



---

**Shaped by trauma, history and hope –**

**audiences' perceptions of social cohesion coverage in Ninewah, Iraq**

---

MiCT Research Report / by Aida Kaisy

## Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	2
2. The Research Questions and Methodology.....	4
3. Executive Summary.....	7
4. Research Findings.....	9
5. Conclusions.....	28
Appendix 1 of media platforms referenced in the report .....	31
Appendix 2 of audience feedback on <i>Tafael</i> output .....	35

## 1. Introduction

The following report describes findings from a research that was carried out in July/ August 2020 and March 2021 by MiCT on behalf of Canal France International (CFI). The aim of this research was to gain insight into perceptions of media content pertaining to issues of reconstruction, reconciliation and post-crisis coverage among local audiences in Ninewah. Moreover, the study aimed to shed light on the media expectations among citizens of Ninewah and how they assess the performance of their local media. Finally, the exercise contributed to the evaluation of journalistic content on social cohesion in Ninewah deriving from a media support project (Tafael) implemented by CFI in Iraq. The study looked at key factors that might be informing media consumption habits and media assessment such as trust in the media, perceived bias, knowledge about media ownership and opinion formation habits.

The study was a qualitative exercise carried out with audiences across the Iraqi province of Ninewah. Ninewah is one of the recently liberated post-IS territories and has particular nuances with regards to socio-cultural attitudes and engagement in political processes in Iraq. Ninewah has suffered much physical destruction since 2014 and the process of rebuilding has been slow for a number of internal political and economic reasons. Social cohesion is under tangible stress partly due to the large number of families with perceived ISIS affiliations, many of which live in camps and wait for opportunities to return to their homes. They are however not very welcomed among their former neighbors. The incursion of IS into Ninewah also saw a number of Ninewah's long-standing communities such as Yazedis and Christians driven out their homes. Their return and status as Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) remain contested as does the changing demography of Ninewah, once considered to be one of Iraq's most diverse provinces.

Participants to the focus group discussions (FGDs) were recruited against a set of criteria that accounted for age, gender and socio-economic status. It is likely that the majority of the participants in the groups represented the Sunni religious sect due to the religious make-up of inhabitants of Ninewah. The rationale for this is explained in more detail in the "Stakeholder and Methodology" section below.

A number of key events informed this study and the responses of participants in the focus groups. There have been ongoing protests against corruption across many cities in Iraq which increased in October 2019. While Mosul and Ninewah have not seen the level of protesting that other cities such as Baghdad and Basra have, there has been a national consensus around the issues and demands that the protesters have raised. At various points in the protest movement, protestors and activists have been attacked by government forces and government sponsored paramilitary groups, known as the *Hashd Al Shaabi*, Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF) and tens of thousands have been injured or killed. Militia-led violence has also escalated against activists and human rights defenders in general. On the 6<sup>th</sup> of July 2020, a leading political analyst, Hisham Al-Hashimi was shot dead in Baghdad by unidentified gunmen suspected to be affiliated to Iran-backed militias. Participants in the first set of focus groups (July/August 2020) referred to the killing of Al-Hashimi and the increased environment of violence and insecurity. The current government in Iraq, led by Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhimi since May 2020, have made some attempts to push back against the levels of impunity that are allowing substate violence to take place but at that time it remained to be seen if he would be successful. Participants in the first set of focus groups referenced the new government and Al-Kadhimi's emerging role in Iraq as reasons for their national news consumption.

The second set of FGDs took place a few days after the visit of Pope Francis to Iraq which included a trip to Mosul, formerly home to one of the world's oldest Christian communities. Participants in these groups referenced the historic visit in particular with relation to coverage of issues related to social cohesion. They also made reference to elections, politicians and media likely as a result of planned national elections for October 2021.

The study took place during the Covid-19 pandemic and amidst escalating cases and deaths from the virus across Iraq. Lockdown restrictions were in place across the country and many Iraqis were feeling frustration with the lack of health and economic infrastructure to deal with the crisis. A number of social issues, such as domestic and gender-based violence and suicide, have been exacerbated as a result of these combined conditions. These are all underlying in the responses of the participants.

## 2. The Research Question and Methodology

This report assesses the findings from two sets of focus groups to understand audience attitudes towards the media and coverage of issues related to social cohesion. The study also addresses some of the key events that have taken place in Ninewah and Iraq that might have impacted on stakeholder perceptions, namely the defeat of IS, an apparent reduction in sectarian division, a recent change in government and on-going civilian protests and anti-government sentiment as well as perceptions of handling of the coronavirus crisis. Based on this, the research question was set as the following:

**What are the audiences' expectations towards coverage of issues related to social cohesion in Ninewah and how is current coverage assessed by local audiences?**

The research breaks down into four key questions:

1. What are stakeholders' perceptions of the overall media landscape in Iraq?
2. How does this impact on their media consumption habits?
3. What are their expectations of the media in covering issues related to social cohesion?
4. How are they forming their opinions on news and current events?

### Stakeholders and Methodology

A total of eight online focus groups were conducted, all with citizens from across Ninewah, four in July/August 2020 and four in March 2021. The first set of groups were divided evenly across women and men. Two of the groups were split by gender and comprised of participants from the lower socio-economic class bracket. The other two groups were mixed gender and comprised of students. By grouping participants according to gender and class, we avoided that men dominated women in the discussion, or speakers with academic background silenced speakers from a lower level class background. In the students group however we assumed more progressive attitudes and less fear to talk among women and hence opted for mixed gender. The second set of groups were all mixed gender and there was a greater inclusion of male participants for issues related to recruitment. Two of the groups were higher education backgrounds and two were lower. There was representation from media

practitioners and journalists in both sets of focus groups although this was more pronounced and impacted on responses in the second set.

The groups were conducted online, using the Zoom platform, due to the travel restrictions that had been imposed in Iraq as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. Each group comprised of four or five participants as it was advised that online focus groups would be more dynamic and manageable with less people. Audiences were randomly selected based on the above criteria and invited to participate.

The focus group discussion method was chosen because it enabled audiences from similar backgrounds to engage in conversations about topics that were relevant to them and their community, and to identify areas where they agree, or disagree. A discussion guide was developed by project stakeholders and a local moderator was chosen to lead the focus group discussions. As well as open discussion questions, the participants were shown two clips chosen by the project to reflect some of the key debates in Ninewah.

In the first set of FGDs, the first clip was a report taken from the national television channel, *Biladi*, which examined the role that the *Hashd Al Shaabi* were playing in proving security in Ninewah. This is a highly controversial topic in the region as the *Hashd Al Shaabi* are associated with Iran-backed Shia militias and there have been ongoing reports of attacks on Sunni communities under their protection. The second clip, taken from national television channel Al Rasheed, covers the topic of the return of Christian communities to Ninewah. Although less controversial, this topic is still one that resonates across Iraq, formerly home to one of the largest Christian populations in the MENA region. These discussions were documented through audio recordings and transcribed for analysis.

