

## *Roundtable Meeting on "The Impact of Oil Refineries on the Environment in Arbat Area"*

Date: 19/09/2023

### *Executive Summary:*

The roundtable meeting addressed Iraq's environmental challenges, specifically the impact of oil refineries in the Arbat area. Participants highlighted pollution from refineries, inadequate environmental impact assessments, and ineffective enforcement of regulations as critical issues.

### Key Outcomes:

1. **Strengthened EIAs:** The need for more rigorous and transparent environmental impact assessments, involving academic researchers, to prevent corruption and ensure better protection of the environment.
2. **Stricter Regulations:** Emphasis on enforcing environmental laws and holding polluters accountable to mitigate the adverse effects of oil refineries on air, water, soil, and groundwater.
3. **Public Awareness:** Importance of raising public awareness and media coverage to promote sustainable practices and informed decision-making.
4. **Local Community Involvement:** Advocacy for involving local communities in decision-making processes to ensure sustainable development and minimize conflicts.
5. **Reforms in Laws:** Recommendations for updating environmental laws and including relevant bodies in monitoring committees to enhance regulatory effectiveness.
6. **Collaboration and Information Sharing:** Encouragement for collaborative efforts between academia, media, NGOs, and government entities to share information and address environmental issues holistically.

In conclusion, the roundtable provided a platform for stakeholders to collaboratively address Iraq's environmental challenges. The action plan emphasizes the urgent need for comprehensive measures and collective efforts from all involved parties to safeguard Iraq's environment for future generations.



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



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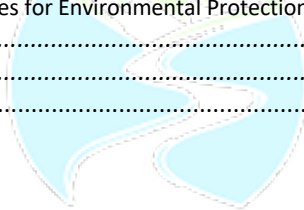
# Environmental Journalism in Iraq Project



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## 1. Introduction:

Iraq and Kurdistan Region, a country rich in natural resources and a significant oil producer, faces numerous environmental challenges that demand immediate attention and comprehensive solutions. The unchecked expansion of oil refineries in various regions, including the Arbat area, has raised concerns among environmentalists, researchers, journalists, and local organizations. To address these pressing issues and initiate a constructive dialogue, a roundtable meeting was organized on the 15th of July 2023 in Sulaimani, Paia Studio. The meeting brought together diverse stakeholders, including representatives from government entities, journalists, researchers, and local organizations, all united by a shared commitment to safeguarding Iraq and Kurdistan's environment for future generations.

The Environmental Journalism in Iraq Project, a collaborative effort between Waterkeepers Iraq Organization, Internews, Nirij Network, and Sama Al-Ebtikar Foundation, laid the foundation for this crucial roundtable with Waterkeepers Iraq as the Implementing partner of the activity. The primary focus was on exploring the significant impact of oil refineries on the environment in the Arbat area, particularly the threats posed to the Tanjero River and its surrounding ecosystems. As the only river that flows through Sulaimani, the Tanjero River plays a pivotal role in sustaining the region's biodiversity and supporting the livelihoods of local communities. Understanding the ecological implications of oil refineries on this vital water source was of paramount importance.

The roundtable's inception began with an insightful speech by Bnwar Rzgar Abdulrahman, a representative of Waterkeepers Iraq. He emphasized the urgency of the chosen topic and cited a recent report compiled by Waterkeepers Iraq on the threats facing the Tanjero River. The report identified a staggering 245 threats, with six oil refineries in the Tanjero and Arbat area emerging as major concerns. These refineries posed grave risks to the river's water quality and the delicate ecological balance of the surrounding areas. Bnwar Rzgar Abdulrahman's speech set the stage for an engaging and productive discussion among the participants.



