Social Cohesion Assessment in Ninewa and Duhok

Achieving socio-economic stability of Returnees, Host community, and IDPs in Iraq (ASET)
October 2022
# Contents

1. AVSI Iraq ................................................................. 3
2. Introduction ............................................................... 3
3. Objective ..................................................................... 4
4. Methodology ............................................................... 4
   Safety, well-being, emotions and trust ............................... 5
   Bonding and Bridging .................................................. 5
   Data collection .......................................................... 5
   Sample ....................................................................... 5
   Limitations ............................................................... 6
5. Findings ................................................................. 6
   A. General information .................................................. 6
      Demographics of the sample ........................................ 6
      Frequency of park use ................................................ 8
   B. Safety ...................................................................... 9
      Feeling of safety in the park and its surrounding ............... 9
   C. Well-being ............................................................. 11
   D. Emotion ................................................................... 12
   E. Trust ....................................................................... 13
   F. Bonding and Bridging .................................................. 13
      Feelings toward in-group and out-group communities .......... 14
      Bonding ................................................................... 14
      Bridging ................................................................... 15
6. Conclusion ................................................................. 16
   Indicators ..................................................................... 16
   General observation ...................................................... 17
7. Recommendation and lessons learned ................................ 17
   Trust ......................................................................... 17
   social cohesion among children ....................................... 18
   Incorporate more qualitative data ..................................... 18
1. AVSI | Iraq

AVSI Foundation is an international non-profit organization, founded in Italy in 1972, and has long-term experience delivering development and emergency relief projects in over 39 countries. In Iraq, AVSI has been present since 1991 and started implementing emergency activities in the Kurdistan Region in 2015, following the humanitarian crisis. As of 2022, AVSI has offices in Ninewa, Baghdad, Duhok, Erbil (local HQ), and Sulaymaniyah, and works closely with various ministries, local authorities, civil society organizations, and bilateral and multilateral donors. These include the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS), UNICEF, the State Department’s Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM), the Ministry of Education (MEHE) in Iraq, the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) in Iraq and Kurdistan, the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs (MoLSA) in Kurdistan, the Ministry of Youth and Sports (MoYS) in Kurdistan, and the Ministry of Health (MoH) in Iraq and Kurdistan.

AVSI designs its multi-sectoral interventions in line with the Iraqi Humanitarian Response Plan and the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan for the Syrian Crisis, mainly in the fields of Education, Livelihoods, and Health. Additionally, AVSI is an active member of the NGO Coordination Committee for Iraq, the Protection and Camp Coordination and Camp Management Committee, and the Emergency Livelihoods, Food Security, Al-Hamdaniya Cluster Committee.

2. Introduction

The Achieving Socio-Economic Stability of Returnees, Host community, and IDPs in Iraq (ASET) is a two-year intervention (2020 – 2022) funded by the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM). The goal of ASET is to enhance the socio-economic resilience of vulnerable returnees, IDPs and the host community in Nineveh and Duhok governorates. ASET has reached 10,300 beneficiaries directly (3,708 returnees, 5,047 IDPs, and 1,545 host communities), and 20,000 individuals indirectly.

Activities implemented in the project include:

1- Nineveh Governorate

A- Technical training on the following sectors: cow breeding, beekeeping, irrigation system, business training, and life skills training.
B- Reactivation of agricultural and animal production business
C- Improve existing irrigation systems
D- Restoring public gardens
E- Awareness campaign
F- Legal support to the Association of Farmers, Livestock Owners and Technicians (AFLT)

2- Duhok Governorate

A- Training activities: life skills training, training on flower and ornamental plant production, production of agricultural substrate, business training,
B- Greenhouse production of flowers and ornamental plants
C- Producing mushroom substrate
D- Restoring public gardens
One of the key interventions of ASET is the rehabilitation of community gardens to promote, strengthen, and facilitate social cohesion among different communities leading to positive neighborhood norms and social networks. In collaboration with local authorities, ASET rehabilitated public community gardens in the municipalities of Al-Hamdaniya, Bartella, Nimrud, Sharia, and Shekhan. The activity enabled social integration among different communities (returnees of different groups and religions in Al-Hamdaniya, and host community and IDPs in Duhok), making it a concrete initiative to enhance belongingness and improve services at the community level. It created a safe common space where the most vulnerable groups of the community (women and children) and families with different backgrounds can gather. Kindergartens and schools near the intervention area also use the spaces for different activities.