In the second set of FGDs, participants were shown a selection of content that had been created with support from the Canal France International project *Tafael*. These clips were commissioned to focus specifically on issues of significance to social cohesion in Ninewah.

The clips focused on the following topics:

- *Awda* is a report about the devastating impact that destruction of infrastructure by ISIS had on different communities in Ninewah.
- The story about Karemlesh, an Assyrian town just outside of Mosul in which different sects coexist peacefully. It is told by a young local who speaks to local personalities, including a priest and local Christians, about its history and social attitudes.

- A shortfilm about media outlets in Mosul that are specialized in covering minority issues; journalists from radio station Ezidi24 are interviewed about the mission and impact of that station on social cohesion in Mosul.
- A clip about journalists in Mosul that believe to have an important role in rebuilding society and promoting social cohesion after the trauma imposed by ISIS. The main speaker is a journalist from radio station al-Ghad. He also talks about ISIS propaganda and the need for 'counter media' after the liberation of Mosul.

The data was collected and analysed by an independent research consultant who has experience of research and analysis of the media in Iraq. A framework analysis was carried out to examine the responses from the participants and summarised by emerging themes. In framework analysis we first gather all statements pertaining to one research questions. By comparing all statements similarities and differences are identified that allow again to cluster and distinguish types of statements. Key findings were validated by triangulating between focus group discussions and contextual knowledge of the media sector and context of Ninewah. Triangulation is a means of using more than one data source in order to verify and validate the findings from the discussions. This served to combine methodical scrutiny of data alongside the contextual knowledge that would allow for the meaningful and nuanced findings.

### 3. Executive Summary

There was an overwhelming recognition that the media environment in Iraq is highly politicised and that most channels are all strongly aligned to their funders and related political parties. Their sources, content and narratives relate to these political alignments accordingly. The highly politicised media landscape in Iraq was seen to be one of the main sources of political instability and a deterrent to social cohesion in Iraq. *Al Sharqiya* and *Dijla* television channels were the most consumed national mainstream media platforms. Neither were considered independent. Channels with strong political affiliations were viewed highly negatively by all of the groups.

While local media in Ninewah were seen to be less politicised and were widely consumed, some were also subject to problematics of nepotism and corruption as well as a lack of professionalism and capacity. International channels were considered to be more professional and analytical and were referenced as a good source of news verification.

*Radio Al Ghad* and *Mosuliya TV* were the most consumed traditional local media channels by participants. *Radio Al Ghad* is highly trusted and considered to operate more professionally, producing content that is relevant and useful to citizens of Ninewah.

Social media is a dominant source of news although levels of trust in social media channels were seemingly very low. Popular platforms and social media accounts include *Ain Al Mosul* and *Yalla*. Official pages and accounts of ministries and government institutions were used to verify news.

Trust in the media is formed based on a channel's perceived levels of accuracy, first and foremost, although use of official sources as well as awareness of partisanship were also key factors in defining trust amongst the participants. In general, participants lamented over-use of citizens as sources and demanded greater inclusion of official sources and experts in the coverage. In that same vein, social media pages of official institutions were widely discussed as trustworthy sources.

Media literacy levels were fairly high amongst the participants, who demonstrated a good understanding of media principles such as sourcing and impartiality as well as high levels of knowledge of media ownership in Iraq. This was more pronounced amongst the student groups.



There was a concern of the lack of coverage of issues related to social cohesion. The coverage that was referenced was considered to be of a low standard, politicised and lacking in constructive or positive stories. Participants were particularly upset about the medias' focus on negative issues, namely sectarian divide in Ninewah. Participants also felt that the paucity of content had become more apparent during the current Covid-19 pandemic. There was also some concern for the media's greater focus on Mosul rather than the wider communities and regions of Ninewah.

Friends and family remain key sources of news verification and modes by which opinions are formed and deliberated. As a most recent trend, some of this interaction is taking place now in WhatsApp groups. The media itself are playing a lesser role in enabling the debate and deliberation of key events and political processes.

There appears to be little difference in attitudes towards media coverage of social cohesion amongst the different gender groups. However, compared to the low level education groups, students demonstrated a greater awareness of the media's role in enabling or hindering communal relations in Ninewah.

#### 4. Research Findings

##### **The highly politicised media landscape in Iraq was seen to be one of the main sources of political instability and a deterrent to social cohesion in Iraq**

Across the board, there was an overwhelming consensus that the national media environment was highly politicised and partisan and was contributing to the overall lack of security in Iraq. Participants, male and female, educated and low socio-economic class across Ninewah, saw all of the national media as subject to narrative control by their owners, the political parties to which these owners are affiliated and those in power. This has created an environment where corruption and *wasta*, nepotism, is seen to dominate the media's practices and there was a noted concern around the paucity of might be viewed to be impartial accurate content.

*Trust in media has been lost across all of the Iraqi population. I don't want to get involved in politics and these things but you know that news gets published to either support certain faction or to bring certain people down*

Male, low education level

*There is no independent media in Mosul and Iraq. They are not just liars but they try to intimidate people.*

Female, student

*Some channels only publish what they are asked to because they are connected to political parties.*

Female, low education level

*Today, there is no way that a media outlet would open if there wasn't tied to a specific group or side. Everyone in the institution works according to that person's agenda.*

Female, high education level

National media platforms and television channels were seen to adapt their narratives according to the political leanings of their benefactors. Many of the participants felt that those political affiliations were evident in the content of the channels. They noted that guests were chosen to reflect the channel's narrative and that sectarian and political framing was clear when watching television.

*I am always afraid when the channel is linked to a party. I do know most of the owners of the channels. I can tell from the reporting and the way that they cover topics. They do not have diversity and they make things sectarian. Also, you can tell about political leanings from the clothes that the presenters wear and the words they chose.*

Female, low education level

*We do know who owns the Iraqi channels and therefore where their loyalties are. So, we make sure to try and avoid these channels. Their speech is sectarian and they are against the community and the country. There are channels where we can understand their politics based on their analysis and their choice of words. For example, with coverage of the protests, some channels use the word 'martyr' and others just say 'killed'. From this you can tell who they are linked too.*

Female, student

Participants referenced coverage of the ongoing protest movement in Iraq as a key marker of a media platform's affiliation. *Al Iraqiya*, the publicly funded national broadcaster, was seen to be controlled by the government and none of the participants viewed it as accurate or

trustworthy. This assessment is contrasting the public service mandate that *al Iraqiya* is officially subject to. At the same time it is in line with the overall perception of the Iraqi government and political classes as self-serving and driven by corruption and greed. As mentioned above, it is too early for the new PM Mustapha Al Kadhimmi to have had an impact on public opinion of the Iraqi government; therefore, these attitudes towards politicians and those in power are long held as are attitudes towards *Al Iraqiya*.

