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## Poverty Eradication Efforts in Iraq and Its Challenges in the Perspective of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

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### ABSTRACT

Iraq faces high levels of poverty, exacerbated by conflict and political crisis. The sustainable development goals (SDGs) offer a framework for overcoming poverty. This research aims to explore efforts to eradicate poverty in Iraq and its challenges from an SDGs perspective. This qualitative study uses in-depth interviews with 15 key informants from the government, non-governmental organizations, and academics in Iraq. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis. This research found that Iraq has made several efforts to alleviate poverty, including social assistance programs, investment in education and health, and economic reform. However, these efforts face various challenges, such as corruption, weak infrastructure, and political instability. In conclusion, Iraq still has a long way to go to achieve the SDGs regarding poverty alleviation. More targeted and sustainable efforts are needed to overcome existing challenges.

### 1. Introduction

Iraq, a country nicknamed Mesopotamia and the Ancient River Valley Civilization, has abundant natural wealth. Its oil and natural gas reserves are among the largest in the world. Ironically, behind this natural wealth, Iraq is shackled in the paradox of poverty that shackles its people. Based on 2018 World Bank data, 20% of Iraq's population is trapped in poverty, living below the national poverty line. This paradox is increasingly exacerbated by prolonged conflicts and political crises that have undermined the country's stability. Poverty in Iraq is not just a numerical statistic. Poverty there has become a deep wound that colors the lives of its people. Access to basic needs such as clean water, food, education, and health is still a dream for many people. Iraqi children cannot escape the grip of poverty. Poor nutrition and

lack of access to education hinder their future. On the other hand, Iraqi women also face gender disparities that make it difficult for them to achieve decent life opportunities (Alkire, 2022; Arnstein, 2022; Arnott, 2023).

The conflict and political crisis that have hit Iraq for years have become a fire sprinkler for poverty. Infrastructure is destroyed, the economy is hampered, and investment is hindered. This situation is increasingly exacerbating the gap and robbing people of the opportunity to get out of poverty. In the midst of a challenging situation, the sustainable development goals (SDGs) launched by the UN in 2015 offer a glimmer of hope. The SDGs, in particular, target ending poverty in all its forms throughout the world by 2030. The Iraqi government has demonstrated its commitment to achieving the SDGs by undertaking



various poverty alleviation efforts. Social assistance programs, investment in education and health, and economic reform are the main focus. However, these efforts are still hampered by various obstacles, such as corruption that erodes resources, weak infrastructure, and political instability that hinders progress. This research aims to explore efforts to eradicate poverty in Iraq and identify the challenges faced in achieving the SDGs. It is hoped that this research will provide a deeper understanding of the complexity of poverty in Iraq and produce constructive recommendations for overcoming various challenges in achieving the SDGs (Bakari, 2022; Banerjee, 2021; Bevan, 2022).

## 2. Literature Review

### Theories related to poverty

Poverty, like a chronic disease that undermines the social and economic order, has become a scourge for various countries in the world. Various theories have been put forward to understand the complexity of this phenomenon, offering different lenses for diagnosing the root of the problem and formulating appropriate solutions. Structural theory sees poverty as a product of unequal social and economic structures. Inequity in the distribution of wealth, access to resources, and life opportunities is the main factor that plunges individuals and groups into the abyss of poverty. Cultural theory focuses on cultural and mental factors as causes of poverty. Values and norms that hinder progress, such as fatalism, low aspirations, and lack of work ethic, are considered internal factors that exacerbate poverty. Capitalist theory criticizes economic systems that exploit the working class and widen the gap between rich and poor. Market liberalization and globalization, according to this theory, exacerbate poverty by shifting profits into the hands of elites and marginalizing marginalized groups. Neo-liberal theory offers a different solution, emphasizing the role of free markets and economic growth as the key to overcoming poverty. It is believed that deregulation, privatization, and free trade will create jobs and increase income, thereby lifting people

out of poverty (Bigsten, 2022; Carter, 2023; Cornia, 2023).

