



AREAS OF LOW RETURN
SHEIKH IBRAHIM VILLAGE,
MUHALABIYA COMMUNITY
DIALOGUE, MOSUL DISTRICT

JULY 2025



Methodology and Objectives

The Returns Working Group (RWG) facilitated a community dialogue to assess the prospects for sustainable return to Sheikh Ibrahim village in Al-Muhalabiya Subdistrict, Ninewa. Sheikh Ibrahim is a predominantly Sunni Turkmen rural community that has encountered multiple post-conflict challenges, including widespread housing destruction, disrupted services, and limited livelihood opportunities. The community dialogue served as a platform for displaced and returnee families to discuss the obstacles they face, express their concerns, and highlight the most urgent needs affecting their reintegration.

Community members voiced feelings of abandonment by government institutions and noted the limited presence of humanitarian and service actors. Returnees expressed frustration over unreliable electricity, insufficient water supply, the closure of the local health facility, and the lack of secondary education options within the village. Delays in processing compensation claims and the inconsistent provision of return grants were also cited as critical barriers to reintegration. These issues have deepened the community's sense of marginalization and made return less sustainable, especially for women and vulnerable groups.

The dialogue aimed not only to identify key challenges but also to outline the type of support the community considers essential for dignified and sustainable return. Among the top priorities were the rehabilitation of destroyed homes, restoration of water access through more reliable infrastructure, reactivation of health and education services, and support for agricultural recovery.

PARTICIPANT LIST

Name	Position
Government	
Maysara Abdul Ghafoor Saeed	Director of Al-Mahlabiya District
Mohammed Abdel Karim Mohammed	Department of Water
Muhammad Abdul-Jabbar Khalil	Department of Agriculture
Muzaffar Salem Jassim	Department of Electricity
Hassan Mohammed Ali	Department of Health
Mahmoud Ahmed Mahmoud	Department of Health
Abdul Ibrahim Ali	Mayor Office
Mohammed Khairy Danoun	Department of Health
Qusay Hashem Fadel	Mayor Office
Community Representatives	
Abdul Khaliq Muhammad Abdul Rahman	Mukhtar
Juma Muhammad Ali	Community member
Hashem Karan Hussein	Community member
Adnan Ahmed Mohammed	Community member

Name	Position
Youssef Mohammed Younis	Community member
Abdul Qader Mustafa Youssef	Community member
Mohammed Ahmed Mohammed	Community member
Muhammad Salim Muhammad Danoun	Community member
Mohammed Abdel Rahman Ahmed	Community member
Khadir Suleiman Abdullah	Community member
Sattam Mohammed Amin	Community member
Abbas Aliwi Hassan	Community member
Bashir Ahmed Mohammed	Community member
Hussein Muhammad Younis	Community member
Ali Abdel Khaleq Muhammad	Community member
Shihab Abdel Rahman Abdel	Community member
Younis Sharif Ismail	Community member
Salem Abdul Qader Ali	Community member
Ahmed Ibrahim Ahmed	Community member
Munir Ibrahim Muhammad	Community member
Ibrahim Abdel Khaleq Muhammad	Community member
Mustafa Hassan Hamou	Community member
Wissam Subaih Suleiman	Community member
Ali Hussein Hamou	Community member
Abdullah Mohammed Saleh	Community member
Aqeel Muslim Muhammad	Community member
Ahmed Ezz Eldin Saeed	Community member
Hashem Khalil Hamdan	Community member
Ajeel Mahmoud Hamdan	Community member
Faisal Mahmoud Hamdan	Community member
Salem Taha Saleh	Community member
UN/NGOs	
Firas Alsalman	RWG
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Figure 1 Muhalabiya village