*I don't trust media that are fixed to one side. Al Iraqiya doesn't speak in the name of the street, just for those who are sitting in the chair of power. It is so political and doesn't have a dot of trust.*

Female, student

Upcoming national elections, planned for October 2021, and the role of the media in an election was also referenced by the second set of groups in particular. There was a demonstrable understanding of how politicians might use their own media platforms to gain votes. This likely reflects the current disillusionment with election processes in Iraq following the postponement of early elections in January 2021. The facilitation of early elections was one of the demands of the protest movement and their continued delay is seen to be a reflection of the lack of official concern with addressing the needs of the Iraqi people. This likely also reflect memories of media instrumentalization by parties during past elections. Frustrations with the lack of possibility for change are high.

*Each channel is currently run or backed by an official. Which I expect will help them with elections. Media must reach all sects and to everyone. But sadly, here we are partial.*

Female, higher education level

*Each politician has several fake pages under his name and under different provinces of where he is looking for elections.*

Male, higher education level

*Al Sharqiya* and *Dijla* channels were the most cited national television stations amongst the participants. Both were seen to have some level of balance and professionalism although were not considered to be independent. *Al Sharqiya* was considered to have become less professional more recently although it is also considered to be the first to the news which participants cited as a reason for its popularity. *Dijla* is a channel that has become increasingly popular in Iraq. Both were considered to be in opposition of the overriding government narrative. Interestingly, participants noted that while these channels displayed professional journalism skills, this was undermined by their overtly partisan content and evidence of political leanings.

### **Despite perceived bias local media are more trusted than national channels**

Local media were seen to be more trusted and relevant to the participants in Ninewah. Participants expressed higher levels of trust in their local platforms because they felt that they represented the needs and diversity of the province as well as the people on the street. The two most referenced platforms were *Radio Al Ghad* and *Mosuliya TV*, both for their traditional and social media channels. *Radio Al Ghad* was notably more trusted which is in line with other qualitative and quantitative studies that have been conducted on media consumption in Ninewah (BBC Media Action 2018). This trust seemed to be defined by their diverse coverage and focus on local events and issues relevant to Ninewah and Mosul in particular. *Mosuliya TV* was acclaimed for its longstanding presence in Ninewah but some of the participants, particularly in the student groups considered it be agenda-driven and less professional.

*Radio Ghad is my guide. Whatever it broadcasts is always correct. Other pages copy what Al Ghad says with a few changed words.*

Female, low education level

*Radio Al Ghad is the most trustworthy channel. Their analysis is good and they focus on issues related to peaceful coexistence. It is not like the rest of the channels. I trust them because, when I follow them, I feel that they don't see Mosul as a place for one sect only or represent certain people in Mosul. I hear news about Muslims, Christians, Yazidis and I feel like Mosul is for everyone not just for one particular group. Even in their news, I feel like they check the accuracy of their news before broadcasting. They also have a very 'shaabi' (of the people) social media presence and channels.*

Male, low education level

*We mainly watch the news on Mosuliya TV because we watch television more than the social media channels. We watch the news on Mosuliya especially in the time of the coronavirus so we can see what the number of cases is. This has had a huge impact on us in Mosul, the rising number of deaths. We have emerged out of the crisis with Daesh and we want to see the development that is happening in our area. We see these developments via Mosuliya, the bridges, the opening of buildings, the building of new hospitals. I don't trust them implicitly but they do cover the news that I want to hear and 50% of it I think is probably accurate.*

Male, low education level

### **Participants were particularly upset about the medias' focus on negative issues, namely sectarian divide in Ninewah**

Other national and local channels were seen to contribute to what was taken to be a divisive sectarian representation of life in Ninewah. Participants attributed this to the political agendas of the channels and recognise the impact that partisan media is having on reporting on social cohesion and stability in Ninewah. Participants were particularly upset about the medias' focus on negative issues and developments:

*There are some channels in Mosul, such as Al Mosuliya and Ninewah Al Ghad, that only show negative stories. They show that the city is still destroyed and that people are still dying. People watch them and think that Mosul is still sectarian. It is in fact the opposite and social cohesion does exist but they never report this.*

Female, student

*Instead of focusing on issues such as the Hashd Al Shaabi, we should be focusing on other more positive topics, on people who are working and carrying on with life, avoiding politics and sectarianism. There is social cohesion and unity in our community and they should be reporting this.*

Male, student

One participant however lamented the opposite, i.e. the focus on only positive issues with the aim to promote the achievements of one particular party or politician:

*Media institutions in Mosul, especially satellites television, don't try to portray the correct picture/idea of the struggle Mosul endured. They lean towards the political, the social, success stories, but do not look at the negative aspect in Mosul- from destruction, to displacement - they don't look at these aspects. Media institutions in Iraq generally, are politicized, not free.*

Male, low education

It is worth noting that participants also referenced transnational and international channels regularly in all of the groups. While the Arabic transnational channels, such as *Al Jazeera*, *Al Arabiya* and *Al Hadath* were widely consumed across all of the groups, the participants showed awareness of their partisan content and were less likely to trust news from these sources. They felt that the political affiliations of these channels were apparent in their content. International Arabic channels such as the BBC, CNN and Sky News Arabia were also

referenced. These channels were seen as more trustworthy and less political and were often used as sources to verify the news that appeared on Iraqi or local media platforms. *Deutsche Welle* Arabic, in particular the programme Jaafar Talk, was highly regarded by the participants, although this channel may have been referenced more widely due to the fact that participants had been told that the research study was being conducted on half of a German media development NGO (MICT).

Online and social media platforms were also referenced, although these were more noticeable in the student groups and in the second set of groups that were conducted. This reflects the growing consumption of news from social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp and Telegram groups. Popular websites included *Ain Al Mosul and Yalla* plus a number of emerging social media pages such as *Wilid Ninewah* and *Nas Al Mosul*, both of which have developed out of civil society initiatives. It remains to be seen whether they will develop into more widely consumed news providers.

*There are social media pages that have thousands of followers that post anything. We try to follow social media pages such as Al Ghad, Yalla and Al Ikhwa al Nathifa which are more truthful and the groups which are more trustworthy. They have Telegram pages too. Also, we follow the pages of the 'muhafithat' (local provinces).*

Male, low education

References to all of these online sites indicate a trend towards the consumption of local grassroots orientated stories amongst students and younger people. Participants wanted to know about their localities, seeking news on local events and society through local pages, official and otherwise. Online news, however, was in the main consumed via the social media platforms, particularly Facebook, of the mainstream media channels.

Perceptions of the credibility of social media platforms varied. For many, social media platforms were inaccurate and therefore untrustworthy. This perception reflects the strong correlation between trust and accuracy amongst Iraqi media audiences which was evident in all of the groups. There was also some concern that some social media pages were also being corrupted by partisan ownership which is more covert than that of the mainstream media.