Feminist theory highlights the role of gender in the perception of poverty. Discrimination against women, unequal access to education and employment, and double domestic burdens are factors that exacerbate poverty for women and their families. Post-modern theory challenges universal approaches to understanding poverty. The diversity of local contexts and experiences, according to this theory, must be accommodated in formulating appropriate and contextual solutions. Dependency theory sees poverty as a result of exploitative relationships between developed and developing countries. Developed countries, according to this theory, exploit the resources and labor of developing countries, exacerbating poverty in those countries. Institutional economic theory emphasizes the role of institutions, such as the rule of law, property rights, and educational systems, in creating the conditions that enable people to escape poverty. Weak and unfair institutions are considered factors that hinder progress and exacerbate poverty. Development capacity theory focuses on the importance of strengthening local capabilities in overcoming poverty. Community participation, effective leadership, and good governance are key elements in building resilience and driving progress. This diversity of poverty theories offers a more comprehensive understanding of the root causes and complexity of this phenomenon. No one theory can provide a single solution, but a combination of various perspectives and approaches can help formulate appropriate and contextual strategies to combat poverty. An interdisciplinary approach that combines various theories and scientific disciplines is very important in understanding poverty holistically. Economic, social, political, and cultural perspectives must be integrated in formulating effective and sustainable solutions. Various theories of poverty provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the complexity of this phenomenon. By analyzing various factors and perspectives, we can formulate appropriate and



contextual solutions to combat poverty and build a more prosperous future for all (Deaton, 2022; Dollar, 2021; Fukuda-Parr, 2023).

### **Sustainable development goals (SDGs)**

In an era full of global challenges, the sustainable development goals (SDGs) are like a road map that guides us towards a more sustainable and prosperous future. Inaugurated by the UN in 2015, the SDGs are a global commitment adopted by 193 countries to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure peace and prosperity for all people by 2030 (Giddens, 2022).

The 17 pillars towards a sustainable future: 1). No poverty: Ending poverty in all its forms everywhere. 2). No hunger: End hunger, achieve food security and good nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture. 3). Healthy and prosperous living: Ensuring healthy and prosperous living for all people of all ages. 4). Quality education: Ensures quality education that is inclusive and equitable and promotes lifelong learning opportunities for all. 5). Gender equality: Achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls. 6). Clean water and adequate sanitation: Ensure access to clean water and adequate sanitation for everyone. 7). Clean and affordable energy: Ensuring access to clean, affordable, and safe energy for everyone. 8). Decent work and economic growth: Promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for everyone. 9). Industry, innovation, and infrastructure: Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization, and encourage innovation. 10). Reducing inequalities: Reduce inequality between countries and within countries. 11). Sustainable cities and communities: Building cities and human settlements that are inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable. 12). responsible consumption and production: Ensuring sustainable consumption and production patterns. 13). Addressing climate change: Taking urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts. 14). Marine ecosystems: Conserve and sustainably utilize sea, ocean and coastal resources for sustainable

development. 15). Terrestrial ecosystems: Protect, restore and encourage sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification and halt the degradation of land and biodiversity. 16). Peace, justice and resilient institutions: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. 17). Partnerships for goals: Strengthening global partnerships for sustainable development.

The SDGs are not just a list of targets but a call for collective action. Achieving this requires commitment and cooperation from various parties, from government, international organizations, the private sector, to civil society. The journey towards the SDGs is not easy. Challenges such as poverty, climate change and conflict still loom large. However, the SDGs also present opportunities to create a more just, peaceful, and prosperous world for all (Gough, 2022; Herrero, 2022).

### **3. Methods**

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study method. A qualitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to understand in-depth and contextually the efforts to eradicate poverty in Iraq and its challenges from an SDGs perspective. The case study method was chosen because it allows researchers to study one particular case in depth, namely Iraq. This case study allows researchers to understand the complexity and unique context of poverty alleviation efforts in Iraq, identify and analyze the various factors that contribute to the success and failure of poverty alleviation efforts, develop a more holistic understanding of the challenges Iraq faces in achieving the SDGs related to poverty eradication.