Fig.1.e, Drone Shot of Tanjero river passing by Unca Sun Oil Facility and a Gravel Mine before reaching Tanjaro Area. Source (<https://www.waterkeepersiraq.org/tanjero-river-threat-assessment-assessment--outreach-project.html>)

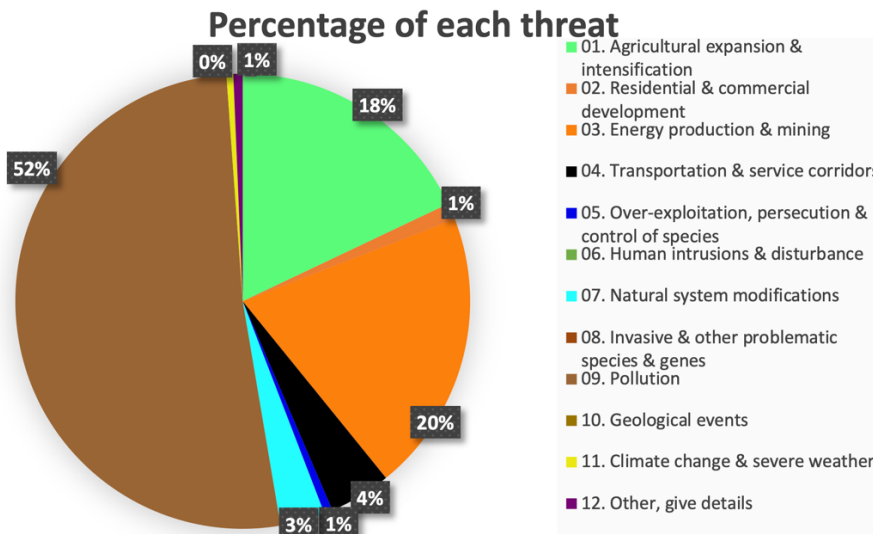


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The main threats on Tanjero River by sector are as follows:



6 oil refineries, compose %20 of Energy Production & mining threats. Source ([https://www.waterkeepersiraq.org/uploads/9/2/7/0/9270858/tanjero\\_river\\_threat\\_assessment\\_14\\_8\\_2022.pdf](https://www.waterkeepersiraq.org/uploads/9/2/7/0/9270858/tanjero_river_threat_assessment_14_8_2022.pdf))

Diverse stakeholders participated in the roundtable, reflecting the multi-dimensional nature of the environmental challenges facing Iraq and Kurdistan Region. Government entities were represented by Daban Muhamad, the Mayor of Arbat, who shared valuable insights into the complexities of industrial approvals and the lack of proper assessments. His concerns echoed the sentiments of Khabat Ahmad, a distinguished PhD student in Petroleum Engineering and lecturer, who emphasized the need for stringent policies and comprehensive geological and environmental assessments before permitting any industrial projects. Both participants highlighted the crucial role of law enforcement and local approval processes to ensure sustainable and environmentally conscious decisions.

Latest incident in Arbat Area which Daban Muhammad mentioned that was covered in the local news which showed a problem where a company was given permission to establish an iron factory next to the Yekhi Mali Village and the foundation of the factory laid on a water source that the villagers use as drinking water and also for irrigation and this resulted in the protest of the villagers to prevent the company from destroying their water source.







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## 2. Problems:

Existing Environmental Issues, Problems, and Concerns Mentioned in the Roundtable:

### 1. *Lack of Thorough Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs):*

- 1.1. Concerns raised about the inadequacy and corruption within EIAs conducted by the Directory of Environment and other organizations, leading to insufficient protection of the environment.
- 1.2. Insufficient assessments before granting permission for industrial projects, including oil refineries, resulting in potential irreversible damage to ecosystems.

### 2. *Pollution from Oil Refineries:*

- 2.1. Presence of six oil refineries in the Tanjero and Arbat area identified as a significant threat to the Tanjero River and surrounding ecosystems.
- 2.2. Lack of proper treatment plants for oil refineries and other industrial companies, leading to pollution of air, surface water, soil, and groundwater.

### 3. *Inadequate Government Oversight and Law Enforcement:*

- 3.1. Concerns raised about the lack of policy and procedures from the government in granting permissions, implementing, and monitoring industrial projects.
- 3.2. Lack of cooperation between government entities, leading to inefficient enforcement of environmental regulations.

