



Women attend a horticultural training course supported by Iraqi implementing partner, Engineering Association for Development and Environment © Dheras Sultan

Impact Story | 1

Rehabilitating public space to increase access for all in Iraq

The strategic location of Mosul makes the city a melting pot of diverse cultures, ethnicities and religious beliefs, but also a target for violent extremism. The city's already limited public green space deteriorated during the 2014–2016 occupation of Mosul by Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).

Through the area-based programme Supporting Recovery and Stability in Iraq through Local Development, UN-Habitat is working to rehabilitate war-damaged houses and restore essential public services, helping the government to strengthen its institution, renewing the social contract between citizens and state.

Restoring Al Yarmouk Park through public participation

Al Yarmouk Park, once an iconic social area full of palm trees and colourful flower beds, was looted and logged during the conflict leading to a deterioration of the environment and a decrease in security in the area.

Recovering public space is a priority in Iraq, one that should always engage the community in a consultative and participatory planning approach. A 2019 focus group discussion asking older persons to identify the use of the park and the factors that led to its gradual dilapidation helped to inform and guide the rehabilitation. Children and youth also expressed their desire for playgrounds and sport activities.

The horticultural training course, which provided a mix of theoretical and practice sessions, was led by Mr. Hussamaddin Thanoon, lecturer at the College of Agriculture and Forestry, Mosul University © Shahla Alhialy



The newly trained gardeners have planted over 260 trees including 45 mature Iraqi and Washingtonia palms to replace the trees that were cut down or burned during the conflict with ISIL © Dheras Sultan

UN-Habitat is providing technical support to restore Al Yarmouk Park as a multi-purpose public space. During the first phase of rehabilitation, UN-Habitat led the construction of three new multi-use sports courts and an open-air gym that includes equipment for persons with disabilities. The boundary wall, gates and guard rooms were repaired, a new well excavated, and 10 large water storage tanks for irrigation fed by a solar-powered water pump and panel system were installed.

Construction work provided over 250 jobs for the unemployed, a priority for the government and donors such as the European Union. An intense horticultural training course provided gardening jobs to 30 vulnerable women through an experienced implementing partner. The female gardeners have planted over 500 new plants, including mature palms, pines, shrubs and fruit trees.

In 2021, playgrounds will be installed, pathways lit by solar-powered lamp posts and a central axis with fountains created, and a community hall retrofitted. Once rehabilitated, Al Yarmouk Park's 67,000 square metres will serve 500,000 people.

Transforming the space, influencing social change

Decades-long conflicts have shown how diversity can be a threat and disenfranchised youth can be negatively stereotyped and influenced by violent political and religious extremism. Public space that can host sports activities and playgrounds are known to have transformative and positive effects, improving relations between youth from different backgrounds and with varying physical abilities.

Scaling up projects like this in Mosul and nationwide will contribute to the stability and socio-economic development of Iraq.

Training and community-driven solutions are critical for sustainable development

Public open space should be available to all. The whole community, including the elderly and persons with disabilities, will have access to Al Yarmouk Park – a safe, comfortable and accessible space.

Participatory planning makes room for enthusiastic community-level commitment fostering a strong sense of ownership and well-managed public green space in the future.

Inclusive multi-purpose public space enriches the social fabric of neighbourhoods.

The strong engagement of municipal governments and local non-governmental organizations plays a pivotal role in delivering and implementing what would be otherwise top-down decisions and helps to improve capacities through practice.

Country: **Iraq**
 City: **Mosul**
 Donor: **European Union**
 National partner: **Government of Iraq**
 Implementing partners: **UN-Habitat under an overall partnership agreement with the United Nations Development Programme**
 Duration: **2019–2022**

“This training has been very special to me. We managed to tailor the sessions in a way that was suitable for a range of education levels, including that of a few who are illiterate. I had the opportunity to support some very ambitious ladies.”

Hussamaddin Thanoon, lecturer at the College of Agriculture and Forestry at Mosul University

“I was jobless, sitting at home depressed with no plans. The training brought back hope in my life. I have learned new skills that will help me to find a job in the park or elsewhere.”

Nafila Mohammed Ali, an unemployed woman who participated in the training

Over 500 new plants including mature palms, pines, shrubs and fruit trees have been planted following an intense horticultural training course that provided 30 gardening jobs to vulnerable women.