



# Environmental Journalism in Iraq Project



پارێزەرانی ئاو عێراق  
WATERKEEPERS IRAQ  
للحافظين على المياه العراق

## Roundtable Discussion on Climate Change and Action Strategies

**Date:** April 25, 2024

**Time:** 9:00 AM - 1:00 PM

**Location:** Erbil International Hotel, Erbil

### Executive Summary:

This roundtable, hosted by Waterkeepers Iraq, aimed to confront and strategize against the profound environmental challenges heightened by climate change in Iraq and the Kurdistan Region. The event successfully brought together a diverse group of stakeholders including NGOs, government officials, environmental experts, and activists. These discussions led to a shared commitment to developing actionable strategies for enhancing environmental governance and collaborative efforts across the region.

### Key Outcomes:

1. A comprehensive understanding of the environmental challenges Kurdistan Region currently faced.
2. A consensus on the necessity of strengthening networking and collaboration among environmental stakeholders.
3. The formulation of a multifaceted action plan aimed at addressing both immediate and long-term environmental concerns.



**Partners:** Waterkeepers Iraq Organization, Internews, Nirij Network, Sama Al-Ebtikar Foundation

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### 1. Introduction:

The Roundtable Discussion on Climate Change and Action Strategies, convened by Waterkeepers Iraq, symbolized a concerted endeavor to confront the prevailing environmental challenges in the Kurdistan Region. Held at the Erbil International Hotel on April 25, 2024, the event gathered a diverse spectrum of stakeholders, including representatives from NGOs, government bodies, environmental experts, and activists. The primary objective of the gathering was to facilitate informed deliberations and constructive dialogue aimed at addressing the multifaceted environmental issues exacerbated by climate change. Participants engaged in thoughtful exchanges, sharing practical experiences, insights, and proposals to formulate effective strategies for enhancing environmental governance and fostering sustainable solutions across the region. The roundtable commenced with an overview of the Environmental Journalism in Iraq Project and the partnership with Internews, underscoring the activities implemented during the project such as Previous Roundtables in 4<sup>th</sup> of March 2023 about the Environmental Issues in Darbandikhan and in 15<sup>th</sup> of July 2023 about The Environmental Issues from Oil Refineries in Arbat Area as well as Training 20 journalists on how to cover Environmental Stories in fact based approach. Against the backdrop of escalating environmental concerns and the urgent imperative for collective action, the roundtable served as a pivotal platform for stakeholders to collaborate, forge partnerships, and collectively confront the environmental challenges confronting the region.



## 2. Problems:

### Presentation on the Current State of Environment in Kurdistan

The session commenced with an in-depth presentation by Waterkeepers Iraq, providing a comprehensive overview of the current environmental challenges facing Kurdistan. The presentation shed light on critical issues including water scarcity, pollution stemming from industrial outputs, and deficiencies in waste management. The discussion further delved into the repercussions of these environmental stressors on the region's ecosystems and communities. Additionally, the session facilitated an examination of the climate initiatives implemented post COP28, emphasizing the need for greater scrutiny and evaluation of their efficacy. Participants also raised concerns regarding the lack of effective communication and collaboration among environmental stakeholders, including government entities, local NGOs, journalists, and activists. Moreover, it highlighted additional concerns such as overfishing and the adverse impacts of urbanization on biodiversity. This dearth of communication impedes the exchange of vital information and hinders coordinated efforts to address pressing environmental issues effectively. Thus, the session laid the groundwork for a broader discussion, encouraging participants to share insights, experiences, and specific challenges from their respective regions, with a view to fostering greater collaboration and action.