The assessment was designed to capture perceptions of returnees, IDPs, and host communities, using a mixed method approach that incorporates both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods. This methodology will allow AVSI to capture a more nuanced understanding of the social cohesion dynamics. It will primarily focus on the horizontal dimension (Citizen-Citizen) present in Al-Hamdaniya and Duhok districts. The assessment did not look at the vertical dimension (Citizen-State) of social cohesion due to the selected qualitative indicators and the sensitive and fragile relationship between the people and the state.

The assessment is based on two pillars: (1) four crucial elements of social cohesion (safety, well-being, emotion, and trust), and (2) the bonding/bridging (interaction) within and between communities.

4. Methodology

The assessment was designed to capture perceptions of returnees, IDPs, and host communities, using a mixed method approach that incorporates both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods. This methodology will allow AVSI to capture a more nuanced understanding of the social cohesion dynamics. It will primarily focus on the horizontal dimension (Citizen-Citizen) present in Al-Hamdaniya and Duhok districts. The assessment did not look at the vertical dimension (Citizen-State) of social cohesion due to the selected qualitative indicators and the sensitive and fragile relationship between the people and the state.

The assessment is based on two pillars: (1) four crucial elements of social cohesion (safety, well-being, emotion, and trust), and (2) the bonding/bridging (interaction) within and between communities.

3. Objective

The main goal of this assessment is to understand ASET’s impact of social cohesion activities in the community. One of ASET’s objectives is to foster civic engagement and social cohesion in order to create a local context that boosts business development.

Within the logical framework of the project, this assessment will measure the following three indicators:

- Indicator 3.4: 70% of beneficiaries who report an improved sense of safety and well-being at the end of the program.
- Indicator 3.5: 70% of beneficiaries who report having the opportunity to build a social capital bond (relationships formed with other residents in the neighborhood).
- Indicator 3.6: 50% of beneficiaries who report having the opportunity to build a social capital bridge (relationships formed between HC and IDPs).

In addition, AVSI is interested in using this assessment for its adaptive management process and use iterative learning to inform and improve future social cohesion activities.

1. Developing a social cohesion index for the Arab Region, Promoting Social Cohesion in the Arab Region Regional Project, April 2017, UNDP
A. Safety, well-being- emotions and trust

To measure the impact ASET has had on the local community, AVSI based its assessment on four essential elements – safety, well-being, emotion, and trust. The assessment was developed referencing a UNDP report, “Developing a social cohesion index for the Arab Region, Promoting Social Cohesion in the Arab Region Regional Project, April 2017, UNDP”. Questions were adapted to the ASET context and the target community. Contextualization and appropriateness of the questions were realized through consultation with local AVSI staff (from both targeted areas), who are members of the community.

B. Bonding and bridging

This second part of the assessment will help AVSI measure social cohesion focusing on the interaction and attitude of the different groups towards each other. To understand the bonding and bridging components, AVSI looked at three elements:

1. The identification (by observation) of different parkgoers as in-groups (people from the same community) and out-groups (people outside of their community, e.g., IDP with Host community),
2. The number of relationships formed/connections made, and
3. The relationship quality between in-groups and out-groups.

The bridging component is only analyzed in Dohuk due to the different contexts within the two targets area. This is explained in more detail in the below ‘Sample’ section.

C. Data collection

Data was collected digitally using a Kobotool box and analyzed in excel following data extraction. Data collection took place in the parks and the surrounding area at peak hours (around 6 pm) by AVSI field staff. Staff was trained on how to use the study tools such as Kobo and the questionnaire, their purpose, proper data collection best practices, and ethics by the MEAL department. Data collection was done in June 2022 under the direct supervision of the MEAL department. On average, the survey lasted no more than 10 minutes, per participant. Participation occurred voluntarily after obtaining verbal consent, and all participants were informed of their responses’ confidentiality prior to their consent to partake in the study.

Caregiver’s verbal consent was obtained when interviewing minors (below the age of 18 years old), and the child’s biodata was provided by the parents per AVSI’s child protection policy.

D. Sample

Due to the different targets set for each indicator, the AVSI team selected two samples to fulfill the objective of the evaluation. The first sample size with 393 participants is for indicator 3.4 and 3.5 (bonding), while the second sample of 331 participants is defined for indicator 3.6 (social bridging); 151 participants intersect between the two sample sizes.

Indicator 3.4 and 3.5 - bonding

All individuals at the park (both in Duhok and Al-Hamdaniya) were considered during the time of data collection. A minimum representative sample size was determined using a 5% margin of error and 95% confidence interval; the initial total sample size was 357
individuals for indicators 3.4 and 3.5 selected from both target areas. An additional 36 individuals were engaged in the assessment after expressing interest bringing the total sample size to 393 and a margin of error of 4.75%.

