Agricultural development assessments and strategies in post-conflict settings: An empirical case study of eight southern Iraqi provinces

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This research was an empirical case study of post-conflict agricultural development assessments and strategies in eight southern Iraqi provinces. The purpose was to synthesize emergent themes, trends, and lessons learned from aggregated agricultural development reports and documents related to post-conflict needs assessments. Using a systems-approach, the goal was to improve Iraqi agricultural practice, extension and training, community development, security, and policies for governance. Three objectives were identified to achieve the purpose of this study: 1) identify emergent agricultural development themes from each of the eight Iraqi provinces; 2) identify emergent agricultural development trends; and, 3) provide relevant case documentation to assist in future agricultural development/post-conflict development efforts. The case study method fit the criteria of the research design. Grounded theory and sensitizing concepts guided the conceptual framework. Using qualitative and quantitative techniques, particular attention was given to agricultural specialties, technical and social knowledge systems, and data collection and analysis protocols. Data collection, analysis, and theory stood in reciprocal relationships. This study recognized three limitations, one delimitation, and four assumptions. Original data were collected as interviews, field notes, final provincial reports, and after-action reviews between June and December 2008.

A series of SWOT analyses within this case revealed eight provinces with four impending strengths, five weaknesses coupled to a plethora of subsumed issues, 15 opportunities, and eight threats to sustainable agricultural and post-conflict developmental efforts. It was found that Iraqi agricultural production lags due to many technical, educational, economic, social, and system factors. Promising practices hinge on the application of proven theories in guiding development and sustainability. Maslow’s hierarchy of needs is fundamental in sequencing sustainable development and facilitating receptivity to change. Roger’s diffusion of innovation theory guides the use of opinion leaders in the adoption and diffusion of innovations. Six general principles emerged from the case analysis of the post-conflict assessments: 1) shared ownership and responsibility are essential; 2) systems-thinking must recognize cultural values and norms; 3) all efforts must be complementary and cooperative; 4) short-term effort must lead to long-term strategies, 5) guard against developing dependency through aid; and 6) integrated theory, policy, and practice will more likely lead to sustainable value chains for food security and economic development in post-conflict environments. With a median age of 20.4, it may be that largest threat to the future of Iraq is not violence, but the diminishing hope of young people caused by their inability to obtain vocational-based skill training and the lack of jobs that match such skills. A pervasive lack of job opportunities, a perceived lack of job availability, and persistent poverty promotes civil unrest with the possibility of insurgency. An aggressive youth development focus on strengths and opportunities will have a positive impact in the current society.