training after vocational courses and as a prerequisite for the award of business grants. In April 2020, the Business Survey showed that more than 95% of beneficiaries desired this additional training. Each application included a three-month implementation plan with 60% of the FVFs stating that they would be using the grant money for renting shops.

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1. Of the 15 FVFs interviewed, all but one was either employed or conducting business and attributed this directly to the training they received\textsuperscript{20}. The unemployed FVFS cited COVID-19 as the reason why he has not been able to start a business or gain employment. Two FVFs were employed by the government, one worked in an oil company, and 14, including those employed had started their own business. Most of them have employed an average of two additional employees.

2. The key challenge they faced was that the training was on old devices, and that the training period of 12 weeks was too short – that they needed more practical training for a longer period to gain confidence. However, this contrasts with the survey conducted at the end of the training, when they stated that they either strongly agreed (44\%) or agreed (46\%) that the time allocated to training was sufficient.

3. The value of the business grant which was USD 4000 per FVF was insufficient, particularly in terms of renting space for a workshop.

4. None of the FVFs had received any assistance from the government for their reintegration. They all stated that they had been promised plots of land, especially to those who did not have housing. They also expected salaries and pensions from the state.

### 4.2 Social and Psychosocial Reintegration

Mental Health and Psycho-social support (MHPSS) was provided in coordination with the Sara Trauma Centre together with a mental health professional from the Basra Directory of Health throughout the training period\textsuperscript{21}. The objective of this was for FVFs and their families to have improved resilience in facing challenges together, managing the impacts of trauma from conflict, as well as build the skills of the target group to problem solve and manage violent behaviours. In line with CSIP’s strategy, the introduction of positive and supportive government mental health service providers to the group of former fighters provided an opportunity for an underserved population to reengage with government as a legitimate resource.

**The approach was to provide customised training based on the individual needs of the FVFs.**

In December 2019, MHPSS experts used the Harvard Trauma method to assess the level of trauma of FVFs and divided the FVFs into three groups based on needs identified following the survey. The questionnaire developed inquiries about a variety of trauma events, as well as

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\textsuperscript{20} Covers the time period from December 2020 (project end) to June 2021.

\textsuperscript{21} The Harvard Trauma Questionnaire.
the emotional symptoms considered to be uniquely associated with trauma. 13 group sessions were delivered, with 16 FVFs receiving individual therapy sessions.

In order to build capacity for psychosocial support locally in Al-Qurna, CSIP facilitated the inclusion of a mental health professional from the government facility in Al-Qurna to work with the Sara Trauma Centre. FVFs were provided weekly group sessions and selected FVFs were provided individual support sessions where appropriate.

Importantly after the psychosocial support, not only did the FVFs find this important, but their a significant number of spouses22 also stated that communication with each other and their children had improved. With the average family size being six persons, CSIP directly benefitted 522 beneficiaries. All tribal leaders23 also stated that FVFs had been more helpful, and peaceful since the start of the CSIP. The instructors also noted a marked improvement in the behaviour of FVFs due to the engagement in the psychosocial support sessions. A planned programme of direct support to family members was cancelled due to COVID-19.

June 2021: Tracer Study with FVFs

1. **Transition from a combatant to a civilian, particularly in this context requires some form of social recognition as well as psychosocial support.** All FVFs stated that the psychosocial support was extremely beneficial. It helped them deal with reintegration into the community, and address issues around self-esteem. Some of them felt that when they returned to their communities, rather than welcomed as heroes, they were had low social status within their communities. A majority of the FVFs requested ongoing individual or group therapy to heal psychological wounds.

2. **Trauma-informed integration must also be family and community-based.** The FVFs felt that they had better skills as a result of CSIP and have a sense of purpose in the community. They feel there are contributing to the community, including through generating employment. A number of FVFs also described how they are mindful of how they react with and deal with their families.

3. **Psychosocial support is integral to reintegration and may be required over a medium to longer-term.** A few of the FVFs with severe cases of trauma felt that they were better equipped to manage the PTSD, and had better skills to take care of themselves, to manage anxiety as well as anger.

