

Iraq's Climate Investment Pathways (2025-2030): A Strategic Policy Agenda

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Executive Summary

Iraq faces acute climate and economic risks: rising temperatures, recurrent droughts and water shortages are already threatening livelihoods and food security. Its oil-dependent economy is highly vulnerable to external shocks, with limited fiscal space to absorb climaterelated costs. The 2025-2030 Pathways for Climate Investment Plan (CIP) provides a roadmap for a just transition; its vision is to facilitate a smooth transition to low-carbon energies while diversifying its economy stepwise in a climate-resilient society. To achieve this vision, Iraq must implement significant governance reforms and strategic planning, enhance institutional capacity, expedite the energy transition, and collaborate with regional partners. Recommendations emphasise the integration of climate considerations into fiscal policy, the enhancement of public institutions and climate units, the modernisation of the oil and gas sector, the expansion of renewable energy and water-efficient agricultural practices, and the phased mobilisation of both domestic and international financial resources. The policy framework underscores the importance of inclusive stakeholder engagement, involving government, the private sector, civil society, and communities to guarantee equitable and transparent implementation. This paper presents the rationale, strategic priorities, and a phased implementation plan that aligns with VFSS objectives of good governance and sustainability. The conclusion emphasises the necessity for Iraqi leaders and international partners to collaborate on a green investment agenda to ensure a stable and prosperous future.

Climate Vulnerability and Economic Risks

Iraq is extremely climate-vulnerable. Its geography and changing climate combine to amplify risks: summers routinely exceed 50°C, droughts lengthen, and sand-and-dust storms intensify, "jeopardising water and food security" (World Bank, 2023). A 2024 assessment notes: "Iraq is particularly vulnerable to climate change, with increases in temperatures, recurring droughts, water scarcity, and sand and dust storms (SDS)", which can trigger food and water insecurity, displacement, and even regional instability (IMF, 2024). International indicators confirm this urgency: Iraq ranks 88th of 187 countries in climate vulnerability, with very low readiness to adapt. Key sectors agriculture, water, health, and infrastructure face stress from reduced river flows, salinised soils, and older systems (FAO, 2018). For example, over 40% of the national water supply relies on flows from Turkey, Iran, and Syria, making Iraq highly sensitive to upstream policies as well as climate trends.

At the same time, economic fragility compounds Iraq's challenge. The economy is heavily reliant on oil and gas (54% of GDP) and narrowly diversified (IMF, 2024). According to the CIP, "the country's economy is highly vulnerable to external market fluctuations, while the current fiscal space is limited" (Government of Iraq, 2025). Low oil prices, debt pressures, and social demands strain public budgets. As CIP observes, financing a large energy transition will entail high upfront costs that must be matched with a stepwise diversification of the economy to avoid social harm (Government of Iraq, 2025). Meanwhile, non-oil sectors (like agriculture) are under-invested and less profitable, leaving Iraq exposed to global price shocks and food insecurity (Vision Foundation for Strategic Studies, 2024). The combined effect of climate and economic shocks is widening vulnerabilities across communities, especially low-income groups and displaced populations.

In sum, Iraq's climate risk profile (intense heat, floods, scarce water) and economic fragility (oil dependence, narrow fiscal margins) reinforce each other. This nexus underlines the need for a coordinated policy response: one that simultaneously builds resilience to environmental shocks and reforms the economy toward sustainability.

Governance and Institutional Reform

Strong institutions and transparent governance are foundational to Iraq's climate agenda. The CIP stresses the need to "strengthen its institutional framework to effectively address climate change" (Government of Iraq, 2025). This process includes creating dedicated climate units in key ministries (Environment, Oil, Water, etc.), clarifying roles between federal and regional authorities, and integrating climate considerations across planning bodies. In practice, Iraq should mandate climate desks in each sectoral ministry (as already initiated by the Ministry of Environment) and empower a cross-ministry climate council to ensure coordination. Institutional capacity from data collection to project management must be bolstered. As CIP notes, "Capacity building is critical, with efforts to train government officials, stakeholders and communities on climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies" (Government of Iraq, 2025). This recommendation calls for technical training programs, knowledge exchanges with international experts, and a concerted push to fill gaps (e.g., installing meteorological sensors, updating GHG inventories).