**Indicator 3.6 - social bridging**

This indicator looks at the relationships formed between the host community and IDPs. Al-Hamdaniya does not have IDP communities, therefore the bridging component of social cohesion was not assessed there. As a result, participants from the Al-Hamdaniya district, 242 returnees were excluded from the sample. However, 151 participants from Duhok who took part in the assessment for indicators 3.4 and 3.5 were represented in the social bridging assessment. An additional 180 individuals were engaged, reaching a total of 331 participants with a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of 5.2%.

The initial sample size for indicator 3.6 was 323 persons; 8 more individuals were included in the study after expressing interest.

**E. Limitations**

While the strength of this assessment resides in the methodology – questionnaire, sample size, and data collection process, the empirical results of this assessment must be seen in the light of a few limitations. As indicated above, social cohesion is measured on two dimensions – vertical and horizontal. However, this assessment could not look at the vertical dimension (Citizen-State) due to the different demographics in the two districts and the political complexity of the country. In addition, even though the questionnaire was developed using a standardized tool that measures social cohesion, the tool did not include qualitative data collection instruments such as Focus Group Discussions (FDG). However, the AVSI MEAL team administered open-ended questions to gather qualitative data and gain a better understanding of social issues in the community.

**5. Findings**

The findings expressed in this assessment draw heavily from the quantitative data. For better comprehension of the below results, it is recommended to refer to the questionnaires in the Annex.

**A. General information**

**Demographics of the sample**

In Duhok, 331 host communities and IDPs (139 female and 192 male) participated in the study. While in Al-Hamdaniya, 242 returnees (137 female and 105 male) were interviewed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Duhok</th>
<th>Al Hamdaniyah</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>331 participants</td>
<td>242 participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>192 male</td>
<td>139 female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>137 female</td>
<td>105 male</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The assessment mainly targeted three age groups: 18 and below, 19-45, and above 45 years old. Of the 242 returnees in Al-Hamdaniya, 88 (34 female and 54 male) were in the 18 and below age group, 91 (53 female and 38 male) in the 19-45 age group, and 63 (50 female and 13 male) in the above 45 age group. In Duhok, the sample included 47 host community participants (26 female and 21 male), and 64 IDPs (24 female and 40 male) in the 18 and below age group. There were 55 host community participants (28 female and 27 male) and 82 IDPs (35 female and 47 male) in the 19-45 age group, and 51 host community (10 female and 41 male) and 32 IDPs (16 male and 16 female) were in the above 45 age group.
The table below illustrates the detailed disaggregation of participants.

**Indicator 3.4 and 3.5**  Participants disaggregated by gender, age, and resident status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Returnees</td>
<td>IDPs</td>
<td>H.C</td>
<td>Returnees</td>
<td>IDPs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(=&lt;5)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(6-18)</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(19-25)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(26-35)</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(36-45)</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(46-55)</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(56-65)</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(65&lt;)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>137</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Indicator 3.6  Participants disaggregated by gender, age, and resident status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>IDPs</td>
<td>H.C</td>
<td>IDPs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(=&lt;5)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(6-18)</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(19-25)</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(26-35)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(36-45)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(46-55)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(56-65)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(65&lt;)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Frequency of park use**

To better understand the dynamics, uptake, and utilization of the parks by the community, the study assessed the frequency of visits to the park. Out of the 393 respondents, only one person in the community stated to have never been to the park. The park is used mainly by the youth in the age group of 6-18 (29%; n=109). Children access the parks at least 16 times per month, while the other age groups tend to visit the park between 2 to 7 times a month. 45% (n=178) of community members use the parks 2 to 7 times each month, with an average of 4 visits per month. However, looking at the total sample size, respondents utilize the parks, on average, at least 10 times per month.

While there is no significant variance in the frequency of park use by host communities, returnees, and IDPs, results show that returnees between the age of 16 and 30 and host communities between the age of 2 and 15 tend to visit the park more often than the other groups.

![10x per month communities are using the parks](10x_per_month.png)

![16x per month children are going to the parks](16x_per_month.png)
B. Safety

Feeling of safety in the park and its surrounding

Indicator 3.4 measures the perception of safety within the parks rehabilitated though ASET. This section will look at the feeling of safety (threat, perceptions, and human security) in the park and the surrounding neighborhood. It does not cover the perception of threat between communities (out-group), which will be presented within the bonding and bridging section.