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<th>4.3 Investing in the community through infrastructure</th>
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<td>CSIP also completed four Community Investment Projects (CIPs) which were all at the Al-Qurna Industrial Preparatory School which had inadequate facilities for training and old equipment. This included rehabilitation of classrooms, providing equipment, improving sanitation facilities, back-up power capacity, equipment for the workshops for the three courses, as well as administrative equipment. CSIP installed an Information and Communication Technology (ICT) laboratory in QIPS to improve access to resources essential for modern learning and employment searches. CSIP also invested in the rehabilitation and equipping of an auto mechanic workshop as well as other repairs.</td>
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| 4.4 Better understanding of the reintegration environment in Al-Qurna |

CSIP developed a Monitoring and Evaluation Plan (M&E Plan) in October 2019 which was a set of tailored tools and products for activity, output, medium-term outcome, and outcome level targets in order to support CSIP’s better understand the needs and track trends and

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22 87% agreed strongly, and 9% somewhat agreed.
results as a result of CSIP inputs. A total of four surveys were conducted including tribal leaders, female family members of FVFs, community members, as well instructors, business, government and FVFs themselves.24

The tribal leaders play an important role in most communities in Iraq and are involved in dispute resolution including intra- and intertribal community disputes; customary justice; security coordination with state actors; tribal facilitation (or exploitation) of IDP return process; and women’s interaction with the state.25

At the start of the pilot, CSIP engaged with two major tribal leaders to identify supportive communities and candidates for CSIP support. They were engaged in the orientation of the FVFs at the start of CSIP in December 2019. Given the context of FVFs in the Al-Qurna context, no female fighters were identified. CSIP aimed to target support to women through the facilitation of grants to martyrs, and indirect support through the PSS support, as well as the business grants at the end of CSIP to FVF.

The survey of 17 tribal leaders was completed in August 2020, and it was found that a third of the tribal leaders either had elementary- or intermediate-level education. Most of the tribal leaders had been in position for between 11-20 years, with some between 21-30 years, with a very few for more than 30 years. Over half the tribal leaders had 4000 or more members in their area of responsibility. Most families within the tribe were engaged in agriculture, followed by formal employment and engaged in business.

A survey of female members, 64 wives, and 20 mothers, was completed in June 2020 – with most spouses being under 25 years old and with limited education. Extremely few had a college degree, with a third having at most elementary-level education. The majority of women had between 6-10 family members in their residence with some having more than 16 members in their residence. Less than half were living in residences that was owned by the family, a third were squatting. Although CSIP had built enough trust within the community to be able to engage with female family members, surveys could not always be administered privately.

Perceptions of security in Basra

Respondents were generally happy about the security situation in Basra, with most identifying the national police as the main security providers, followed by the national army. However, there are concerns, particularly about increasing conflicts between tribes. Interpersonal conflict and competition over positions were identified as areas of concern. Respondents indicated the need for merit-based recruitment, better training, improved leadership, and integrity amongst security providers. Respondents were also concerned about the possibility of increased violence due to COVID-19.

The vast majority of tribal leaders felt secure in their communities because of the presence of security forces, as well as tribal authority in their areas. They identified some key measures to improve local safety and security as being a focus on promoting social cohesion, as well as community security interventions. They stated that the government needed to improve the services of the local police, as well as access to justice for their community.

A vast majority of the women family members stated that they always feel safe in their communities because of the presence of security actors, as well as their tribal authorities. The main reason for not feeling safe was the high rate of unemployment and corruption. They also prioritised advocating for social cohesion and conflict prevention, as well as supporting

the local police to improve safety and security. The women family members prioritised improving local police services, as well as greater army presence. The women showed the most concern about keeping ISIL away from their communities.

**June 2021: Tracer Study with FVFs**

1. A lack of a rule of law culture, poor governance as well as the lack of unemployment opportunities continues to have an impact on the FVFs and their perception of safety and security in their communities. While the majority continued to feel safe in their communities, 40% of the FVFs responded they did not feel safe in their communities. Those who did not feel safe cited the failure of the government to enforce laws, lack of employment opportunities and increased criminality, poor governance, and lack of strong leadership. Some also feared the return of ISIL.

**Relationship between state, society, and development models**

Most respondents identified the state as having primary responsibility for development in the community – however, their perception was that development projects do not cater to public needs and priorities. Most respondents were unaware of development plans and had no input into these plans – indicating a need for better communication strategy for all actors, be it government, NGOs or other international actors. Most respondents who knew about plans and projects obtained their information from the internet.

Local governments are best positioned to improve the security and development situation in the community, as well as local NGOs. However, respondents stated that communities would suffer if international organisations are absent. Some of the main perceived impediments to development projects are a lack of resources, the interference of state actors, logistical challenges, and security.

Unemployment was identified as the key concern by tribal leaders, the FVFs and the female family members. Tribal leaders identified unemployment and access to services as the top concerns in their communities, followed by public health and corruption. The women family members identified unemployment, public health, and access to services as the top three concerns within their community, followed by corruption.

**June 2021: Tracer Study with FVFs**

1. **Unemployment** in their communities continues to be the top concern of the FVFs, as well as the impacts of COVID-19 on their livelihoods and access to services. Drug abuse and corruption were also key concerns.