Iraq's post-conflict context adds urgency to governance reforms. Recent studies highlight how donors are channelling billions towards debt relief and governance to stabilise the economy. The CIP data (reflecting UN and IFI planning) shows that USD 15.2 billion of recent aid was aimed at "strengthened governance, enhanced public services, and improved civil society engagement. This study highlights the international expectations that climate investments should align with anti-corruption measures, legal reform, and the active participation of parliament and civil society. Therefore, Iraq should expedite public financial management reforms, such as e-governance and audit systems, to ensure the tracking and value delivery of green investments. In parallel, rule-of-law reforms (on environmental regulation, land use, and resource rights) will build trust and attract private capital.

Key recommendations

1. Formally establish and fund a National Climate Council or a similar body, chaired at the senior level, to oversee CIP implementation across ministries.

2. Create a system of climate "focal points" in each key ministry, with clear mandates and resources (tied into Vision 2030 planning processes).

3. Enact transparency measures, such as publicising climate budgets and project outcomes, to enhance accountability.

4. Work with international partners to build civil service capacity (e.g., secondments, twinning of agencies, and technical assistance projects).

Together, these reforms will help translate climate ambitions into action, improving governance in line with VFSS goals of stability and citizen participation.

Strategic Planning and Policy Integration

To avoid ad-hoc actions, climate investments must be embedded in Iraq's broader development strategy. The CIP advocates integrating climate into fiscal and planning frameworks. Recommendation 1.1 explicitly calls for the integration of climate actions into fiscal policies. This means that, from 2025 on, every budget line and public investment plan should undergo a climate review. For example, road and power projects should be screened for emissions and climate resilience. The government should adopt a Medium-Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) that includes climate indicators, as urged by Iraq's 2023 Climate Public Expenditure & Institutional Review (UNDP Iraq, 2023).

Iraq is already revising its National Development Plan (2024-28) and preparing a Vision 2030 update; these must incorporate CIP targets and SDG goals in a coherent package. CIP's vision is to align with Iraq's broader developmental agenda, the SDGs, and other national policies that prioritise inclusive and sustainable growth (Government of Iraq, 2025). Practical steps include aligning sectoral plans (energy, water, agriculture) with the CIP's priorities. For instance, the upcoming electricity master plan should set a roadmap for 24-hour renewable energy by 2030, reflecting CIP's emphasis on both mitigation and adaptation. Similarly, the water management plan should factor in climate scenarios of 30-50% reduced flows (as projected) and target measures accordingly.

Transparency and monitoring are equally important. CIP Recommendation 1.2 calls for a formal M&E cycle: "Monitor and evaluate the CIP every five years." Iraq should institutionalise that process by requiring annual climate progress reports from Parliament and the public. It could establish an independent Climate Commission (or use the Parliament's Environment Committee) to review these reports, ensuring accountability. Moreover, all new legislation (e.g., on investment, land use, or industry) should be vetted for climate impacts. By mainstreaming climate into all levels of planning, Iraq ensures that reforms are strategic rather than reactive, fulfilling VFSS's call for evidence-based, inclusive policymaking.

Energy Transition and Green Investment

The energy sector is the backbone of Iraq's economy and the front line for a low-carbon transition. The CIP emphasises that a "fair and just energy transition" hinges on modernising existing industries; oil, gas, and heavy industries must become more energy-efficient and low-carbon.

Specifically, Iraq should prioritise the following:

a) Upgrade refineries and power plants to reduce flaring and emissions.

b) Investing in renewables, especially solar and wind, to gradually replace diesel generators and ageing turbines.

c) Electrifying transportation, supported by regulations and incentives to diversify away from oil.

d) Implementing methane capture and efficiency projects in oil and gas fields (aligned with the CIP's funding stream for methane reduction).