Background Information

Sheikh Ibrahim is a village in Ninewa Governorate, located in Mosul District and administratively under Al-Muhalabiya Subdistrict. It lies approximately 4 kilometers west of the subdistrict center. Before the conflict, the village hosted around 300 families, approximately 1,950 individuals living in about 200 houses. In 2014, following the ISIS invasion and subsequent security deterioration, all residents were displaced—some fled to Mosul city, others to Al-Muhalabiya center, and a smaller group sought refuge in Turkey. From 2019 to 2022, a total of 110 families, or roughly 650 people, returned to the village, now residing in around 100 houses. The population is predominantly Sunni Turkmen (97%), with a small minority of Sunni Arabs (3%). Security in Sheikh Ibrahim is jointly managed by the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), specifically the 58th Regiment of the 60th Brigade—composed largely of locals—and the 16th Division of the Iraqi Army, both maintaining a visible and stable presence in the area.

HOUSING

Before the conflict, houses in Sheikh Ibrahim were primarily built using plaster and stone. Due to the intensity of the conflict and the vulnerability of these construction materials, over 95% of the homes were either partially or completely destroyed. Since then, only limited rehabilitation has taken place. UNDP has restored 12 houses with minimal interventions, including repairs to doors, windows, and electrical wiring. In the absence of comprehensive reconstruction or compensation, many families who have returned are making efforts to repair their damaged homes using their own limited resources to resettle and restore a sense of stability in the village.



Figure 2 Housing Damage in Sheikh Ibrahim

COMPENSATION

Despite widespread property damage, compensation remains a critical and unresolved gap in Sheikh Ibrahim. Although many families have formally submitted claims to the relevant authorities in hopes of rebuilding their homes, the vast majority have yet to receive any financial support. To date, only an estimated 1% of applicants have received compensation, and even in these rare cases, the amounts disbursed have been insufficient to cover the actual cost of reconstruction. One key reason for this inadequacy is the way the damage assessments are conducted: since Sheikh Ibrahim is a rural village, the estimated value of homes is often significantly underestimated. Additionally, because most houses were originally built from stone, a common but low-valued construction material in compensation evaluations the final approved amounts have been minimal. This has left many returnees feeling overlooked and frustrated, further slowing the pace of recovery and limiting the prospects for a dignified and sustainable return.

ACCESS TO LIVELIHOODS

The pre-conflict economy of Sheikh Ibrahim centered on agriculture and livestock. Residents cultivated around 75 dunams of orchards, mostly olives and pomegranates, along with vegetables, wheat, and barley. Animal husbandry was also common, and a number of villagers worked in public sector jobs or in construction. At present, agriculture and livestock remain active but on a much smaller scale. A few residents are still employed in the public sector, but economic activity overall has decreased substantially, limiting income and food security for returnees.



Figure 3 Agricultural land in Sheikh Ibrahim and effects of drought

Currently, after 2017, prolonged drought and a lack of access to water have led to severe desertification and the drying up of more than 50 acres of agricultural land. As a result, many families have lost their primary sources of livelihood, compounding their economic challenges. Access to Water.

Previously, villagers depended on purchased drinking water, a natural spring within the village for washing and irrigation, and private wells for both household and agricultural needs. Now, Sheikh Ibrahim is connected to a piped water network that draws from the Al-Muhlabiya water project located 5 kilometers away. However, water only reaches the village every four days, and only when there is electricity to power the pumping station. Interruptions to the electricity supply directly affect water access, leaving residents without reliable water for extended periods. Families in Sheikh Ibrahim requested support from organizations to install a generator or any alternative power source to ensure consistent operation of the water pumping system. This request stems from the unreliable electricity supply, which severely limits water access—currently only available once every four days, and only when electricity is present.



Figure 4 water spring that needs cleaning.

Local authorities acknowledged the issue but indicated that they are unable to provide a solution, citing that the electricity problem is beyond their control and affects many areas across Iraq. No concrete plan or commitment was offered from their side to address the water supply interruptions.



Figure 5 The destroyed well that needs maintenance and cleaning.

There was also a well in the village, but it was destroyed by armed groups (ISIS) and now requires full rehabilitation. In addition, the existing water channel, once used for irrigation, remains clogged and needs to be cleaned to restore its functionality and support agricultural recovery.