*They (politicians) send people who receive their information concealed messages, including through social media pages, which people think are independent. They are not. These channels even sometime post information against their affiliation, to conceal who they are to gain the trust of people.*

Male, low education

*If we rely on pages, we know that news may be exaggerated. Whereas there are channels that are credible.*

Female, higher education

### **Social media pages of official institutions are widely considered trustworthy sources**

The social media pages of official institutions, such as the ministries of health and police were cited as good sources for verification of news and data. This trend of referring to the channels of official institutions to check the accuracy of content is one which is being seen in other countries in the region. It appears to have been fuelled more recently by the Covid-19 pandemic and the lack of verified related information. However, increased use of government owned sources of information might as well indicate a higher level of trust in government institutions than protests and public dissatisfaction with government performance might suggest on the first glance. Further research should be devoted to testing this hypothesis.

### **Ethical values and professionalism are perceived as declining which contributes to an environment where trust in the media is low**

Participants across the focus groups expressed a concern with the lack of professional values in the majority of the Iraqi media. The media were seen to be inaccurate, biased and unfair in their coverage. Some of the participants blamed this on the partisan nature of the media. Others however suggested that the reason was a lack of understanding and capacity amongst journalists of how to present news and information that is in the public interest and will enable citizens to make informed choices based on facts.

*There is a need for capacity building and to provide workshops for journalists to understand how to cover these issues related to social cohesion. There is a lack of skill and understanding of the issues between the different communities, Yazidis and Muslims for example.*

Male, student

*High levels of accuracy are the most important thing to improve content on social cohesion.*

Female, student

*What I wish is for your organization to work with journalist unions to make media practitioners and institutions to produce a number of outputs that call for social cohesion. If you can adopt this as an organization, it would make a big difference to the media in Nineveh.*

Male, higher education

### **Audiences would like to see more inclusion of official sources and experts as sources**

Under use of official and expert sources was cited as a huge problem and it was felt that there was a lack of proper analysis of events provided by experts via the media. This was particularly pronounced with coverage of political events where participants felt frustrated by the overreliance of the media on citizen sources rather than providing independent political analysis through the use of analysts and experts.

*With the Hashd piece (referring to one of the videos shown) they should have brought experts not just people on the street.*

Male, student

*The presenter needs to be impartial and the report also needs to give some data from officials and needs to take the data from its official and original source.*

Male, student

*If he got more people who are better placed or are more specialized to speak about what happened and who can use statistics and facts, the report would have been better.*

Male, higher education

This was juxtaposed by the reactions to the content created by the project which was shown in the second set of focus groups discussions. The film, *Al Awda*, was criticised for not including a more diverse range of citizens as sources who could talk about their experiences of living under the occupation of the Islamic State. Clearly audiences are looking for a balanced use of sources, official, expert and citizen, in order to provide an accurate and balanced depiction of events (see Appendix 2 for details on audience feedback).

The student groups were more likely to reference the lack of journalism skills and men in particular called for the greater provision of training for journalists in Ninewah to better cover topics related to social cohesion. It is likely that this particular point might have been raised by participants who have friends who work in the media. A common complaint amongst the media in Iraq is that media development projects and capacity building workshops are focused on major conurbations in Iraq such as Erbil and Baghdad. This is worth bearing mind as it was raised by a number of student participants.

### **Audiences engage in news verification but mostly rely on peer groups in their search for truth**

Sourcing practices were seen to be contested as was fact-checking and news verification, whether consciously or due to a lack of skills and awareness amongst journalists and the media community. As a result, participants all displayed their own verification skills, checking news and reported events across a number of trusted sources and platforms. WhatsApp

groups comprising of friends and family, and in some instances local journalists, were referenced as key verification tools despite an obvious lack of expertise in this group. The use of WhatsApp groups to check news is a growing phenomenon in Iraq. The challenge is with their authenticity and levels of accuracy. While in principle, audiences are displaying some understanding of media literacy by verifying the news that they consume, their approach to verification heavily relies on social networks.

*There is a problem with fake news. When we phone our friends and relatives to check news they tell us it is wrong.*

Male, low education

Another strategy includes inquiry of officials, which again indicates growing trust in government institutions:

*I have media groups, so when I see something on social media, I go check on these groups. I also go check on international outlets. We also have groups of officials to ask.*

Male, higher education

### **Participants demand greater diversity in the media's coverage of topics related to social cohesion**

Participants also referenced the lack of diversity in the media's coverage of topics related to social cohesion. All of the participants in the first set of FGDs were shown the two video clips referenced in the methodology section above. Both of these clips were seen to lack a range of views and opinions, despite their attempts to cover some of the key sectarian and religious debates that have been associated with Ninewah more recently. Reactions to the second clip, on the return of Christian IDPs to Ninewah after fleeing persecution by IS, were particularly focused on the lack of representation of Muslim views and reactions to their return.

*I liked the second clip about the return of Christians to Ninewah which was on Rasheed channel. They tell this story without you realising that it was about social cohesion. They covered the return of the IDPs, the numbers of people, about how many used to live in Ninewah, and then showed that they had also been affected (by Daesh) and that's why they left and are now coming back ... To make it better, they should have brought Muslims and showed them welcoming the IDPs. This would focus on the social cohesion ties and how these ties are coming back.*

Female, student

*The report was very one sided in favour of the Hashd. The presenter himself was pro-Hashd and he took their side. He presented their side of the story and there was no official representation to give a point of view ... It needs more balance to be a better report. The presenter needs to be impartial.*

Male student

### **Citizens of Mosul are traumatized and thus scared by exposure to violent imagery from the time of the IS occupation**

In the second set of FGDs, where participants were shown content created by the project, reactions were mixed. It should be noted however that many participants found the use of violent imagery in *Al Awda* unwatchable, bringing back traumatic memories of their recent pasts.

*I couldn't finish it after the first few minutes. With amputating the hand and the killings, it took me back to the past.*

Female, high education

This kind of reaction seem to reflect the level of ongoing trauma and impact that the occupation of Ninewah still has on the lives of residents. Participants wanted to see their own

experiences and voices represented in media content. At the same time they are scared by this type of coverage.

Participants also called for the use of more diverse sources and voices, including Sunni citizens, that reflect the reality and makeup of Ninewah. This was a sentiment that was expressed in both sets of focus groups.

*We need more coverage of what we experienced. The violence, destruction of our homes, to the Yazidis, we need to see more about this.*

Male, student

Others said that they found al Awda fairly average and cliched, not dissimilar to content that was produced in the Iraqi media. It was also unanimously felt that the video could have examined the tactics employed by IS in more detail, looking at hate speech and disinformation created by the terrorist group.