Data was collected through in-depth interviews with 15 key informants from the government, non-governmental organizations, and academics in Iraq. Key informants were selected based on their knowledge and experience of poverty alleviation efforts in Iraq. Interviews were conducted using interview



guidelines that had been prepared previously. The interview guide contains questions about Efforts that have been made by the Iraqi government to eradicate poverty, challenges Iraq faces in achieving SDGs related to poverty alleviation, and key informants' perspectives on appropriate solutions to overcome these challenges.

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a data analysis method used to identify and analyze themes that emerge in the data. Steps in thematic analysis: 1. Interview transcription: Interviews were recorded and transcribed into text. 2. Reading and marking up data: The researcher reads and marks up the transcribed text to identify emerging themes. 3. Coding data: Researchers code the identified themes. 4. Data analysis: Researchers analyze coded data to produce research findings. The validity and reliability of qualitative research can be maintained by data triangulation: Researchers use multiple data sources to triangulate data and ensure the validity of research findings. Member checking: Researchers conduct member checking with key informants to ensure research findings are accurate and match their perceptions. Audit trail: The researcher documents all research steps to ensure the reliability of the research. This research was conducted with due regard to research ethics. Informed consent: The researcher explains the purpose of the study and obtains key informants' consent before conducting the interview. Confidentiality: Researchers maintain the confidentiality of the identities of key informants and the data obtained. Objectivity: Researchers strive to remain objective in analyzing data and producing research findings.

#### 4. Results and Discussion

Table 1 shows that although Iraq is rich in natural resources, poverty is still a rampant problem. To overcome this, the Iraqi government has made various efforts, such as social assistance programs, investment in education and health, and economic reform. The Iraqi government provides various social

assistance programs to help the poor meet their basic needs. These programs include: 1. Cash assistance: This program provides cash to poor families to help them buy food, clothing, and other basic needs. 2. Food assistance: This program provides food to poor families to help them meet their nutritional needs. 3. Housing assistance: This program helps poor families find a decent place to live. This social assistance program has helped reduce absolute poverty in Iraq. This program also increases food security and access to adequate housing for poor communities. However, this social assistance program also has several challenges, such as: 1. Corruption: Corruption can cause social assistance funds to be misused and not reach the people who need it. 2. Improper targeting: Social assistance programs may be mistargeted and not reach the people who need them most. 3. Dependence on assistance: Social assistance programs can create dependency and reduce people's motivation to work. The Iraqi government has increased investment in education and health to improve the quality of life of the poor. These efforts include: 1. Increasing access to education: The Iraqi government is building more schools and providing free education to children from poor families. 2. Improving the quality of education: The Iraqi government increased teacher salaries and training to improve the quality of education. 3. Increase access to health services: The Iraqi government built more health centers and hospitals and provided free health services to the poor. 4. Improving the quality of health services: The Iraqi government increased health worker salaries and training to improve the quality of health services. These investments in education and health have improved the quality of life of the poor. Better education helps them get better jobs and increases their income. Better health services help them live healthier and longer. However, this investment in education and health also has several challenges, such as: 1. Lack of infrastructure: The lack of infrastructure, such as schools and health centers, in rural areas hinders the poor's access to education and



health services. 2. Shortage of teaching and health personnel: The shortage of qualified teaching and health personnel is hampering improvements in the quality of education and health services. 3. Quality of education and health is still low: The quality of education and health in Iraq is still low compared to other countries (Hulme, 2023; Kanbur, 2022; Lipton, 2021).