Perception of safety within the park and its surrounding

Most of the research participants perceive the areas to be very safe, 83% (n=327). The feelings of safety are substantially higher for IDPs (84%) than the other groups – “very safe” responses were higher by 38 and 46 percentage point when compared to returnees and host communities, respectively.

Out of the total sample size, 95% of the host communities (n=55) and IDPs (n=89) feel safe. By contrast, of the total 393 participants, returnees feel the least safe (4%, n=15) and 100% of the returnees find the park dangerous. The majority of respondents who felt “not safe” were also returnees.
No significant element regarding safety were found when we disaggregate by gender, although men felt safer by less than 5% variance.

Feeling of safety for women and/or children alone, and at night

Women and children are the most vulnerable members of all the community groups – host communities, IDPs, and returnees. When asked what the perception is about having a woman or a child member of their family member use the park alone, only 10% felt it was “dangerous” and “not safe”. The perception of safety does not increase significantly but the feeling of “very safe” slight decreases, by 10 percentage point. There was no significant change in response to feeling of safety when using the park at night.

Being in the neighborhood with strangers

Compared to the general feeling of safety while using the park, the perception of it feeling “dangerous” and “not safe” is more prominent when solely strangers are present at 16%, 6% and 10% respectively. on average, 20% of women and 11% of men feel unsafe (dangerous and not safe). It is worth mentioning that this is the only response with significant variance between how men and women feel.
Impact of the rehabilitated parks on feeling of safety

It was important for AVSI to understand the rehabilitated parks’ effect on the community’s perception of safety. When asked if the existence of the parks increased their feeling of safety in the neighborhood, 97% agreed and/or strongly agreed. Therefore, there is a strong positive correlational between the presence of the parks and the increased feeling of safety amongst the neighborhoods.

C. Well-being

Well-being is one of the measurements of Indicator 3.4. The well-being of households and communities is a foundation to social cohesion. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) defines a socially cohesive society as one that “works towards the well-being of all its members, fights exclusion and marginalization, creates a sense of belonging, promotes trust, and offers its members the opportunity of upward mobility”.

The concept of well-being constitutes different elements for different age groups. Thus, in this section, the sample was organized into two age groups after consulting a Child Protection Specialist, young people under 15 years of age and 16 and older. Based on this categorization, the total sample size for children under 15 was 302, and 91 for individuals older than 15.

Well-being, 16 years old and older

The study used a five-point Likert scale to assess well-being. Respondents were asked to react to different statements by stating whether they strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree, or strongly disagree. Topics covered include friendship, mental health, and positive behavior in the park, among others. The statements, listed below, were developed using documentation produced by UNDP and contextualized to reflect the realities of the two districts.

1. The garden is a place of gathering with friends: 94% of the respondents agree.
2. I enjoy being in the garden because it gives me the opportunity to have a sense of freedom: 97% of respondents agree.
3. Being in the garden is good for mental health and social interaction, it also helps to build physical strength: 96% of respondents agree.
4. It is a peaceful place where one can escape the hustle and bustle of life: 94% of respondents agree.
5. I am relieved to let my family members (kids, wife, sisters) go to the garden with no sense of fear: 92% of respondents agree.
6. Being in the garden helps me build social network and interact with new people: 80% of respondents agree, while 18% of were neutral.
7. Being in the garden helps me learn about others who are different from me, learn how to listen and respond to diverse groups: 78% of respondents agree while 20% were neutral.
An average of 90% of the local community “agreed” or “strongly agreed” with the statement presented, showing that the park facilitates a sense of well-being in the community. Statements on social capital, numbers 6 and 7, were lower than the average but surpassed the target.

Children’s well-being in the park

To get a sense of children’s well-being when using the parks in the community, a specific question was asked to 91 respondents under the age of 15 who were not presented with the previous seven statements. The children had three options to choose from for their responses. 81% of children respondents stated they like the park the most because of the sense of freedom they have to play.

What do you like the most about being in the garden?

D. Emotion

To understand the community’s perception of one another, respondents were asked to express their feelings when meeting someone new in the parks. Respondents were provided a set of seven emotions to choose from to express their feelings. The majority of respondents have little to no negative emotion towards a new person they met or will meet, instead have positive emotions to a “large” or “very large” extent. An average 74% responded “not at all” to negative emotions, and an average 50% responded with “to a very large extent” to positive emotions.

