

## RESULTS SUMMARY

### Enhanced Economic and Social Inclusion of Vulnerable Iraqi People

Author: Danish Refugee Council (2024)

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PROJECT	<b>Title:</b>	Enhanced Economic and Social Inclusion of Vulnerable Iraqi People Through Equitable and Sustainable Agriculture and Food Market Systems' Growth
	<b>Partner:</b>	The Agriculture Department, the Department of Extension
	<b>Country:</b>	Iraq (Diyala Governorate)
	<b>Period:</b>	2023 - ongoing

CHANGE	<p>DRC is piloting an Inclusive Systems Approach (ISA) in Diyala Governorate, Iraq to promote social and economic inclusion of returnees, by incentivizing inclusive economic recovery and social cohesion within local livelihood systems. This approach shifts away from direct service delivery, focusing instead on enabling systemic change through the engagement of local actors. Promising evidence emerged from the production and utilization of high-quality vermicompost by farmers to address climate resilience and resource scarcity issues. The government began promoting vermicompost as an environmentally friendly alternative to chemical fertilizers by training entrepreneurs and farmers and distributing initial supplies. In parallel, local entrepreneurs started to actively produce vermicompost and supply it to farmers independently. These developments signal growing ownership and momentum among system actors, proving ISA's potential as a viable and scalable approach for long-term, locally driven change.</p>
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CONTEXT	<p>Diyala Governorate faces complex challenges stemming from conflict, displacement, climate stress, and economic decline. As an agricultural governorate, Diyala now struggles with declining soil fertility, inefficient water use, and outdated farming practices. Fertile lands are increasingly sold and converted into residential plots due to population pressures, real estate speculation, and weak regulatory enforcement, heavily impacting the agricultural economy and local production. The collapse of local farming, limited private sector investment, and high levels of unemployment (especially among returnees) have severely constrained reintegration. These stressors erode social cohesion and increase the risk of renewed displacement.</p>
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CONTRIBUTION	<p>DRC facilitated the piloting of the proposed intervention by combining grant funding for the establishment of pilot plots with targeted engagement to encourage market actor participation. Since the successful pilot, DRC has facilitated the sensitization of the pilot to the Department of Extension who has adopted the piloted service package. DRC has also advocated for the approach with the Department of Agriculture and lead farmers to expand vermicompost production, boost customer demand and increase policy support for alternatives to chemical fertilizers. If successful, farmers will gain access to an affordable alternative to chemical fertilizers that improves soil health, reduces cost, and consequently increases income and self-reliance – factors that contribute to social cohesion.</p>
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IMAGES	 <p><i>The vermicompost expert during the establishment of the pilot farm.</i></p>	 <p><i>Vermicompost expert training the extension center's staff on worms composting.</i></p>
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## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

### ACTIVITIES

The intervention followed a phased model. First, DRC partnered with the Department of Extension to establish a production unit to procure vermicompost and a demonstration plot to train extension staff, agronomists and farmers in vermicomposting techniques. Next, collaboration with the Department of Agriculture will lead to the development of a larger production facility and expanded farmer training. In the final phase, DRC will support 25 lead farmers and agronomists to establish decentralized vermicompost production units for both personal use and commercial sale. This model aims to build local capacity, increase farmer access to climate-friendly inputs, and lay the foundation for a self-sustaining, scalable supply system driven by local actors.

### LESSONS

The program highlighted the importance of long-term presence and consistent engagement to build trust with local actors and shift expectations away from direct aid. Investing time in co-design and systems analysis early on enabled faster and more effective implementation later on, particularly due to ownership of the design by local actors. Grant financing proved valuable for piloting innovative models in fragile contexts, helping to de-risk new approaches and attract future investment. However, for such approaches to take root, sustained funding and internal operational adjustments are essential. DRC is now embedding lessons from this program into its organizational strategies to support a more systematized adoption of the ISA across its global programming.

### EVIDENCE

The co-delivered pilot between the Department of Extension and DRC consisted of training 730 people (37 extension center staff, 160 agronomists, and 535 farmers) in vermicomposting techniques and producing and distributing 500kg of quality vermicompost. In parallel, the vermicompost extension center achieved positive trial results in terms of seed quality, cultivation resistance and productivity. This program has increased farmers' knowledge of and demand for vermicomposting and consequently incentivized the center to continue producing vermicompost and independently train an additional 500 farmers in 2025. Positive signs of adaptation are emerging, with six trained agronomists independently producing vermicompost, and the Agriculture Department now partnering with DRC to establish a larger production facility in response to the encouraging results. The Government has also announced plans to independently replicate the model across all Governorates without support from this program—an early and promising indicator of potential system-wide scale-up.

### DOMAINS

*Development strategy priorities:*

*Changes in the lives of people facing poverty, marginalisation or vulnerability*

X

*Changes in laws, policies and practices that affect people's rights*

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*Changes in the capacity of organisations and communities to support rights*

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*Changes in partnerships and collaborations that support people's rights*

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*Changes in participation of groups facing poverty, marginalisation or vulnerability*

X

*Changes in local leadership of development and humanitarian work*

X