The electrification of transport is detailed in CIP's project pipeline (Annex V), which lists specific grid upgrades, solar parks, and gas harnessing projects planned for 2025-2030.

Stable policy signals, such as introducing feed-in tariffs or auctions for solar/wind and revising tax or pricing policies to make renewables competitive, are necessary for such investments. Promoting energy efficiency in buildings and industry (through codes and financing) will also cut demand. The plan points out that "renewable energy deployment can enhance energy security, create jobs, and mitigate climate risks" (Government of Iraq, 2025). Indeed, given Iraq's "rich renewable energy potential, particularly in solar and wind" (IRENA, 2019), these sectors should be targets for both public green funds and private investors.

The private sector can play a significant role in this context. The CIP calls for mobilising private climate finance (via blended financing, concessional loans, and PPPs). To catalyse this, the government should streamline permitting for clean energy projects and consider partial risk guarantees. The banking sector can be encouraged (and regulated) to develop green lending facilities. The Vision Foundation recommends establishing a national green investment bank or climate fund (as per CIP Recommendation 4.2) to channel both public and private capital into renewable energy and efficiency projects. To make clean energy investments "bankable," Iraq leverages the savings of its youth and diaspora, turning climate risk into an economic opportunity.

Key initiatives: Map and expedite the most impactful clean energy projects (e.g., large-scale solar in desert areas, pilot wind farms in Kurdistan, and grid modernisation). Introduce an attractive feed-in tariff or auction system by 2026. Strengthen SOEs like the Ministry of Electricity with performance-based incentives for renewables. Engage industry players (cement and steel) in modernising plants (co-finance upgrades). All these align with CIP's funding streams and VFSS's focus on energy and economic transformation.

Water, Agriculture, and Natural Resource Resilience

Water scarcity and land degradation threaten Iraq's food security and livelihoods. The CIP emphasises adaptation in water management and agriculture, two of the nation's most vulnerable sectors. Urgent actions include rehabilitating irrigation infrastructure (to reduce 70% water losses in canals), expanding rainwater harvesting, and using treated wastewater. The plan notes the need to invest in drought-tolerant crops and modern irrigation to increase yields. Reforestation and land restoration programs can combat desertification and improve the local climate.

Because Iraq's water also depends on regional cooperation, the policy agenda must extend beyond borders. The CIP observations highlight that "water resources in Iraq are dominated by imports from upstream neighbouring countries," making Iraq "vulnerable to climate change" and "allocation policies beyond national control." In response, Iraq should immediately revive diplomatic efforts to renegotiate transboundary water agreements (e.g., the Tigris-Euphrates protocols with Turkey, Iran, and Syria).

The CIP suggests establishing "international agreements on water sharing" and investing in non-traditional sources like desalination or recycled water. For example, a Gulf grant-funded desalination plant or joint Iraqi-Turkish reservoir project would be transformative.

We need policy reforms in agriculture to encourage efficient water use: we need to subsidise drip irrigation, promote high-yield varieties, and support farmers transitioning from water-intensive crops. Strengthening agricultural extension services (possibly through a climate-smart agriculture programme) will help farmers adapt their practices. These measures not only build resilience but also open economic opportunities: CIP notes that water and agriculture sectors, if climate-hardened, can "generate revenue" while securing food supply.

Regional Collaboration

Water is one area, but broader environmental cooperation can also pay dividends. For instance, shared forest management or joint renewable energy grid projects with neighbours could emerge at a regional climate forum. Engaging with programs like the Arab Water Council or transboundary wetland conservation (for the Mesopotamian Marshes) can bring technical and financial support. The plan's scope and the VFSS's regional outlook both support such collaboration, recognising that climate resilience is a common cause across the Middle East and North Africa.

Financing and Private Sector mobilisation

Implementing the CIP requires massive new financing. Iraq must leverage all sources: public budgets, private investment, international climate funds, and innovative instruments. The CIP framework proposes several "funding streams" (R&D, adaptation projects, combined projects, renewables, methane capture) to structure investment. But to realise these streams, Iraq needs to reform its financial architecture.