No significant differences were recorded between women and men in each category, except for a 10% variance where women expressed a range of emotions in the four emotional categories – fear, compassion, affection, and respect.
Trust is one of the key factors when measuring social cohesion. It is “an important element in cementing relationships and estimating reactions to interpersonal interactions.” In order to understand the level of trust in the communities, participants were asked the following questions.

1. In your opinion, compared to the prior existence of the park, do you believe most people are trustworthy, or that one should be careful when dealing with them?
2. In your opinion, compared to the prior existence of the park, do you believe that most people would try to abuse you if they get the chance or they would act fairly?
3. In your opinion, compared to the prior existence of the park, do you believe that most of the time people try to help others or that they prioritize their interest at the expenses of others?

On average, 50% of participants responded neutrally, meaning participants had neither a positive nor a negative opinion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“Negative” emotions</th>
<th>To a very large extend</th>
<th>To a large extend</th>
<th>To a certain extent</th>
<th>To a little extend</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More fear</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More anger</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More hatred</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More contempt</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“Positive” emotions</th>
<th>To a very large extend</th>
<th>To a large extend</th>
<th>To a certain extent</th>
<th>To a little extend</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More respect</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More compassion</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More affection</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

E. Trust

This did not change significantly when disaggregated by age or gender. Subsequently, 44% of the respondents, on average, trust other people in the park and the neighborhood.

Findings for Question 1 and 3 show that women tend to trust others more than men (with a variance of 5%). For responses to Question 2, 3% of women and 11% of men thought most people would try to abuse them, with an eight-percentage point variance.

F. Bonding and Bridging

In this part of the assessment, the impact of indicators 3.5 and 3.6 of ASET is measured. As detailed in the methodology, the sample size to measure bonding and bridging is 393 and 331, respectively. This is due to the different demographics in the target areas. Findings are presented in three parts:

1. (1) in-group (within) and out-group (across) feelings within the different communities.
2. (2) quality of relationships formed.
3. (3) and the quality of bonding and bridging of the different communities who frequently visit the parks.

2. Developing a social cohesion index for the Arab Region, Promoting Social Cohesion in the Arab Region Regional Project, April 2017, UNDP
Participants are considered to belong to a group based on their status: host community, IDP, and returnees.

**Feelings toward in-group and out-group communities**

Participants were asked to express their feeling on a five-point Likert scale to six statements related to in-group and out-group communities. Scale ranged from 1 (very positive) to 5 (very negative).

In your opinion, compared to the prior existence of the park, please indicate your feelings towards the following.

Out of the 393 respondents, on average, 64% (39% “very positive” and 25% “positive”) had a positive outlook towards their communities (in-group) and other communities (out-group). Even though the positive outlook outweighs the negative, out-group bias is more prominent, with an average of 7% of participants having a “negative” and 1% “very negative” perception.

**Bonding**

Indicator 3.5: 70% of beneficiaries who report having the opportunity to build a social capital bond (to connect with other residents in the neighborhood)

**70% of beneficiaries connect with other residents in the neighborhood**

Bonding refers to the social connection and interaction of peoples of the same group or community. Results on bonding did not have significant variance between men and women, thus, gender disaggregation was not included in the assessment.

**Number of new people met (noticed in the park) within the same group/community**

Overall, 83% (n=326) of respondents met with someone in the same group/community. The host communities and IDPs meet new people within their group at a higher rate than returnees, 90%, 88%, and 79%, respectively.
Connection refers to an interaction between two individuals. Interviewees who responded “no” to the previous question were excluded from the bonding questionnaires. Our findings show that 95% (n=310) of respondents connected with the new person they met. Similarly, the host communities and IDPs connect (100% connection) with new people of the same group compared to returnees (92%).

Did you try to meet them (connect with them) outside of the park, and try to build a friendship?

- **96% of H.C and IDP**
  tried to meet new connections outside the park

- **94% of returnees**
  tried to meet new connections outside the park

Participants who responded “no” to the previous question were excluded from this section, reducing the sample size to 310. Majority of respondents (96% - HC and IDPS, and 94% - returnees) tried to connect with the new person they met outside of the park. Even though there is only a two-percentage point difference, host communities and IDPs tend to capitalize more on their social network than returnees.

### Bridging

Indicator 3.6: 50% of beneficiaries who report having the opportunity to build a social capital bridge (to connect between HC and IDPs).