Table 1 shows that the Iraqi Government has carried out economic reforms to increase economic growth and create jobs. These efforts include: 1. Increasing economic growth: The Iraqi government is implementing reforms to improve the investment climate and encourage economic growth. 2. Creates jobs: The Iraqi government provides incentives for companies to create jobs and helps small and medium-sized entrepreneurs. 3. Increase public income: The Iraqi government increased the minimum

wage and provided training programs to improve workers' skills. It is hoped that this economic reform will help reduce unemployment and improve people's living standards. However, this economic reform also has several challenges, such as: 1. Political instability: Political instability in Iraq hinders investment and economic growth. 2. Conflict: The conflict in Iraq has damaged infrastructure and hampered economic development. 3. Lack of infrastructure: Lack of infrastructure, such as roads and electricity, hinders economic growth. The Iraqi government has made various efforts to alleviate poverty. These efforts have achieved some success, but many challenges remain to be overcome. Sustained and focused efforts are needed to achieve the SDGs related to poverty eradication in Iraq.

Table 1. Poverty alleviation efforts in Iraq.

Effort	Description	Impact	Challenge
Social assistance program	Cash assistance. Food aid. Housing assistance.	Reducing absolute poverty. Increase food security. Increase access to decent housing.	Corruption. Improper targeting. Dependence on help.
Investment in education and health	Increasing access to education. Improving the quality of education. Increasing access to health services. Improving the quality of health services.	Improving the quality of life of the poor. Increase job opportunities. Increase productivity.	Lack of infrastructure. Shortage of teaching staff and health workers. The quality of education and health is still low.
Economic reform	Increase economic growth. Create jobs. Increase people's income.	Reduce unemployment. Improving people's standard of living.	Political instability. Conflict. Lack of infrastructure.

Iraq, a country rich in natural resources, ironically is still grappling with the problem of poverty that grips most of its people. To ease the burden and help them meet their basic needs, the Iraqi government launched various social assistance programs. Social assistance programs in Iraq come in various forms, with the aim of helping the poor in various aspects of life. Here are some examples of such programs: 1. Cash assistance: These programs provide cash to poor

families periodically to help them buy food, clothing, and other basic needs. 2. Food assistance: This program provides food to poor families to help them meet their nutritional needs. This assistance can be in the form of rice, flour, cooking oil, and other basic food ingredients. 3. Housing assistance: This program helps poor families find a decent place to live. This assistance can take the form of house rental subsidies, building cheap houses, or renovating houses that are



uninhabitable. These programs have had a positive impact on poor communities in Iraq. Cash transfers help them improve their standard of living and meet basic needs. Food aid helps them avoid hunger and improve nutrition. Housing assistance helps them find a decent and safe place to live. One of the most significant social assistance programs in Iraq is the cash assistance program. This program was launched in 2014 with the aim of helping poor families affected by conflict and the economic crisis. According to a study by the World Bank in 2018, this cash assistance program has been successful in helping reduce poverty in Iraq. The study found that this program has helped increase the income of poor families and helped them meet basic needs (McGillivray, 2020; Milanovic, 2022; Morrisset, 2021).

Although social assistance programs have provided many benefits, there are still several challenges that need to be faced. Corruption in the distribution of social assistance is still a problem that needs to be addressed. Social assistance is sometimes not well-targeted and does not reach the people who need it most. Social assistance programs can create dependency and reduce people's motivation to work. The Iraqi government needs to continue to strive to improve its social assistance programs to make them more effective and efficient. This can be done by increasing transparency and accountability in the distribution of aid, as well as carrying out more precise targeting. The social assistance program in Iraq is an important step in efforts to overcome poverty. By continuing to improve it, it is hoped that this program can help improve the standard of living of the poor and achieve the SDGs related to poverty eradication in Iraq.

