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**Integrating Gender Equality into  
international humanitarian aid and sustainable development interventions  
A case study of the use of Gender-Sensitive  
Programming by different actors in the Ninewa Plains, Northern Iraq**

The international framework such as the **UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development** emphasizes the importance of integrating Gender Equality into development and humanitarian action particularly in crisis situations and during recovery.

The post-crisis context of the Ninewa Plains, a region in Northern Iraq that is notable for the ethno-religious diversity of its population and its geographical location between Iraq and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), is shaped by the aftermath of the occupation of so-called ISIS that occurred between 2014 and 2017. Large segments of the population were forced to flee and besides emigration abroad and to the KRI, large numbers of IDPs have returned to their place of origin since 2017. However, the vulnerability of returnees is high as the political, economic and security situation remains unstable. Women and children disproportionately suffer the consequences of the region's recent conflicts.

This study examines the various approaches of integrating a gender perspective into programming for returnees by different actors of the humanitarian and development sectors, such as international and national NGOs and faith-based organizations. A qualitative data collection based on 16 key informant interviews was conducted during a research stay in the KRI in March 2020.

The research results indicate that specific needs, particularly of women and girls, differ between the respective areas and ethno-religious communities of the Ninewa Plains and programs must adapt appropriately to recognize and meet these needs. A detailed knowledge of the local context and an understanding of gendered power relations and dynamics amid conflict and crisis are crucial for effective programming.

The paper shows that in general further interdisciplinary research is needed to contribute to drawing more attention on the intersections of gender and religion in international humanitarian and development interventions.

**Keywords:** development and humanitarian sector, gender sensitive programming, displacement, non-governmental organisations, faith-based organisations, Northern Iraq