ELECTRICITY

Electricity in the village is sourced from the Al-Muhlabiya power grid. Before the conflict, residents typically had access to electricity for 10 to 15 hours a day, depending on the season. This situation has remained relatively unchanged. However, there are currently no private generators in the village, and during the summer months, national grid outages leave residents without electricity, significantly impacting daily life and well-being. The absence of private generators in Sheikh Ibrahim is primarily due to the community's limited financial resources. Many residents live in conditions of poverty and cannot afford to purchase or

operate private generators, especially given the high cost of fuel and maintenance. This economic hardship has left the village entirely reliant on the national grid. As a result, prolonged outages during peak summer months severely disrupt daily life, affecting access to water, food storage, and basic comfort.

HEALTH

Prior to the conflict, Sheikh Ibrahim had a functioning health facility staffed by three nurses, though no doctor was stationed there. The clinic managed to provide basic healthcare services, with residents relying on the Al-Muhalabiya health center for more serious medical issues. Currently, the village health facility is out of service, forcing residents to travel 4 kilometers to Al-Muhalabiya to access healthcare. This has placed a significant burden on vulnerable individuals, particularly the elderly and those with chronic illnesses.

EDUCATION

The village formerly operated three schools: one each for primary, middle, and secondary education. These schools collectively enrolled 250 students, including 140 girls and 110 boys, with gender-segregated classes. Each school had five teachers, while the middle and secondary schools together employed seven teachers, 75 students. Today, only the primary school remains open and now operates as a mixed-gender school with around 160 students and five teachers. The middle and secondary schools are closed due to staff shortages and declining student numbers. Approximately 35 students now travel to Al-Muhalabiya daily for high school, incurring transportation costs of about 30,000 IQD per student per month.

MAIN BARRIERS TO RETURN

The primary barriers to return include a lack of livelihood opportunities, continued water scarcity, and unresolved property destruction. Years of drought and poor water access have rendered much of the agricultural land unusable. Large amounts of rubble from destroyed homes continue to pose physical dangers, with some collapsed structures housing snakes and other animals. Many standing structures are unstable and at risk of collapse. These difficult conditions, along with the absence of basic services and limited economic opportunities, have especially deterred women from returning. During the community dialogue, men shared that women in their families were unwilling to return under the current circumstances. In many cases, this has led to ongoing disputes within households, as men described frequent arguments with their wives, who refuse to go back—particularly after hearing firsthand accounts from families who have already returned and described the harsh realities of life in the village.

COMMUNITY PRIORITIES AND GOVERNMENT COMMITMENTS

The Health Department representative advised the village Mukhtar to submit a formal request to reactivate the old health facility. This step is seen as a preliminary requirement to assess the possibility of restoring basic healthcare services in the area.

The Subdistrict Manager of Al-Muhalabiya has committed to supporting debris removal in the village. He pledged to deploy municipal equipment to clear the area around the village spring but emphasized that humanitarian support is essential to complete the effort. He also stated that he would coordinate with the Ninewa Directorate of Municipalities to expand debris clearance throughout the village. To this end, he requested that NGOs contribute fuel and manpower to support municipal operations.

Regarding water access, the subdistrict plans to connect the village's water network directly to the main line of the Al-Muhalabiya water project. This is expected to improve the reliability of the water supply. However, a recurring challenge remains: the water pumping station depends on the general power grid, resulting in frequent delays and inconsistent water distribution. To address this, the subdistrict suggested the installation of a dedicated generator or solar power system and appealed to humanitarian organizations to help implement this solution.

NEXT STEPS

The immediate priority is to follow up with the Department of Health regarding the reactivation of the village's health facility. In parallel, the identified needs, including health services, water infrastructure, and debris removal should be shared through the Joint Coordination Forum (JCF) and with relevant humanitarian partners. This will help mobilize technical and material support to address urgent gaps and ensure that coordinated interventions can begin to improve living conditions in Sheikh Ibrahim.

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