### 4. *Corruption and Feasibility of Environmental Impact Assessments:*

- 4.1. Corruption within the Directory of Environment and other organizations conducting EIAs, leading to compromised assessments for financial gains.
- 4.2. Environmental Impact Assessments not conducted in a feasible manner, raising doubts about the integrity of the process.

### 5. *Inadequate Awareness and Media Coverage:*

- 5.1. Lack of attention from media and government towards environmental issues, particularly those related to oil refineries and oil drill companies.
- 5.2. Poor media coverage and inadequate awareness campaigns on environmental matters, hindering public engagement and understanding of the issues.

### 6. *Unplanned Industrial Development and Conflict Potential:*

- 6.1. Unplanned designation of the Tanjero area as an industrial zone, resulting in conflicts with local communities and concerns about the irreversible loss of agricultural lands.
- 6.2. Environmental problems potentially escalating into conflicts, necessitating government involvement to resolve issues in collaboration with researchers, NGOs, journalists, and activists.

### 7. *Ineffective Environmental Laws and Regulations:*

- 7.1. Environmental laws require reforms and updates to effectively control environmental violators, including the Board of Investment, which is not included in committees monitoring water resources and polluters.
- 7.2. The need for reinforcement of environmental laws to ensure strict adherence and accountability for environmental polluters.



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## 8. *Inefficient Resource Allocation:*

- 8.1. Inefficient allocation of government funds for environmental projects, resulting in the mismanagement of resources to combat environmental challenges effectively.
- 8.2. Existing funds obligated for environmental projects are often directed towards unsuitable organizations and initiatives.

## 9. *Lack of Cooperation and Communication:*

- 9.1. Insufficient cooperation between public sectors, academics, journalists, activists, and NGOs, hindering the exchange of valuable information and expertise.
- 9.2. Limited communication between academia and media, leading to poor coverage of environmental stories and lack of data sharing on environmental issues.

## 10. *Declining Water Quality and Quantity:*

- 10.1. The decrease in water quality and quantity of the Tanjero River due to pollution from oil refineries and industrial activities, affecting ecosystems and local communities.
- 10.2. Significant reduction in water flow from the Sirwan River to Darbandikhan Lake due to dams built by Iran, highlighting the need for effective water resource management.





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## 3. Action Plan:

The action plan outlines a comprehensive approach to address environmental challenges regarding oil Refineries in Iraq and Kurdistan Region, focusing on the impact of oil refineries in the Arbat area. It involves strengthening environmental impact assessments that are conducted for oil refineries and oil drilling, enforcing regulations, raising public awareness, involving local communities in decision-making, and fostering collaboration among academia, media, NGOs, and government entities on the impact of oil refineries and oil related industries:

### 1. Strengthen oil industry's Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs): Within the next 12 months.

**Entities involved:** Directory of Environment, Ministry of Natural Resources, Researchers, Media and companies such as Fox, UncaSun, Zillion, Phoenix

- 1.1. Develop more rigorous and transparent EIAs, involving academic researchers, to ensure thorough assessments of potential environmental impacts by oil refineries and other oil industries in Arbat Area.
- 1.2. Introduce measures to prevent corruption and ensure the integrity of the EIA process.

### 2. Public Awareness and Education: Within the next 12 months

**Entities involved:** Ministry of Education, Media Organizations such as Rudaw, Kurdsat, Kurdistan24, NGOs and Agencies such as Hiwa Foundation, Vim Foundation, Paia Agency, Civil Development Organization.

- 2.1. Introduce an environmental education curriculum in schools to raise awareness among the younger generation about environmental issues and sustainable practices.
- 2.2. Launch public awareness campaigns with contents prepared by Waterkeepers Iraq organization and others who are interested through media outlets and NGOs to inform citizens about the importance of protecting the environment and the impact of oil refineries on ecosystems.