Bridging refers to the social connection of individuals across different groups or communities. Because of the demographics of Al-Hamdaniya, bridging social cohesion was only assessed in Duhok. This section focuses on the findings of bridging between the host communities and IDPs in Dohuk where ASET played a major role by pairing host communities and IDPs to create a joint venture to revitalize their livelihoods. The sample size was 331 and no significant variance between men and women was found; therefore, gender disaggregation results are not included.

Number of new people met (noticed in the park) outside of the same group/community that you belong to?
Did you try to meet them (connect with them) outside of the park, and try to build a friendship with them?

**97% of respondents** said Yes

Similar to bonding, a significant majority of participants (97%) responded “yes” to having connected with the person outside of the park.

Compared to bonding, bridging responses are much more nuanced and balanced. On average, 62% (208 out of 331) of respondents have met at least one person outside their community (out-group) within the park. Findings show significant disparity (fourteen percentage point variance) between communities, with 55% of the host community and 69% of IDPs responding to meeting a person outside their community. All respondents (n=208) who met a new person outside their group also made a connection/interacted with the person. The remaining 37% (n=124) who responded “no” were not included in the analysis for interaction/connection.

6. Conclusion

The analyses presented aim to assess ASET’s impact of social cohesion activities in Ninewa and Duhok. Findings reveal the positive influence of the parks in enhancing social cohesion between and within communities. The results will inform future AVSI social cohesion activities in Iraq. In the following sections, we shed light on the main results and recommendations that have emerged.

**Indicators**

Indicator 3.4: 70% of beneficiaries who report an improved sense of safety and well-being at the end of the program.

When asked whether the presence of the park increased their feeling of safety in the neighborhood, 97% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed to the statement. Additionally, considering all statements on the feeling of safety, an average of 77% of respondents felt safe and/or very safe when visiting the parks, surpassing the project target.

We also reached the expected outcomes for the well-being component, as an average of 90% of respondents reacted positively to the seven statements regarding mental health, freedom, and networking opportunities,
amongst others. It is worth noting that social relations were lower than the average, yet still higher than the indicator target.

Indicator 3.5: 70% of beneficiaries who report having the opportunity to build a social capital bond (to connect with other residents in the neighborhood).

| 97% of beneficiaries | connected with other residents in the neighborhood |

97% of respondents recorded having the opportunity to build a social capital bond, and therefore meeting the project’s initial target. It is clear from the data that people from the same community actively try to connect with others outside of the park, and 95% of the respondents try contacting with people they meet at the park once they leave.

Indicator 3.6: 50% of beneficiaries who report having the opportunity to build a social capital bridge (to connect between HC and IDPs).

| 98% of beneficiaries | built a connection between H.C and IDP |

98% of the respondents asserted that they connect with people outside of their group/community. While this number seems relatively high, it is important to note that only 55% of respondents stated to have perceived people that are not part of their community.

General observation

On average, participants visit the park at least ten times per month. These results indicate the valuable role the parks play in stimulating social cohesion necessary for the local communities by promoting a peaceful and more harmonious co-existence. Findings also show that the horizontal relationship (citizen-to-citizen bonding) between local communities improved since the rehabilitation of the parks; these include a sense of safety, emotion, well-being, trust, and bonding-bridging.

Gender within the social cohesion

Gender was a prime focus during the assessment to understand the gender disparity in social cohesion and the study found no significant difference between men and women. The main variances were seen when measuring emotion and trust, where women were found to be more trustful and expressed a range of emotions.

Bridging in Dohuk:

Recorded results from the first component of the bridging indicator are interesting. It suggests that most local communities do not notice or meet members outside of their communities in the park (out-group) regardless of their presence; 45% of the host community does not notice that IDPs are also present in the park. On the other hand, IDPs tend to notice host community members more, with only 31% who do not. This states that there is some sense of disregard or lack of attention when it comes to noticing other members at the park.

7. Recommendation and lessons learned

Trust

Trust is a fundamental element of social cohesion between and within communities. Since 50% of responses were “neutral,” it is essential to look at the notion of trust and understand its implication within the different
Incorporate more qualitative data

It is essential to incorporate more qualitative data when measuring social behavior in order to gain a more nuanced understanding. Tools such as focus group discussions often stimulate discussions and provide unanticipated insight into how communities perceive each other. The integration of feedback and complaints received during project implementation is also a valuable tool to incorporate in future assessments.

Social cohesion among children

Although different demographic variables were taken into consideration during the assessment, a separate assessment targeting only children is beneficial due to the higher number of children using the parks. Children play a key role in social cohesion programs, particularly in the parks, and conducting a child-led social cohesion assessment is crucial.