First, public budgets must be reprioritised. Even with a tight fiscal space, redirecting subsidies (e.g., gasoline or electricity) towards green projects can mobilise domestic funds. The government should task the Ministry of Finance with creating a system for tagging climate budgets, ensuring that every plan identifies climate expenditures. One practical step (Rec 1.1) is to mandate a share of the national budget for CIP priorities.

Second, domestic financial institutions must become part of the solution. The CIP recommends the establishment of a working group with the financial sector, including banks, pension funds, and insurance. This multi-stakeholder forum – co-chaired by the central bank and MoEnv officials – would identify regulatory and capacity barriers to green finance and propose solutions (like easing collateral rules for renewable projects). International partners can help by providing lines of credit or currency hedging facilities for climate projects.

Third, international climate finance must be tapped aggressively. Iraq should expedite accreditation to the Green Climate Fund (GCF) and other multilateral channels, allowing direct project funding. It should also invite donors to align with CIP targets: for example, directing their water/sewer or energy grants toward projects identified in the CIP pipeline. CIP data show that despite commitments, disbursement in Iraq has lagged (53.6% of climate finance absorbed vs. 83% global average). Improving this uptake rate is crucial: it means strengthening project development capacities and reducing bureaucratic hurdles.

Private sector engagement is vital

The Vision Foundation urges a clear path for businesses: clarify investment rules for renewables (e.g., guarantee tariff agreements and land leases), and offer guarantees or co-financing for green ventures. Public-private partnerships (PPPs) in infrastructure (solar parks, water treatment, public transport) can crowd in private capital. Donors and the World Bank/IFC should consider blended finance schemes that make climate projects bankable by sharing risk. CIP's emphasis on "green bonds, climate funds, and public-private partnerships" aligns with these approaches.

Key financing steps

1. Leverage domestic revenues (e.g., oil revenues or savings) as seed capital.

2.Consider a National Climate Fund (potentially under MoEn or a new authority) to pool international grants/loans and channel them to approved projects.

3. Tap private finance via policy incentives and credit lines.

4.Require climate finance. Disclosure requires that all major industrial and financial firms report climate risk, which encourages the market to appropriately price these risks.

By mobilising both public and private finance, Iraq can close the gap between plans and projects, in line with CIP recommendations and VFSS's energy-economy priorities.

Inclusive Stakeholder Engagement

A climate investment plan succeeds only with broad ownership. The CIP explicitly calls for "strengthening stakeholder and private sector engagement.". Building on this, we propose a formal multi-stakeholder framework:

Government and Parliament: The ministries of environment, oil, water, agriculture, finance, and planning should jointly oversee CIP implementation through an interministerial council. We should regularly brief Parliament's relevant committees (Environment, Economy, Finance) to provide legislative support, such as passing climate budgets or new regulations.

Private Sector: Industry associations and state-owned enterprises (SOEs) must be at the table. We can expand the working group with banks (Rec 3.1) to include large energy and agribusiness firms. Their role: co-develop investment roadmaps, report on progress, and invest in green technology. Private actors, from manufacturers to farmers, should see climate solutions as business opportunities (energy savings, new products), not just compliance.

Civil Society and NGOs: The CIP recognises Iraq's "vibrant civil society and NGOs" as key advocates for sustainable policy. NGOs can help monitor project impacts, raise public awareness, and ensure social inclusion (especially of women, youth, and the displaced). The plan should incorporate NGO-led community programs (e.g., reforestation projects, watershed committees) and civil society participation in local climate councils. VFSS's mission stresses citizen participation; thus, public forums or town halls on climate issues will build trust and legitimacy.

Academia and Research: Universities and think tanks (e.g., the Vision Foundation) should be engaged in independent analysis, capacity building, and innovation. The CIP's analytical chapters and Annex IV, which includes a list of institutes, clearly define this role. Iraq can consider a Climate Research Fund to support local studies on everything from solar potential mapping to social vulnerability. Involving experts early will improve project design and ensure best practices.