### 3. Involvement of Local Communities in Decision Making: Within the next 18 months

**Entities involved:** Local Government Authorities, Board of Environmental Protection and Improvement, NGOs, Media

- 3.1. Waterkeepers Iraq and journalists that are interested to make a report about the importance of Local Communities in decision making.
- 3.2. Encourage participatory decision-making processes, where local mayors and representatives are involved in granting permissions for industrial projects in their respective areas.
- 3.3. Incorporate public consultations and Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) as mandatory components of the decision-making process.





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## 4. Reformation of Environmental Laws about Oil Refineries: Within the next 18 months

**Entities involved:** Prime Minister's Office, Parliament, Board of Environmental Protection and Improvement, Ministry of Natural Resources, Law Enforcement Agencies, Parliament Environmental Committee

- 4.1. Review and update existing environmental laws about the regulations for the oil refineries, such as the 2008 law and the 2022 water law, to address loopholes and include relevant bodies, like the Board of Investment, in committees monitoring water resources and polluters.
- 4.2. The reviewed and reformed laws to be presented to Kurdistan Environmental Improvement Board.
- 4.3. Strengthen law enforcement efforts to ensure compliance with environmental regulations by industrial companies, including oil refineries.
- 4.4. Introduce a taxation mechanism for industrial companies, including oil refineries, with the revenue earmarked for funding environmental projects and initiatives.
- 4.5. Reaching out to the Prime Minister's office and Advocate for the prioritization of environmental projects and allocate sufficient resources to tackle environmental challenges effectively.

## 5. Creation of a Platform for Information Sharing: Within the next 3 months

**Entities involved:** Board of Environmental Protection and Improvement, Research Institutions, NGOs, Journalists

- 5.1. Reinforce the online platform Environmental Electro Library to share data, research findings, and information among researchers, NGOs, journalists, and activists to enhance collaboration and informed decision-making.
- 5.2. Meeting with Vim Foundation and researchers who started Environmental Electro Library to discuss the possibility of adding a section for journalists for better facilitation between journalists and researchers.

## 6. International Collaboration and Support: Within the next 12 months

**Entities involved:** Ministry of Foreign Affairs, International Organizations such as WFP, WBO, WHO, UNDP, UNEP

- 6.1. Engage with international organizations through briefing and seek support to address environmental challenges in Iraq, including pressuring the government to take effective measures.

## 7. Reactivation of NGO Committees for Environmental Protection: Within the next 3 months

**Entities involved:** Board of Environmental Protection and Improvement, NGOs

- 7.1. Creating a list of active NGOs that work on the environment and presenting them to Board of Environmental Protection and Improvement.
- 7.2. Revitalize existing NGO committees within the Board of Environmental Protection and Improvement to actively engage in environmental protection and provide valuable input on policy matters.



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## 4. Conclusion:

The roundtable meeting on the impact of oil refineries on the environment in the Arbat area provided a comprehensive and insightful platform for diverse stakeholders to address Iraq's pressing environmental challenges. The discussions highlighted a range of issues, including inadequate environmental impact assessments, pollution from oil refineries, ineffective government oversight, and corruption within the regulatory process. Participants also expressed concerns about the lack of public awareness and media coverage, the potential for conflicts arising from unplanned industrial development, and the need for reforms in existing environmental laws and regulations.

The meeting emphasized the urgent need for collaborative efforts among government entities, NGOs, researchers, media organizations, and the public to tackle these environmental issues effectively. Strengthening the process of environmental impact assessments emerged as a critical step to ensure thorough assessments and prevent corruption. Participants stressed the importance of introducing stringent policies to enforce environmental regulations, along with stricter law enforcement to hold polluters accountable.

The significant environmental impact of oil refineries in the Arbat area was a key focus, with concerns raised about pollution affecting air, surface water, soil, and groundwater. Participants emphasized the necessity of establishing treatment plants for oil refineries and industrial companies to mitigate pollution and manage wastewater effectively.