- Bureaucratic Challenges:** Participants like Hana Ahmad Raza President of Leopards Beyond Borders Organization detailed how bureaucratic hurdles inhibit NGO operations, especially when trying to expand into provinces with strict security requirements.
- Resource and Training Needs:** Aram Harbi Saadallah HR at One Tree Organization highlighted the desperate need for resources and training to support fledgling environmental groups in Duhok, emphasizing the challenges posed by environmental violations and the lack of enforcement.
- Funding Sustainability:** Hazhar Abdullah Member from Zhingadosty Organization discussed the difficulty in sustaining projects after initial funding runs out, a challenge compounded by Namo President at Iro Organization who mentioned issues with jealousy and competitiveness affecting collaborative efforts.
- Activist Support Deficiencies:** Bahez Farooq Ali Project Coordinator and Salam Ramadhan Hussein Member at Leopards Beyond Borders discussed the insufficient support for activists facing threats from influential figures involved in illegal activities.
- Technological Shortcomings:** Shagul Abubakr Ali Researcher from Earth Network highlighted significant gaps in the availability of essential technological tools such as lab equipment and devices for water, air, and soil monitoring for effective environmental research.
- Government Engagement and Support:** Muhanad Eyub Head of Department of Climate change at The Board of Environment highlighted the lack of proactive engagement from NGOs in submitting proposals for government funding that is readily available.



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7. **Waste Management and Public Engagement:** Nma Nadhim Khany Founder and CEO at Nma Khany Organization pointed out the challenges in managing urban waste and the necessity for more robust community cleanup campaigns in Sulaymaniah city and especially in the Resorts.
8. **Legal Awareness and Enforcement:** Hiwa Rashid Ali Researcher from Garmyan University emphasized the need for greater awareness about environmental laws and regulations and enforcement of existing environmental laws within communities and NGOs.
9. **Regulatory Authority Limitations:** Ahmad Muhammad Office Manger at the Kurdistan Board of Environmental Improvement and Protection discussed the board's limited power, which restricts its ability to enforce environmental regulations effectively.
10. **Cop28 Remarks:** During the roundtable, significant attention was directed towards the COP28UAE climate initiatives spearheaded by the KRG Prime Minister Masrour Barzani. The initiatives emerged as a pivotal topic of discussion, highlighting the government's efforts to address climate change concerns. However, a notable concern raised by participants was the lack of visibility, follow-up, and available data regarding these initiatives. This dearth of information hindered the ability of NGOs and other entities to effectively utilize the initiatives in their reports and future projects. The absence of transparent data and progress reports created challenges in assessing the impact and effectiveness of the COP28UAE climate initiatives, emphasizing the need for enhanced transparency and collaboration between governmental bodies and civil society organizations. Participants emphasized the importance of establishing mechanisms for transparent communication and data sharing to ensure that climate initiatives are effectively monitored, evaluated, and utilized to drive meaningful environmental action in the region.

### 3. Action Plan:

The action plan developed during the roundtable includes specific strategies and estimated periods for implementation, along with the entities involved:

#### 1. Development of an Online Collaboration Platform: Within the next 6 months.

Entities involved: Waterkeepers Iraq, Directory of NGOs, local NGOs, tech partners, Media, researchers, journalists, and activists.

- 1.1. The online platform will be designed by a team of experts within Waterkeepers Iraq Organization, in collaboration with technical partners if necessary. The launch process will involve extensive testing and refinement to ensure usability and functionality. Additionally, support from relevant Government Stakeholders will be sought to provide input, endorse the platform, and potentially contribute resources for its implementation.
- 1.2. Implement features for project collaboration, resource sharing, and community engagement.



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## 2. Enhanced Community Engagement and Government Transparency: Within the next 12 months.

Entities involved: Local government bodies, community organizations, environmental NGOs

- 2.1. Organize workshops and public forums to involve community voices in environmental decision-making.
- 2.2. Develop transparency protocols for environmental governance, including public access to environmental data and decision-making processes.

## 3. Structured Networking and Stakeholder Mapping: Within the next 3 months.

Entities involved: Waterkeepers Iraq, all participating NGOs, research institutions

- 3.1. Establish a structured network supported by the online platform to enhance coordination among NGOs.
- 3.2. Create a comprehensive stakeholder map to identify roles, resources, and areas of expertise for better collaboration and resource allocation.

