



مركز المنصة للتنمية المستدامة  
PLATFORM CENTER FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

# Climate Change in Iraq

Analysis of Impacts and Solutions

Roundtable Discussion





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## About the center:

Platform for Sustainable Development is a center registered at NGO Department under the registration number(1S2106012) It is platform for knowledge exchange and dialogue that seeks to nurture positive change.

## Vision

We seek to establish a platform for dialogue and policies to contribute to achieving sustainable development goals in Iraq.

## Mission

Bridging the gap between the state and society in a way that ensures the realization of the essence of democracy represented by the participation of citizens in the decision-making processes, through training, monitoring, analyzing, researching, raising awareness, and conducting advocacy campaigns.

## Strategic Goals

- Preparing Youth to fulfill their societal obligations by analyzing root causes of problems, proposing feasible and desirable policy alternatives and advocating for their implementation.

- Presenting statistics and issues that occupy the political and societal scene to reflect a deeper understanding of Iraq's realities

- Encouraging youth to work towards achieving sustainable development goals

- Establishing a network of active, informed, and committed citizens towards Iraq's state-building project

## Introduction

On Saturday, November 25, 2023, the Platform Center for Sustainable Development (PSDIraq) held a roundtable discussion to address climate change in Iraq, examining its impacts and potential solutions. The session covered key topics, including climate priorities, impact mitigation, and required climate policies. The discussion was attended by a group of experts, academics, researchers, and participants from the Iraq Policy Program (Third Round) who presented policy papers related to the session's theme.

The session was opened by Mr. Ghazwan Al-Manhalawi, the Executive Director of the Center. He welcomed the attendees, highlighted the center's activities and projects, and emphasized its commitment to fostering dialogue between youth, experts, and decision-makers to diagnose issues in various sectors, offering suitable solutions. Mr. Al-Manhalawi commended the researchers from the Iraq Policy Program (Third Round) for their policy papers, inviting them to share their ideas during the session.

The session was moderated by Mr. Hashem Al-Husseini, who noted that these dialogues align with the PSDIraq's strategy to consolidate discussions and opinions to address critical issues, including climate change. The floor was then opened to the participants.



### Dr. Nizar Al-Kubaisi - Agricultural Expert, Food and Agriculture Organization - Ministry of Agriculture:

- We have discussed climate change in many local and international sessions since 2009, focusing on temperature changes and their impact on Iraq's economic and social environment.
- The International Bank held a conference to support the Iraqi marshlands, emphasizing water scarcity, quality, and its impact on the agricultural sector.
- International law lacks a concept called "water rights," and each country has the right to manage its natural resources. Water is as essential as oil.

- Our real problem lies in consumption, as Iraq consumes large amounts of water. Without changing our water consumption patterns, Iraq will become a poor country in the future.
- We have extensive studies on climate change and many experts; what is lacking is practical implementation. We have two options: negotiate with upstream countries or change our water consumption patterns.

### ■ Mehdi Bahar Al-Ulum - Project Manager of Iraq's Water Observatory:

- The Iraq Water Observatory project, a collaboration between the Scientific Institute for Postgraduate Studies and the Bahr Al-Aloom Institute for Dialogue, focuses on climate change, water scarcity, and environmental and agricultural challenges.
- The project emphasizes the need for international cooperation and identifies internal and external challenges, highlighting a lack of coordination between the center and the region on water-related issues.
- Iraq lacks a supreme water council to formulate effective policies addressing water issues.
- The goal should be to create regional cooperation to gather stakeholders, identify commonalities, and build upon them.
- The project held a conference with the Iranian side, followed by a meeting in Tehran, resulting in joint reports to be announced soon. Similar steps will be taken with the Turkish side.
- The project adopts various opinions, including the flexible handling of climate changes by Iraq and leveraging the Central Bank's green economy initiative. It also emphasizes developing early warning systems for climate changes and adopting modern technology.



### ■ Qutaiba Jawad Kadhim - Project Director of Iraq's Environmental Observatory:

- The observatory conducted a survey to identify various environmental problems in Iraq. They are developing an application for citizens to diagnose and report environmental problems and violations.
- Urgent government seriousness is needed to change the environmental reality. Multiple pressure tools, alliances, networks, and their functions to press the government for policy changes in water and agriculture are essential.
- Although some executive bodies positively responded to the idea of the website, there is no possibility of collaboration due to a lack of cooperation from government entities in disseminating procedures related to reports and violations.
- Some government entities, including the Ministry of Health, significantly contribute to environmental pollution by disposing of waste in rivers.



### ■ Dareed Al-Anzi - Economic Expert with a Focus on Climate Change:

- We lack clear laws and policies for water regarding storage and consumption.
- There are alternative solutions like artificial rain, applied by around 99 countries globally. Previous experiences with cloud seeding were not positive due to the use of chemicals. However, using Carbon Dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) crystals for cloud seeding suggests it doesn't cause environmental harm.
- Water consumption in Iraq is excessively high, whether for agriculture or personal use. It is crucial to have laws regulating consumption, storage, and preventing encroachments on rivers and lakes.



- I propose transferring the issue of environmental waste management to the Ministry of Agriculture, which can convert it into organic fertilizers instead of chemicals.
- Some provinces, particularly Babil and Maysan, have been significantly affected by environmental pollution. Basra, collecting the waste from all Iraqi rivers, faces additional pollution from mining and oil extraction.

#### ■ Dr. Hameed Al-Salehi - Academic:

- The water file, especially with Turkey, is dominated more by political aspects than technical ones.
- During Minister Hassan Al-Janabi's term in the Ministry of Water Resources, the idea of establishing a water police force was proposed to hold accountable water consumption and violations.