2. Most of the these concerns have been compounded due to COVID-19—increased restrictions have reduced business activities and opportunities. Access to services has deteriorated because of the closure of many institutions and companies. The rise of unemployment has led to an increase in activities such as drug abuse.

**Perceptions about political culture and change agents**

The development and security elements in Basra intersect and communities rely heavily on family and tribal relationships for access to development resources, as well as for maintaining a degree of stability and security in the face of challenges. When CSIP was introduced—there was strong support from the late Mayor of Al-Qurna and the traditional leaders and the FVFs themselves. In terms of who the tribal leaders trusted, most identified their family members, followed by security providers (local police and the army). The women family members identified the most trusted enablers as being tribal leaders, family members and the local police. Trust in mukhtars was the lowest across the board.
1. **In terms of whom the FVFs trusted the most** in their communities almost half of them identified their tribal leaders first, followed by the police and the Iraqi army.

**Perceptions about politics, youth, and gender**

The overall perception was that women had less access to economic opportunities compared to that of men. Respondents generally felt that the status of women had stayed the same after the ISIL crisis—however, there are indications that this starting to change. Respondents also felt that women did not have the same opportunities to be in leadership positions in government.

**Direct beneficiaries of projects stated that women who had been successful with new skills and grants should be used as role models for other women.** Women suggested that projects should target women and be tailored to their priorities.

**The inclusion of women in CSIP training itself was challenging in the context of Al-Qurna.** CSIP had allocated 10% of spots to assist female family members of FVFs killed in action as initial assessments determined that there were no female former fighters in Al-Qurna. CSIP met with two challenges while trying to engage with female beneficiaries in Al-Qurna. First, local cultural norms meant that female family members were not to work outside of the home. CSIP was able to work with partners to facilitate family support for female beneficiaries to participate in activities under the ICRRP programme, but this option was not been tested for longer term training programs that could develop technical skills. Secondly, in Al-Qurna, the government vocational training institutions were designed to accommodate only male trainees and courses. For example, QIPS enrolls only male students in its two-year vocational courses and does not have any restroom facilities for females. Some partners addressed this by creating short ad hoc courses. For longer courses, such as CSIP’s three-month training, alternative venues and training resources would need to be identified and resourced for female beneficiaries. There is no data available on the number of females left vulnerable by the death of a volunteer fighter.

**Youth were largely identified as potential change agents—however, they needed better economic opportunities.** Youth who had been engaged in projects were seen to demonstrate commitment to achieving results and had higher aspirations towards peace and productivity. If youth are affiliated with political parties, they had opportunities for active participation in bringing new perspectives to more traditional dialogues.

**Participants in various projects felt that his process had not only fostered social cohesion, but importantly, they had provided the participants a sense of dignity, self-respect, and hope.** Projects provided them opportunities to expand their network for peer-support.
5. KEY LESSONS

Understand the patterns of exclusion in a given context, and work with local champions to address these patterns

- Designing and implementing programmes such as CSIP requires an understanding of patterns of exclusion, be it to power, resources, livelihood opportunities, justice, or services along racial, ethnic, gender or class lines.
- Programming should also have a flexible approach and be adaptive, informed by regular feedback loops to understand changing incentives and dynamics in a given context.

1. Programmes should be designed using a community-based approach with the support of local champions, particularly to identify redistributive actions which are appropriate for a given context.

2. Programmes should have transparency and accountability, particularly to the most vulnerable and marginalised at the centre of programme design and implementation.

3. Invest in regular political and conflict informed analysis and research to adapt and inform programming given the fluid and dynamic context of Iraq.

DDR or DDR like programming can be designed around the knowledge, skills, and abilities of a disadvantaged beneficiary pool

- CSIP explored 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. FVFs self-reported literacy rates of around 60%, with a majority reporting at least elementary education. However, functional literacy was deemed to be less than 40% by business skills trainers.
- CSIP worked with vocational training partners to focus on hands-on practical training and verbal instruction and provided two additional support interns for every 15 FVFs during business skills training to accommodate the characteristics of the beneficiary pool.
Early decisions to commit to a comparatively long vocational training programme of 12 weeks were also critical for allowing FVF s time to receive new information and skills in an accessible format.

1. Vocational training should be hands-on and practical with verbal instruction and a relatively long training programme.

2. Where possible, vocational training should be linked to existing local institutions. This may require the need to build capacity of these institutions themselves, as well as make modest investments to upgrade necessary infrastructure and equipment (e.g., an ICT laboratory, workshops for the training, sanitation, back-up power, and internet facilities in the case of QIPS).

3. Linkages should be made with other Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET) reform efforts being rolled out nationally for longer-term support.

Selection of vocational or other training should respond to market analysis and linked to certification that is recognised where possible

- CSIP was fortunate to have a strong partnership with dedicated and experienced educators in Al-Qurna, however, care needs to be taken to ensure that future programming does not oversaturate the market with certain skills.