**Audiences are concerned with the lack of coverage of topics related to social cohesion which has been further amplified throughout the Covid-19 pandemic**

While there has clearly been some coverage of issues related to social cohesion in the media in the eyes of the stakeholders, there was also an evident need for more and better content. Participants referenced reports that have covered the issues of Ninewah's diverse groups, mainly coverage about the plight of Yazedis and events that have occurred around Sinjar, a district in Ninewah whose population is predominantly Yazedi and was the site of a huge massacre by IS in August 2014. There have been ongoing discussions between the governments in Baghdad and Erbil about facilitating the return of Yazedi IDPs to their homes in Sinjar.

*I have seen a lot of things published on the Yazidis and the situation in Sinjar.*

Female, low education level

*I saw a good report about the new minister of migration on Al Sharqiya going to Sinjar talking about the importance of social cohesion in this area and the problems of the IDPs and their return.*

Female student

While topics such as the return of IDPs to Ninewah were seen to have been covered well by the media, national and local, others were considered to have been neglected. Participants felt that other important issues related to reconciliation and rebuilding needed to be analysed, for example issues related to women and girls, youth, the elderly and vulnerable groups in society. Participants wanted to see stories of diverse groups working together, celebrations of religious holidays and more discussion about topics such as the fate of young widows in Ninewah, women's rights, harassment and violence.

*There is so much missing on coverage of social cohesion: the role of women, widows in the city, how are they living. We have the most widows in our region who need help and we want to see more about how they can be helped.*

Male, low education level

When participants were asked to recall content related to social cohesion that they had enjoyed watching recently, they referred to stories involving Christians and Jews, mixed religion families, stories of groups of young people expressing their community bonds through food and art. They did however recognise that there was a lack in interesting ideas on how to cover the key issues related to their communities in post-IS Ninewah and were keen to see different types of content that reflected such topics, including drama and talk shows. They clearly recognised the relationship between media coverage of intercommunal relationships and what has been classed as sectarianism in Iraq. This was particularly evident in the discussion groups with students.

*We need to show that there are ties amongst all elements of the community and we need to increase the people who are covering these issues so it's not always the same people that are covering the topic of social cohesion.*

Female, student

*We are very concerned with media and social cohesion. I like watching Jaafar Talk on DW for example when Sheikh Mohamed Shamma'a on Jaafar Talk tried to cover social issues and relations between Christians and Muslims. I think this has an impact on social cohesion because when you see these type of talk then it spreads on social media. In 2005 the media was negative and didn't give voice to The Other and then we end up in a situation like we did in 2014 when Daesh came into Mosul.*

Male, student

Participants in the first set of groups expressed frustration with the media's current focus on all issues related to the Covid-19 pandemic, in their minds at the expense of much-needed coverage of social cohesion topics and stories. This may reflect their frustrations with the Iraqi government's handling of the coronavirus crisis. It may also point to some of the issues with reporting on the pandemic that have emerged in Iraq, namely a lack of accuracy with data and figures, little transparency or accountability as partisan media use the pandemic to apportion blame, and very little analysis of the impact of the pandemic on traditional and religious communities where stigmatisation and disinformation around the disease are still rife.

*Everyone is concerned with the pandemic and virus so there is no focus at the moment in the media on social cohesion.*

Male, low education level



*I have not seen anything related to social cohesion. It is all about coronavirus and we are weary of it.*

Male student

By the time the second set of focus groups were conducted, the Covid-19 pandemic was much less discussed by participants. One of the groups had a conversation about the curfew, questioning the motivations of the government with regards to the curfew and lockdown that was imposed in February. Due to the timing of the second set of FGDs, the same week as the Pope's visit to Iraq, there was a more positive perception of coverage of social cohesion topics with many participants recalling examples of media coverage of his visit optimistically.

*Honestly the most positive was the Pope's visit. There's a lot of issues of social cohesion, especially those presented by Saqar, I like them a lot as a page which encourages people to think of social cohesion. A page called "Wilid Nineveh" also worked on this issue.*

Male, low education

*The events of the visit of the Pope were the most prominent on TV and social media. I can't recall now a specific output, but all of the television channels helped with the visit of the Pope. All have covered it positively.*

Female, high education

Audiences are seeking out positive stories and solutions to the challenging conditions which they have experienced and live in. Across all of the groups, local media is playing a role in reflecting coexistence and reconciliation in Ninewah. However, social media is also a key player and many of the participants referenced local social media accounts as covering local success stories and civil society initiatives. It is this type of content that they are interested in consuming and consider integral to the future of Ninewah and even Iraq.

*We get stories of success on Radio al Ghad and this is what we want to hear as listeners.*

Male, low education level

*The first issue is the ideas. We need better ideas and the people to come up with these ideas. Then, we also need more funding to support programmes on social cohesion instead of relying on wasta. If these two issues are sorted out, then we will see better programming. We also need to support more civil society initiatives, for women and youth, in order to improve coverage of social cohesion.*

Female, student

They tempered their desire for positive stories, however, with a call for reporting which told the truth about the situation in Ninewah.

### **Opinions and media consumption habits continue to be informed by friends and family as well as local personalities on social media**

While participants are trusting their media based on their provision of accurate and professional content, they demonstrated a propensity to then discuss this content with friends and family in order to form their opinions. It reflects the communal nature of Iraqi society and the strong familial and social ties that continue to inform interactions.

*If I have a personal conviction about a report, I share this, and can change their [peers and family] perspective if theirs is wrong. And vice versa, they can change mine if mine is wrong.*

Male, low education

*Yes, I like to discuss, to see their [peers and family] opinions and compare mine. The importance is that maybe they understand something better, or I understand something better, I take the positive from them. Maybe they see the negative or positive, which I can take from them.*

Female, low education

*We do discuss programming amongst our friends. When the subject is topical and relevant to our community, then we discuss it. Everyone has different views and sometimes I change my opinion as a result.*

Female, student

The second set of the FGDs took place a few days after the brutal killing of eight people in Salah al Din province north of Baghdad allegedly by Islamic State. This event was referenced in the groups as type of reporting that would be discussed amongst friends and family.

*When I discuss things with my father, he may give me reasons that I am unaware of, like reasons related to tribal issues. He will make me more aware of this as he has more experience. Discussion is important to exchange views.*

Female, high education

WhatsApp groups were cited as a means of sharing information amongst social circles.

*It is hard for the media to be independent. There are journalists who chose what they want to broadcast. I always check with my friends on a WhatsApp group, some of whom are journalists. I also wait to see if the news appear anywhere else and check the details before I believe it.*

Male, student

Participants also referenced social media influencer type personalities who shared news and stories on their personal platforms as a key source for opinion formation. Some of these were local journalists who participants did reference as likely to 'trend' when posting events and analysis. Participants in the second set of focus groups displayed more positive perceptions of content produced by activists on social media, suggesting that it was more innovative and a better reflection of reality.