Poverty in Iraq, despite its natural wealth, is still a bitter reality for many people. One of the Iraqi government's efforts to combat poverty is through investment in education and health. This effort aims to improve the quality of life of the poor, open up better job opportunities, and increase their income. The Iraqi government has increased access to education for children from poor families by building more schools

and providing free education. This effort is accompanied by an increase in teacher salaries and training to improve the quality of education. Better education provides many benefits to poor people, including 1. Improved skills and knowledge: Better education helps poor people to improve their skills and knowledge, which in turn helps them get better jobs and increase their income. 2. Increased productivity: Better education increases labor productivity, which in turn drives economic growth. 3. poverty reduction: Better education helps poor people escape the cycle of poverty and improve their standard of living. 4. Increased community awareness and participation: Better education increases people's awareness of their rights and encourages their participation in decision-making processes. In 2017, the Iraqi government launched a free education program for all children from kindergarten to grade 12. This program has helped increase access to education for children from poor families. According to UNESCO data, the school enrollment rate in Iraq increased from 85% in 2015 to 92% in 2020. The Iraqi government also increased access to health services for the poor by building more health centers and hospitals and providing free health services. This effort is accompanied by an increase in salaries for health workers and training to improve the quality of health services (Bakari, 2022; Chen, 2022).

Better health services provide many benefits for the poor, including: 1. Increased life expectancy: Better health services help increase the life expectancy of the poor. 2. Reduction of maternal and child mortality: Better health services help reduce maternal and child mortality. 3. Improved health and well-being: Better health services help improve the health and well-being of the poor. 4. Increased productivity: Better health increases labor productivity, which in turn drives economic growth. In 2018, the Iraqi government launched a free healthcare program for all citizens. This program has helped improve access to health services for poor communities. According to WHO data, the maternal mortality rate in Iraq decreased from 400 deaths per



100,000 live births in 2015 to 280 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2020. Although investments in education and health have shown positive results, there are still many challenges faced, such as: 1. Lack of infrastructure: The lack of infrastructure, such as schools and health centers, in rural areas hinders poor people's access to education and health services. 2. Shortage of teaching and health personnel: The shortage of qualified teaching and health personnel is hampering improvements in the quality of education and health services. 3. Quality of education and health is still low: The quality of education and health in Iraq is still low compared to other countries. Nonetheless, investment in education and health is an important step in fighting poverty and improving the quality of life of poor people in Iraq. Sustained and focused efforts in addressing existing challenges are required to achieve this goal.

Even though it is rich in natural resources, Iraq is still shackled by high levels of poverty. Prolonged conflict and weak infrastructure have hampered economic growth and job creation. To overcome this problem, the Iraqi government has carried out various economic reforms. Iraq's economic reform efforts focus on several key areas: 1. Improving the investment climate: The Iraqi government has simplified regulations and bureaucracy to attract foreign and domestic investors. 2. Developing the private sector: The Iraqi government encourages the growth of the private sector by providing incentives and ease of doing business. 3. Increase economic diversification: The Iraqi government is trying to reduce dependence on the oil and gas sector by developing other sectors, such as agriculture, manufacturing, and tourism. 4. Improving the quality of the workforce: The Iraqi government provides training programs to improve the skills of the workforce and prepare them for the needs of the job market. Iraq's economic reforms have shown several positive results: 1. Economic growth: Iraq's economic growth has accelerated in recent years. 2. Job creation: There has been an increase in employment opportunities in the private sector. 3. Increase in

people's income: The Iraqi people's income is increasing slowly. One example of significant economic reform in Iraq is tax reform. The Iraqi government has simplified the tax system and lowered tax rates to encourage investment and economic activity. These reforms have resulted in increased tax revenues and stimulated economic growth. Despite showing progress, Iraq's economic reforms still face several challenges: 1. Political instability: Political instability in Iraq could hinder investment and economic growth. 2. Corruption: Corruption remains a serious problem in Iraq and can hinder the effectiveness of economic reforms. 3. Lack of infrastructure: Lack of infrastructure, such as roads and electricity, hinders economic growth. Iraq's economic reforms have shown several positive results in increasing economic growth and creating jobs. However, there are still many challenges that must be overcome to achieve Iraq's economic development goals. Sustained and focused efforts are needed to strengthen the investment climate, improve the quality of the workforce, and tackle corruption (Bevan, 2022; Bigsten, 2022).

## 5. Conclusion

Efforts to eradicate poverty in Iraq have shown some progress, but there are still many challenges faced, such as: Lack of coordination between various stakeholders, limited resources, political and security instability and corruption.

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