

INTRODUCTION

Post-Conflict Recovery and Returnee Planning

AUTHOR(S)

Rawaa Khalid, Ardhsight Technologies

1-2 SENTENCE FRAMING

Nearly a decade after Nineveh liberation from ISIS, Nineveh still hosts the largest IDP population in Iraq (55%), with 1 in 4 living in camps, host families, or uninhabitable structures. Families in camps cannot verify whether their cities or farmland is safe to return to.

High resolution imagery exists that could answer that question, but commercial pricing keep it out of reach for the communities and local institutions who need it most.

TIMEFRAMES & URGENCY

- Halt of financial grants have decreased the returnees by 83% compared to previous year and IDPs stranded in camps with no verified data on whether home is safe/viable.
- Locations of no return are growing, with 21 new sites added to an existing 293, driven by drought, security concerns and destruction barriers
- Failed returns are recorded in 2025 due to climate-related factors and limited livelihood
- 1:10 returnees are living in critical shelters

STAKEHOLDERS

- Data users: displaced families, smallholder farmers, local NGOs, CBOs, NGOs, UN, human rights and civil society
- Intermediaries: UN cluster coordination, civil society organizations, NGOs
- Decision makers: Reconstruction Committee, donors, Municipal government, Property Claims Commission, camp administrators and Ministry of Migration.
- Indirectly affected: competing land claimants, international accountability bodies including ICC and UN investigation mechanisms.

THE DECISION CHALLENGE

THE SITUATION

WHO IS AFFECTED?

- Nearly 208,483 IDPs remain displaced within Nineveh, led by 35% in Mosul, and 20% in Sinjar where Yazidi communities face a 51% return rate and the highest concentration of failed returns driven by climate-related factors and destroyed agricultural livelihoods.
- 40k individual lives in critical shelters such as tent/mud structures, inhabitable/abandoned buildings, and public buildings/collective shelters

WHAT ARE THE DATA NEEDS?

What area to be covered and where? Frequency and length of data collection?]

- Monthly coverage for urban areas across Mosul city, Sinjar city, and other cities of active return zones for returnee and construction monitoring
- Seasonal imagining aligned to crop cycles across the agricultural land, orchard zones mainly in Sinjar and Nineveh Plains agricultural corridor
- Quarterly imaging of remaining camp locations to track population movement and return flows.

THE DECISION CHALLENGE

WHAT DECISIONS NEED TO BE MADE?

- Local authorities & municipalities deciding which neighborhoods are safe to reopen and where to sequence reconstruction investment
- Camp administrator deciding whether camps ready for closure
- Donors deciding where does reconstruction funding go
- NGOs/CSOs/UN cluster coordination deciding how to allocate shelter, protection, and agricultural recovery plans.

WHY ARE THEY DIFFICULT WITHOUT THIS DATA?

- Investment influenced by political convenience rather than verified habitable capacity or reconstruction velocity
- Camps closure timelines driven by financial and political pressure
- Narrative reporting cannot support comparative investment decisions across districts
- Resources reach based on accessibility and existing relationships rather than verified condition data at the scale and speed of urgency

HOW WOULD SATELLITE IMAGERY BE USED?

Institutional used: full imagery archive, change detection/time series analysis outputs, vegetation indices accessible to local authorities, NGOs, UN, journalists and researchers for detailed analysis in APIs, bulk download, or data portal.

Community used: simplified thematic maps for non-technical communities such as displaced families and decision makers in a web portal or communication channels supported by native languages

IMPACT, RISKS & GOVERNANCE QUESTIONS

WHAT CHANGES

WITH OPEN IMAGERY

- Reconstruction committees and agricultural recovery partners receive systematic updated imagery across all damaged neighborhoods and farmlands, replacing fragmented data sources
- Displaced families, community organizations and local NGOs access the same imagery as international NGOs and federal government.
- Automated reconstruction velocity tracking, agricultural recovery modeling with encroachment alert system
- local leaders independently monitor their community's land and housing conditions and support land restitution claims.
- Open access humanitarian imagery shifts the information balance toward local ownership and enables community-led recovery monitoring in post-conflict context and builds local technical capacity which persists beyond the immediate recovery phase.

POTENTIAL RISKS

- Reports revealing the location, density, and movement patterns of returnees in partially recovered neighborhoods could be exploited by residual armed actor networks still active in the security environment
- Open building and land-level data could be exploited by commercial investors and competing political actors to target abandoned farmland or weaponize property boundary evidence
- Selective use of positive reconstruction reports risks premature recovery narratives
- Recovery monitoring calibrated to the most accessible areas risks underrepresents communities in rural and remote areas across the Nineveh Plains and Sinjar mountain corridor
- Data access will remain concentrated among technically sophisticated international users without active investment in community data literacy programs, tools designed for non-technical users, and native languages interfaces,

GOVERNANCE QUESTIONS

- ? Who have the most legitimate need for CS data about their own territory, are genuine beneficiaries of open access rather than nominal ones? And who is accountable if they are not?
- ? When local authorities, CBOs, UN and international donors simultaneously request tasking of the same geography for different purpose, what decision framework determines whose request takes precedence?
- ? What consent and access control mechanisms are required for the specific harm dynamics of: active-security threat, a post genocide, contested land right context?
- ? How does CS define formal governance standing for displaced populations?
- ? Does CS have "Harm/Misuse" reporting mechanism in order to hold accountability when something goes wrong?