The meeting also underscored the importance of raising public awareness and media coverage to drive environmental consciousness among citizens. Participants called for the introduction of environmental education in school curricula to foster a sense of responsibility towards the environment among the younger generation. Public awareness campaigns through media outlets and NGOs were seen as instrumental in informing citizens about environmental issues and promoting sustainable practices.

Involvement of local communities in decision-making processes emerged as a vital aspect of environmental protection. Participants advocated for participatory approaches, where local mayors and representatives play an active role in granting permissions for industrial projects in their areas. Public consultations and Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) were considered crucial components of the decision-making process.

The roundtable discussions brought to light the need for reforms in existing environmental laws to address loopholes and include relevant bodies in committees monitoring water resources and polluters. Participants emphasized the significance of reactivating NGO committees within the Ministry of Environment to provide valuable input on policy matters.

Collaboration between academia, media, and NGOs was identified as essential to share information and expertise and foster a more comprehensive understanding of environmental challenges. Participants stressed the need for academia to actively engage with journalists and NGOs when addressing new environmental issues and sharing data on environmental hotspots.

In conclusion, the roundtable meeting provided a platform for diverse stakeholders to address Iraq's environmental challenges with a comprehensive and collaborative approach. The action plan outlined during the meeting, encompassing strengthened environmental impact assessments, stricter enforcement of regulations, establishment of treatment plants, public awareness campaigns, involvement of local communities, and collaboration among various entities, serves as a roadmap to promote sustainable environmental practices in Iraq. The collective efforts of government bodies, NGOs, researchers, media organizations, and the public are essential to safeguarding Iraq's environment and preserving its natural treasures for future generations. The meeting's outcomes set the stage for meaningful progress towards a greener and healthier Iraq.



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## 5. Acknowledgment

Acknowledgments:

We extend our sincere gratitude and appreciation to all the participants who contributed their valuable insights and expertise during the roundtable meeting on the impact of oil refineries on the environment in the Arbat area. The success of this event would not have been possible without their active engagement and commitment to addressing Iraq's pressing environmental challenges.

Special thanks to the following participants for their contributions:

1. Chra Mahmood - Hiwa Foundation (Local Organization)
2. Daban Muhamad - Mayor of Arbat
3. Dara Amin - University Professor at the University of Sulaimani (Researcher)
4. Diary Ali - Dean at Sulaimani Polytechnic University (Researcher)
5. Hiwa Rashid - University of Garmian (Researcher)
6. Khabat Ahmad - PhD student in Petroleum Engineering, Miskolc University (Researcher)
7. Khaled Soleiman - Guest Speaker and Environmental Journalist
8. Lava Fazil Lawa – Hiwa Foundation (Local Organization)
9. Rawaz Jalal – Agriculture Consultant and Lecturer (Other Participant)
10. Sarwar Qaradaghi – Aryen TV (Journalist)
11. Shagul Ali - Petroleum Geologist at Kurdistan Institution for Strategic Studies and Scientific Research (Researcher)
12. Zheno Khalid - Conscious Planet Kurdish (Local Organization)
13. Zhyar Hakim – Rudaw (Journalist)
14. Bawan Omer Salih - Waterkeepers Iraq Organization (Local Organization)
15. Bnwar Rzgar Abdulrahman - Waterkeepers Iraq Organization (Speaker)
16. Nabil Ibrahim Musa – Waterkeepers Iraq Organization (Local Organization)
17. Goran Khudhur – Internews Iraq (International Organization)

We also express our appreciation to all the individuals who actively participated in the discussions, providing valuable feedback and suggestions for the action plan.

Your dedication and commitment to finding sustainable solutions for Iraq's environmental challenges are commendable. Each of you played a significant role in shaping the discourse and laying the groundwork for positive change. We are grateful for your presence and unwavering support.

Once again, thank you for your invaluable contributions. Together, we can work towards a greener and healthier future for Kurdistan Region and Iraq, preserving its natural resources for generations to come.

With warm regards,

### **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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