- The state should adopt an innovative policy to address water scarcity, considering the global concept of "water footprint" to provide accurate data for policymakers.
- It is essential to engage civil society organizations and individuals to create pressure groups influencing other countries to support government efforts.
- The Ministry of Water Resources has started developing a strategy for water resources and has a dedicated section for climate change.

#### ■ Sara Jassim - Climate Horizons Volunteer Team:

- Rural women are the most affected by climate change.
- Iraq lacks a clear, explicit database on climate change, often relying on international organizations' data.
- We created a climate-induced displacement map to conduct a census of displacement due to climate change in various Iraqi provinces. However, obtaining information was challenging due to the non-cooperation of multiple entities, including local authorities.





### ■ Dr. Amar Ibrahim - Bahr Al-Aloom Foundation:

- Focus should be on the outcomes of workshops and dialogues on climate change, turning problems into research topics for postgraduate students. Capacity development should be emphasized.
- We facilitated connections between journalists and decision-makers through workshops and training sessions, resulting in a recommendation to establish an environmental media alliance. We are in the process of forming this alliance and are open to collaborating with PSDIraq as a partner.



### ■ Jawad Al-Khaykani - Director of the Energy and Water Department at the Nahrain Center for Strategic Studies:

- The technical negotiating team faces more political issues than technical ones.
- The current government's direction is positive, with regular monthly meetings with the Prime Minister to follow up on negotiations with neighboring countries.
- The water file is political, and no international law forces Turkey or Iran to provide us with water for free.
- The Iraqi negotiating team is currently developing a strategy with the assistance of the United Nations mission.
- International organizations can assist in training and developing strategies, but the decision is purely Iraqi. Iraq has various pressure tools, with the volume of trade dealing with Iraq being \$23 billion.





- The Ministry of Agriculture is the largest water consumer, using around 75-80% of Iraq's water. The ministry lacks a strategy for agricultural development and irrigation methods.
- There are tensions in the water file between the Ministry of Water Resources, Ministry of Agriculture, and Ministry of Environment. However, there are signs of cooperation among ministries in the current cabinet.
- Iraq has Law No. 27 of 2009 for the protection and improvement of the environment, which includes establishing environmental police.
- There is a need to transform the environmental department under the Civil Defense Directorate into a directorate directly linked to the Minister of Interior.

#### ■ **Mohammed Al-Hakim - Fellow, Iraq Policies Program - Third Cycle - Specialized in Environmental and Climate Issues:**

- We need comprehensive awareness about climate change. People wrongly believe that addressing climate change starts with afforestation. In reality, tackling climate change and its impacts on various sectors requires a series of awareness programs.
- The environmental protection law needs amendment to include green economy aspects. Incorporating green economy practices in our daily lives, such as reducing paper and plastic consumption, is essential.
- Environmental awareness must be integrated into school and university curricula. Innovative approaches are needed for societal awareness and developing citizens' sense of responsibility.

- Many graduates specialize in agriculture and the environment. It's crucial to provide tax exemptions related to environmental issues, similar to those for electric cars.



#### ■ **Al-Hamza Laith - Civil Activist and Member of the "Ejja Dorna" Team:**

- We work on climate change issues and have held several dialogues with decision-makers. Climate change is a global problem, primarily manifested in rising temperatures and water scarcity. Effective awareness through influencers in social media and other platforms is crucial in combating climate change effects.



#### ■ **Aqeel Qasim - Researcher in Public Administration Affairs:**

- The impacts of climate change are connected to most sectors. While Iraq is significantly affected by water scarcity, other issues, especially environmental pollution, require study and attention.
- Previous and current government measures fall short of the necessary ambition given the scale of the problem. Climate change has always been seen as a secondary, although it should be a top priority.
- There are multiple problems, not just water; carbon emissions, environmental pollution, and internal water pollution are Iraqi responsibilities, not neighboring countries.

### ■ Dr. Khaled Abdul-Allah - Former Dean of the College of Political Science - Al-Mustansiriya University:

- Many strategies and policies have been written but lack real implementation due to bureaucratic obstacles. Administrative bureaucracy and conflicts between state institutions, along with our inability to negotiate with neighboring countries, result from a lack of political will.
- We have multiple problems, not just water. We have an issue with the Turkish side, where the Paris Commercial Court ruled in Iraq's favor with \$1.5 billion. Negotiations are ongoing to turn this into projects through Turkish companies, including projects for river channel lining, modern irrigation, and waste recycling. Iraq seeks a strategic partnership with Turkey encompassing all sectors, not just water.
- Regarding awareness, we need to start from kindergarten, focusing on younger generations. Turkey and Iran do not recognize international law regarding rivers like the Tigris and Euphrates, considering them internal rather than international, based on the 1975 Algiers Agreement. Iraq rejected this agreement after 2003, especially regarding water, and the Iranian side is pressuring Iraq to recognize the agreement. However, recognition goes against Iraq's interests.
- Water is a national asset. When writing the strategy, goals must be set, and the strategy should be followed through with a monitoring and control team.



## Recommendations

- Form an environmental alliance of civil society organizations to participate and influence climate policies, coordinating with climate-focused organizations and contributing to awareness of climate change impacts and coping mechanisms.
- Expedite the establishment of the Supreme Water Council as an entity specialized in formulating and monitoring water policies.
- Transform the environmental department linked to the Civil Defense Directorate into a general directorate under the Minister of Interior, activating environmental police to remove and limit environmental encroachments.
- Refrain from politicizing the negotiation team and forming an independent, professional team.



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