## 5. Conclusions

This research analysis aims to assess perceptions of media coverage of social cohesion in Ninewah and understand how content is consumed and assessed by audiences in the province. What this report has demonstrated is that while there is a distrust of the media at a national level, local media are playing a fundamental role in providing citizens with information and news about topics that are important and relevant to reconciliation and rebuilding communities in post-IS Ninewah. Social media and activist accounts are also playing a significant role in the media information ecosystem in Ninewah. However, the political environment in Iraq is having a huge impact on both media coverage and analysis of key topics as well as on audiences' perceptions of media coverage of such topics. There is still a clear need for increased content and a focus on topics that will support peace-building and social cohesion as the province of Ninewah recovers from the events of its recent past.

The report concludes that audiences across different groups are fairly coherent and in agreement that the media should be playing a larger role in covering important topics related to diversity and religious difference in particular. They felt that the media had painted a false picture of Ninewah as a sectarian society and should be providing more positive and inclusive programming in order to combat the challenges that they faced as a society. Levels of awareness of the positive role that the media could play were high although trust in the media in general was low. This view was tempered by reactions to inaccurate portrayals of life in Ninewah post-IS and audiences also wanted to see the realities of their life in media content. Violent content and images were rejected however which is a significant point to demonstrate the impact and trauma incurred as a result of the occupation by IS.

Taking these conclusions into account, the following key points should be highlighted in order to inform any future activities and content creation to support the media and audiences in Ninewah.

1. Public trust in the media is at an all-time low due **the government's repeated failures that continue to impact on both the performance and perceptions of the media.** Audiences in particular expressed a weariness and despair with the current political scene and the impact it was having on their daily lives. From a lack of coverage of important relevant issues to a

dearth of accurate information, in their eyes the media were as implicit in the corrupt practices that were used for political gain by their benefactors. Distrust in media is therefore confounded with ongoing disappointment with political elites, society at large and with democracy and the political culture. This is a significant finding as Iraq is undergoing a significant period of change. National elections which are currently planned for October 2021 will see representation from new parties that have been formed out of the protest movement. However, unhealthy pluralism and lack of trust in the media could be another reason why such changes and processes might fail.

2. On a more positive side, **findings from the focus group discussion indicate a healthy scepticism that media users apply to protect themselves against undue manipulation through party media.** Scepticism and distrust work as a shield against divisive impact that polarized media landscape otherwise would have on a fragmented and fragile society such as Iraq. From that view angle, Iraqi media seem to be well protected! Media literacy in that sense can help prevent polarized and partisan media to deepen existing cleavages in society.

3. **The Iraqi media will struggle to play its role in providing citizens with accurate and useful information about overcoming and understanding their key challenges until there is a change in the structural conditions of the media landscape.** Media which continue to rely on funding from the state or political parties will never be able to fulfil their role as independent and in the public interest. Trust in all mainstream media will continue to decline while ethical principles such as accuracy, impartiality and sourcing are not practiced at some. These principles are clearly being comprised, according to the participants, by the partisan nature of the media landscape as well as a lack of skills and capacity. Again, as important political processes take place, the possibilities for citizens to have access to the accurate and transparent information they need to participate in such processes becomes extremely limited.

4. Social media is becoming the key source of news in Iraq. **Activists and influencers are shaping the dominant narratives in both the public and private spheres.** The pages and profiles of local media organisations are also becoming more widely consumed as audiences appear to engage more with content that has been produced by non-professionals and are turning away from televisual production values which are becoming associated with inaccurate news and stereotypes. Anecdotally it is now said that the mainstream media is

sharing social media content on its platforms rather than the other way around. Initiatives to support social cohesion through media and communications must consider the role of social media and activists as a part of the solution.

### **About the author:**

Dr. Aida Al-Kaisy is a Researcher and Media Reform Advisor. She has worked extensively on research and media development projects across the MENA region, including in Iraq, Sudan and Syria. She is currently producing research for the London School of Economics Conflict Research Programme, looking at disinformation in the Iraqi media and its impact on policy. She is a strong advocate for ethics in the media and works as a Programme Consultant for the Ethical Journalism Network.

### [Appendix 1 of media platforms referenced in the report](#)

***Ain Al Mosul*** Also known as Mosul Eye, this is a news blog created and maintained by historian and citizen journalist Omar Mohammed who graduated from Mosul University. For more than two years, Mohammed used the blog to report conditions and events in the Iraqi city of Mosul during the occupation by IS. During this time, *Mosul Eye* was an anonymous blog. The blog is frequently cited as one of the few reliable sources documenting life under IS rule and has been called a critical source of information for journalists and scholars. Mohamed revealed his identity in December 2017 after the liberation of Mosul.

***Al Hadath*** Launched in March 2012, *Al-Hadath* is managed by the team of *Al Arabiya* which was founded through investment by the *Middle East Broadcasting Center (MBC)*, as well as other investors from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the Persian Gulf states.

***Al Iraqiya*** The Iraqi Media Network (IMN) produces broadcast content on its main *Al Iraqiya* channel that appears to support the state and government narrative rather than represent the nation as a whole. While its public service remit meant that, in its infancy, it attempted through its content to encourage interaction between citizens and their government, cover issues such as religion and politics in its entertainment and drama shows, and supported local media production across all sections of Iraq, in recent years it has been seen as another tool for sectarian rhetoric in the government's battle for power. Some observers have suggested



that *Al Iraqiya* is following the propagandist role that the state media played under Saddam Hussein. The channel continues to be funded by an annual grant from the Iraqi government. A board of governors issues policy and strategy for the IMN. Their aim is to represent the public in their decisions and through Iraqiya content but, with the Board selected politically and ratified by the Prime Minister himself, their true representation of the Iraqi public remains questionable. Similarly, the Director General of the IMN has in the past been chosen by the Prime Minister and thus allied to his party.

***Al Rasheed*** *Al Rasheed* Satellite Channel is an Iraq-based satellite television channel broadcasting from Baghdad where its headquarters is located. *Al Rasheed's* programming includes news programs, drama and comedy shows. The channel is owned by Saad Asem Al Janabi, a moderate Sunni politician and head of the Iraqi Republican Assembly Party, an opposition party that does not have any seats in parliament, and his son Asem Saad Al Janabi. In November 2019, the channel was suspended for three-months by the Communication Media Commission (CMC) the Iraqi media regulator for its critical coverage of the protests.

***Al Sharqiya*** Saad Al Bazzaz, a prominent Baathist until 1992 when he went into exile, established *Al Sharqiya* in 2004 as the first privately-owned channel to broadcast in Iraq. Since then it has become one of the most popular channels in Iraq, widely associated with the Arab Sunni narrative, offering a counter narrative to that of *Al Iraqiya*. The channel is often referred to as the 'Baathist channel' by those in positions of power and it has been accused of receiving funding from Saudi Arabia. It openly supported Ayad Allawi, a former Baathist and leader of the Iraqi National Movement (INM) in both the 2010 as well as April 2014's Iraqi elections. According to Ibrahim Al Marashi in an interview in 2010, "*Al Sharqiya* is a Sunni channel. It has its own agenda. It covers Shia news but there is always a negative spin with any piece of news having to do with (Prime Minister) Maliki'.