- Future vocational training offerings should be based on most up to date market survey/analysis or opportunity mapping which can also inform course design and contribute to modernization efforts of partner training institutions.

1. Where possible, vocational training providers should be linked to certification from a recognized Iraqi or international body with the aim of ensuring curriculum standards, as well as certification of skill levels. While this may not be possible in the short term in certain locations, linkages should be made with other TVET reform efforts being rolled out nationally in the longer-term.

2. Structured mechanisms and innovations for referrals should also be tested to improve livelihood opportunities for FVF s.

Developing and managing strategic partnerships with local actors, including community leaders

- UNDP worked through local formal government offices, particularly the Mayor of Al-Qurna, and informal channels to identify senior traditional leaders to work with in developing CSIP.

- However, it took more than a year, for CSIP to complete data collection on local leadership in the communities from which FVF s were drawn.

1. In areas with less stability and formal governance presence than Al-Qurna, partnerships with local traditional leadership will need to be built robustly enough to facilitate community engagement and decision-making processes without the support of government structures.

2. Tribal leaders play an important role in the context of Al-Qurna, including for the reintegration of FVF s.

3. Efforts should also be made to ensure that local champions and positive role models particularly for women, youth, and minority groups are engaged, and are regularly consulted to inform contextualised programming and problem-solving.

Leverage available human capital through internships and “champions”
• CSIP partners in Al-Qurna identified an untapped pool of unemployed university graduates that had created semi-formal “unions” to demonstrate commitment towards contributing to their local communities. CSIP engaged ten of these graduates as interns (7 male, 3 female) to support the CSIP beneficiaries in completing their business skills training and related documents.

• Though the exercise was limited, instructors deemed the interns as essential to allowing the beneficiaries, who as a group had low literacy rates, to complete their training. The programme provided the Interns with a stipend during a very difficult financial period, professional experience with a UNDP pilot, and access to the business skills training.

1. CSIP experience suggests that efforts such as interns or the use of “champions” can improve internal community relationships, leverage human capital, and provide local support networks for former volunteer fighters.

Context-appropriate and customised Mental Health and Psychosocial Support should be integrated into all development efforts to meet the diverse needs of affected populations.

The long and different experiences of violence in the different contexts in Iraq requires that future programming incorporates appropriate psychosocial support to beneficiaries—particularly for FVFs and their families, as well as the impacted communities.

1. All programming should be trauma-informed and take a community-based approach so that MHPSS is not only provided to the individual, but where possible, appropriate support to the wider community to create an environment for longer-term community resilience.

2. MHPSS might be required over a sustained period of time, particularly for FVFs.

Needs of female FVFs and female family members of FVFs should be distinctly considered in any new programme area

• CSIP confirmed that female family members of FVFs in Al-Qurna have had limited access to educational and economic opportunities either due to, or compounded by, societal restrictions that limit support from family for participation in activities outside of the home.

• These same restrictions also require thoughtful accommodations and time to build trust in order to connect with female community members for any level of programming. CSIP developed linkages with female family members of FVFs and confirmed that there are both gender and role-specific elements that should be considered for future programming—one single package will not address deeper needs of male and female FVFs as well as the needs of male and female family members of former volunteer fighters.

1. Programmes need to take into consideration female family members of FVFs, and female FVFs where present as distinct target groups for support that accommodate the unique needs and goals of the beneficiary group under DDR or other programme umbrellas.

Social services needed by FVFs and their families are widely mandated, but have very limited funding through government channels

• CSIP discovered a highly supportive environment of at least 20 government or pseudo-government institutions that could provide a range of social services to
FVF s and their families based solely on their economic or other needs. However, very few CSIP beneficiaries reported receiving any government support.\textsuperscript{26}

This warrants further study through the SDN study or subsequent programmes.

**Grant support (Cash and/or Tools and Equipment)**

- CSIP surveys revealed that 60\% of FVF s were unemployed and their average monthly income was less than USD\textsuperscript{250}.
- The small monthly stipends they received through CSIP helped FVF s to cover transportation, education and other expenses while remaining committed to CSIP support – after initial intake processes, there was only one beneficiary dropout throughout the project cycle.

1. It is therefore recommended that future programmes of a similar nature provide small monthly stipends to support FVF s to cover daily expenses so that they can attend vocational training, have access to psychosocial support, and other activities over an extended period.
2. Other grant support should be tailored using “in-kind” or cash packages to meet the backgrounds and needs of the specific beneficiary group.
3. Ideally, linkages should also be made with longer term business support, projects that support micro-enterprise development and financial inclusion, including those that support efforts such as savings groups for the limited business grant to have more impact.