## 4. Volunteer Support and Media Engagement Initiative: Immediate to ongoing.

Entities involved: One Tree Organization, Avyar Organization, local media outlets

- 4.1. Deploy volunteers from One Tree Organization to support environmental activities across the region.
- 4.2. Launch a series of radio broadcasts and media campaigns with Aso from Avyar Organization to raise public awareness about environmental issues.

## 5. Regular Stakeholder Coordination Meetings: Immediate to Ongoing.

Entities involved: Waterkeepers Iraq, Roundtable Participants.

- 5.1. Waterkeepers Iraq will initiate the preparation phase by scheduling and organizing the bi-monthly meetings. This involves setting meeting dates, preparing agendas, and coordinating with participating entities to ensure their availability and participation.
- 5.2. During the meetings, Waterkeepers Iraq will facilitate discussions and provide updates on action plan progress. Participating entities will share updates on their initiatives, discuss challenges, and strategize on collaborative efforts to address environmental issues in the Kurdistan Region.

## 4. Conclusion:

The roundtable underscored the urgency of addressing environmental challenges and the necessity of a collaborative approach. The comprehensive exchange of ideas and strategies highlighted the commitment of all participants to improving environmental conditions and governance in the region.

### Next Steps and Closing Remarks

Participants emphasized the importance of sustained engagement and collaboration, agreeing to scheduled follow-up sessions to assess progress on action items and refine strategies for effective advocacy, particularly in preparation for COP29.

Waterkeepers Iraq will now proceed with implementing the action plan points as follows:



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- 1. Development of an Online Collaboration Platform:** Waterkeepers Iraq will lead the design and launch of the platform, collaborating with technical partners if needed and seeking support from Government Stakeholders. Features for project collaboration, resource sharing, and community engagement will be implemented.
- 2. Enhanced Community Engagement and Government Transparency:** Workshops and forums will be organized to involve community voices, while transparency protocols will be developed in collaboration with local government bodies, community organizations, and environmental NGOs.
- 3. Structured Networking and Stakeholder Mapping:** Waterkeepers Iraq will establish a structured network and create a comprehensive stakeholder map to enhance collaboration and resource allocation among environmental stakeholders.
- 4. Volunteer Support and Media Engagement Initiative:** Collaborating with One Tree Organization, Avyar Organization, and local media outlets, Waterkeepers Iraq will deploy volunteers and launch media campaigns to raise public awareness about environmental issues.
- 5. Regular Stakeholder Coordination Meetings:** Waterkeepers Iraq will organize bi-monthly meetings to facilitate ongoing collaboration, information sharing, and progress tracking among stakeholders, ensuring effective implementation of the action plan.

## 5. Acknowledgment

Heartfelt thanks were extended to all participants for their invaluable contributions and to the organizers for facilitating a productive and engaging discussion. The insights and commitments shared are vital for advancing the environmental agenda in Iraq and the Kurdistan Region.

### Participants:

Shagul Abubakr Ali, Aram Harbi Saadallah, Gashbin Idrees Ali, Hazhar Abdullah, Hisham Zaki, Sanaan Abdullah, Ahmed Muhammad, Muhanad Eyoob, Hana Ahmad Raza, Bahez Farooq Ali, Hiwa Rashid Ali, Sarwan Hasan, Nma Nadhim, Aso Shkak, Parez Mohsin Dzay, Namo Majeed, Salam Ramadhan Hussein, Bnwar Rzgar, Bawan Omer.

### Disclaimer: Purpose of this Report

This report aims to contribute constructive suggestions and potential solutions to environmental challenges in the Kurdistan region of Iraq. It is not intended to criticize or blame any party but rather to foster collaboration among stakeholders for the betterment of the environment. We encourage open and cooperative discussions with the goal of inspiring positive action, raising awareness, and ensuring a sustainable future for the region's natural resources and communities. Waterkeepers Iraq Organization - Environmental Journalism in Iraq Project

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