***Biladi*** is owned by former Prime Minister Ibrahim al-Ja'fari. It is thought to be very close to the Islamic Dawa Party. The station broadcasts general entertainment, as well as news.

***Dijla TV*** is Amman-based and launched in 2010 under the patronage of Jamal al-Karbouli, an Iraqi politician who is head of the National Movement for Development and Reform party

(*Alhal*). It is one of the more popular news channels in Iraq and has experienced a number of attacks on its offices as well as revoking of its license to broadcast by the CMC more recently.

**Mosuliya TV** Al-Mosuliya TV was established in 2006 with alleged funding from US forces in Iraq. It was then rumoured to have been taken over to the Iraqi Media Network (IMN), although IMN management deny any connection and claim that the Ninewa provincial governorate operate and fund it. The channel is headed by Ghazie Al-Faesar, who has been seen to use the channel to support his various election bids. The station has also been known to give airtime to another local party, Ninewa Haweyetuna, suggesting that this, along with the Wataniya bloc of Al Faesar, could be more recent sources of funding.

**Ninewah Al Ghad** Ninewa Al-Ghad is a television station that is associated with Atheel Al-Nujeifi, the previous governor of Ninewa and a leading Sunni politician, who is known for criticising the Iraqi government for its sectarian policies. The channel was established in Turkey and is rumoured to have been supported by Turkey in various forms related to funding and infrastructure.

**Radio Al Ghad** *Radio Al Ghad* was launched in March 2015 in response to the absence of accurate information and reporting on Mosul for those still based in the city under the occupation of IS. On many occasions, the militant group unsuccessfully tried to stop their broadcasting. However, the station persevered and has become known for its regular phone-in shows, which aimed to provide a platform for Mosul's residents to share information about the occupation, warning people about potential dangers and hazards as and when they were happening. Following the departure of Islamic State from Mosul, they launched their flagship programme, *Sowt Al Muwatin* or 'Voice of the Citizen', a live programme that has broadcast six days a week since 2017 and seeks to address the communication gap between government and the people on a more practical level. According to *Al Ghad's* manager, Mohamed Alhashimie, the goal of the programme is to call government to account on issues related specifically to Mosul such the rebuilding of bridges, the re-opening of Mosul Airport and payment of salaries. Local officials and policy makers answer questions from the public live on air. The public interact via phone-ins but increasingly via text messages and social media.

**Yalla** according to their own social media channels, ‘Yalla: Iraq’s largest, fastest-growing youth-focused media organisation, with 3 million+ followers on our Arabic & Kurdish pages. Yalla’s English-language output shares news, views and original content about Iraq.’ Yalla is funded by *Al Hurra Iraq*, a US-based public television channel funded by Voice of America.

## Appendix 2: Audience feedback on *Tafael* output

### Clip 1: Al Awda

This clip was a longer film shown in all of the second round of focus groups. Overall the feedback was fairly positive although there were some issues related to sources used and also the use of violence.

#### The overall perception was mixed:

- It was really great- from a content perspective. Because it started with a Kurdish person, then moved on to a Christian then Yezidi women. It targeted all of the components who were affected by Daesh's war. When I started and finished the video, I was full of hope.
- It was really balanced of course. He showed a Christian woman, a Kurdish person, a Moslawi. The work itself needs a longer time. I disagree slightly with Marwa that they spent a lot on it. Contrarily, it needs more resources- it may even need a trillion dollars!
- I felt happiness that there is credibility in relaying events that have happened during the liberation. The film has documented things that happened- the destruction that Mosul has witnessed, to the external world. The amount of pain from loss of loved ones and friends.
- The film is honestly excellent. But if he got more people who are better placed to speak or more specialized about what happened and who can use statistics and facts would have been better. The stronger the evidence the better.
- I didn't feel the report as a whole was anything new- it felt almost identical to videos I have seen.
- It was a really average film. We've been following these stories since the liberation from Daesh. These stories are familiar to us- the film was really average.
- It didn't portray a holistic picture about Nineveh. It focused on specific sides of it, such as Mosul, or specific components.
- I don't think the film's approach is new. I read a lot of the comments that accompanied the film, and they were very similar to comments on any other film. 10

minutes was too long, especially after 3-4 minutes when it started discussing stories, I knew what they were about.

### Use of Sources:

- The film is very nice and painful simultaneously. I blame the producer for one thing, in the beginning of the report, when he finished showing the torture by Daesh of people, he didn't let one story, or one person speak for themselves. He didn't take a story from those who were tortured.
- It was very appropriate, but only if he let someone who was tortured by the hands of Daesh speak it would have been more realistic.
- It would have been better if he used people's words more than his own, to take more than he gave, to let the citizens speak more.
- Only one person was appropriate, the old man. The rest should have been in a location before they came back to Mosul.
- The content is good- combined lots of components and stories and encouraged the return. But it was supposed to address the Islamic religion and how Daesh falsified the truth. I don't see it as neutral as it didn't host any locals from Mosul- only a Kurd and a Yezidi. Not from the simpler people who were tortured or killed because of Daesh. Those who were subjected to violence by Daesh
- Yes, it's true that the issue or subject is cliché, but this is our main problem. The video is really nice. We can't say that it wasn't nice at all because it's reality. The choice of people goes back to the one who produced it, but he could have chosen more ambiguous people outside of our circle rather than in our circle- of course we would see Dr. Tareq and expect him to say something specific.
- Why were the Kurdish, Christian and Yezidi were portrayed? Where is the Sunni? I didn't see a Sunni. No one was harmed more than Sunnis...The Moslawi citizen was harmed more...from the "working class neighbourhoods" (منطقة شعبية), like the old Kurdish man, he should have been brought a similar person who lived this same struggle and these days.
- I wanted a citizen who lived everything just like the Yezidis and Christians, who lived through bombs and lack of food. 7 months in the days of liberation, people were starving, they were eating paper cartons.

**Accuracy:**

- Al Awda film needed to tie more issues together. For example, the instance of busses was a long time ago- from 2009. If they brought a more recent incident, it would have been more enticing.
- There is a kind of lie in it. A lot of people who have adopted the issue of “returns”, or Christians returning or others, is dictated to them. The person who made the video knows that this has been widely consumed by the public, but they are trying to gain people’s sympathy or support. They are using videos that touch people’s empathy and attract attention- not more or less.

**Violence:**

- I couldn’t finish the video, It was a torture video, that was painful. There was no need to put segments of the torture.
- it was really painful because I lived this period. It speaks to the bitter reality that we lived.
- I couldn’t finish it after the first few minutes. With amputating the hand and the killings, it took me back to the past. I was really touched and affected by it, so I didn’t finish it.

**Presenter style:**

- Yes, the presenter was neutral. Of course there may have been things that have happened which he couldn’t document- like the massacres in Mosul, so the film wasn’t directed to all woes that have struck Mosul.
- There is no balance between all segments- he didn’t talk about everyone. The first three minutes of the film, it addressed well-established facts that are already public, so I didn’t feel compelled to continue watching. Some of the minorities they spoke to should have spoken in their mother tongue, to show that the city is welcoming and has no sensitivities towards minorities.
- The presenter was classic. His tone was not exciting. It was predictable.
- He could have brought someone in a more sensitive position—other than children. Having a student is repetitive and not new.
- He could include more minorities in Nineveh- he didn’t include Ka’aiyah, or Shabakk- we can include them and let them speak in their mother tongue and show the city’s acceptance of them.

- The journalist had an empathetic approach- but I don't always find it encouraging or encourage a sad or impactful beginning of a film. I would keep the beginning enticing, so the audience can continue- such as covering events since Daesh took over, what they have done to the people and the city...

#### **Compared to content on local media:**

- Compared to local media amongst activists- we can say that such work is present. But on Channels it is not. You may see it as a news item or brief reportage of 3-4 minutes, but not as a documentary. We have seen something like this on the news, of a family returning, which is why I thought it was repetitive.
- Honestly, I have seen such kinds of videos, I felt that it was routine and repetitive. I didn't feel like there's anything new in the video. These videos are now largely cliché (مستهلكة). I think that even the issue they touched upon, which is largely the return of Christians and Yezidis and peaceful co-existence, has taken a lot from programmes and awareness raising initiatives and excessive spending on this by other organizations. I feel that it is too consumed.
- The photographer or the producer's approach was similar to DW or France 24. There is nothing similar to it by local journalists who work here. It is professional. But I noticed that he has filmed 11-12 minutes, which is very long. He could have made this shorter.

**Clip 2:** The story about Karamlesh, an Assyrian town just outside of Mosul in which different sects coexist peacefully. It is told by a young local who speaks to local personalities, including a priest and local Christians, about its history and social attitudes.

- What's nice about it: Several people spoke in the report, not just one person like in the film Al Awda. It brings together social cohesion between Muslims, Christians, Yezidis, encouraging them to go back to their original neighborhoods and areas.
- There were several people asked, he combined several sects. The presenter was not partial.
- As an idea and programme, it's very nice. How he came in a bicycle was very nice. Other channels, not local ones on Nineveh, have something similar.
- It's not something we can see in local channels, as per their policies, they wouldn't allow it. This method of presenting people's words is better than other channels.

**Clip 3:** A shortfilm about media outlets in Mosul that are specialized in covering minority issues; journalists from radio station Ezidi24 are interviewed about the mission and impact of that station on social cohesion in Mosul.

- The characters: I didn't know their origin. There was a girl and two men who could be Yazidi and Christian, but I didn't know who these minorities are... I didn't feel that there was neutrality because I didn't know who the minorities are and how many of these minorities they are- I didn't know if the goal was just to get the message of these minorities across.
- the report was a free ad for the platform. It was not appropriate for the name of the report. The message I got was that this platform was that it was to present issues of minorities- but that wasn't what was presented or what I got from the report.
- The fact that minorities are secluded is in and of itself weak. The report was so weak, any person can do it. The conversation is very simple. Even people who spoke didn't speak about the work of the association, or the work of their group. I don't find it impactful
- It needs to address a lot more issues to be more varied.

**Clip 4:** A clip about journalists in Mosul that believe to have an important role in rebuilding society and promoting social cohesion after the trauma imposed by ISIS. The main speaker is a journalist from radio station al-Ghad. He also talks about ISIS propaganda and the need for 'counter media' after the liberation of Mosul.

- First: the film has no numbers, facts and statistics...Second: I didn't see anything about the hate speech by Daesh, nor the film's approach to fight hate speech.
- It didn't show people's opinions of how Daesh's media/films/narrative impacted them.
- There was only one person- I don't think that was enough. He can bring more, or have more guests use more assets (films, photographs from Mosul, facts). We also don't know what the conditions of his filming was for him to take this angle.
- The material's title was about media and hate speech- correct? But I didn't see anything in it related to media and hate speech. The main objective was not there. It summarized the issue in a success story of a person speaking about an individual story.
- It mentioned that the message of the media is clear- and that Daesh used media to take over Mosul under its control. But he didn't have any evidence or facts to back



this up- like, what did media produce after liberation? He could have brought someone who participated in the peace festivities and how media is a tool and how it was utilized. Another weakness: He focused on one side only- the Moslawi audience, in spite of those who are engaged on this are from the outskirts of Nineveh. Also, when he interviewed the second person, he fell into the same mistake.

- He only recited one success story of a person- the idea that he was able to get out of Mosul and continue working in Radio Al Ghad from Erbil and take calls from people from Mosul and outside of it. I didn't see anything related to media and hate speech.
- It needed additional work, because he only welcomed two people (Regardless of who they are). For it to be better, he should have chosen people who were involved during the liberation operations- photographers, reporters.
- It needed more facts and figures- it was merely a portrayal of one person's story.
- The first thing I'd do is to bring people more involved in the liberation, those who were with security forces, those who have participated... According to my knowledge of this, there were Muslims who hid Christians, Yazidis in their homes, so there were such stories that could have been highlighted.
- It was a personal message about an individual success story. There should have been a scenario of hate speech conveyed between different segments who reject this kind of speech in society- ex: whether Christians hate Muslims or Yazidis. There should have been a scenario to break this narrative. What I saw was an individual success story and not a spotlight on any kind of hate speech.

### **Clip 5: Returnees**

- The report was really average. Anyone you would see in the street would wish for the situation to return to normal. We were coexisting in a normal way. It's a really average video.
- The idea is familiar. Since the beginning of the liberation till today, we've seen a lot of videos about this issue.
- With all due respect to the presenter, it was really cold (lacking affection or warmth). There was supposed to be more exciting characters to make this material more enticing. I would question: Who are you (to tell me to return)? I would bring a few people from the original area, the Christian area, to talk...
- The idea is nice, but completely lacks presentation skills.

- Not all of them were inappropriate, but there were about 2 who were appropriate. The man from the old area, but the girl who was on the platform didn't seem that she was convinced in what she was saying. The thing is that whether it's me or Marwa or Ali, or any person who has lived and worked in this field, we would know who's who. But the local citizen would not.
- The message did not reach me, but if you ask someone who is more distant than these people (in the film), maybe they would be touched by the message. Maybe it was a bit cold, but the repetition generates nostalgia and empathy. We need to be repetitive about this issue, until it becomes a reality. Such issues should be placed between advertisements between programmes- it would be a nice message.