Local Communities: Given the social dimensions, grassroots engagement is crucial. For example, community-based adaptation programs in rural areas (through local councils) can identify the most urgent needs (water harvesting, heat shelters) and co-finance them. Internally displaced individuals and poor regions, such as Basra and Nineveh, who are most vulnerable to climate change, should receive special attention. Prioritising social-responsive projects (as CIP outlines in Annex V) will help build broad support.

By establishing a participatory governance model with regular stakeholder meetings, transparent reporting, and grievance channels, Iraq will ensure that diverse voices shape and benefit from the green transition. This aligns with VFSS's emphasis on inclusive dialogue and good governance.

Implementation Roadmap (2025-2030)

Building on CIP's phased approach, we outline an implementation timeline with priority steps:

Phase I (2025-2026): institutionalisation and Early Actions

Establish governance structures: Please initiate the establishment of the National Climate Council and designate climate focal points across various ministries, such as Energy and Water.

Fiscal integration: Incorporate CIP projects into the 2025/26 budgets; mandate climate impact assessments for new investments.

Capacity-building: Start training programs for officials and technicians; upgrade the climate research lab at the Ministry of Environment.

Policy signals: Issue regulations to enable renewables (permit fast-tracking) and launch a small pilot "green bond" issuance for a solar project.

Stakeholder outreach: Form the government-private working group (per Rec 3.1) and hold the first multi-stakeholder climate forum (including NGOs and youth groups).

Phase II (2027-2028): Scaling Up Investments

Major projects launch: roll out medium-scale projects (e.g., a 100 MW solar park, an upgraded irrigation network, a methane capture plant) from the CIP project pipeline.

Financial reforms: Adopt climate budget tagging; consider a budgetary reallocation toward climate (e.g., repurpose a portion of energy subsidies).

Monitoring systems: Implement a national climate M&E system (per Rec 2.2) tying CIP to NDC targets; publish a mid-term progress report.

Strengthen stakeholder bodies: Expand the working group to include subcommittees on issues like finance and technology and institutionalise NGO advisory panels.

Regional cooperation: initiate or conclude negotiations on water sharing agreements and join regional climate adaptation initiatives (with the UN or neighbours).

Phase III (2029-2030): Consolidation and Review

Full-scale transition projects: Complete the first wave of large renewables (e.g., 500 MW wind farm in Erbil) and rehabilitated dams.

National Climate Fund: Operationalise a public fund or dedicate a trust for climate projects (leveraging domestic and foreign capital).

Policy evaluation: Conduct a comprehensive review of the CIP (as recommended every five years) and update the plan based on outcomes.

Inclusive growth: Ensure communities share benefits (e.g., job training for green industries). Begin planning Phase II (2030–2050) with lessons learnt.

Each phase involves multi-stakeholder action and feedback loops. Importantly, steps overlap; e.g., reforms in Phase I (like fiscal integration) support investment scaling later. The Vision Foundation's focus on strategic, evidence-based planning suggests that Iraq should treat the process as an adaptive management cycle: learn from pilots, adjust policies, and scale successes. Only coordination across government levels and sectors, with clear accountability, will ensure the success of the roadmap.

Conclusion and Call to Action

Iraq finds itself at a pivotal juncture. The decisions made today will either lead to the country's prosperity or lead to increased hardship due to climate change. The 2025-2030 Pathways for Climate Investment Plan provides a blueprint that aligns with global climate goals and national development priorities. For success, all stakeholders, from the Prime Minister's office to local communities and from international donors to private investorsmust commit to the reform agenda outlined here.

We call on Iraqi leaders to endorse the CIP as a national priority, fast-tracking the reforms and investments described. We urge international partners to provide financial and technological support for these efforts, acknowledging their interest in stabilising Iraq's climate-vulnerable economy. Civil society and youth groups should actively participate in implementation, ensuring transparency and equity. The private sector is invited to mobilise capital and innovation for clean energy, water, and resilience projects.

As the Vision Foundation advocates, achieving stability, democracy, and prosperity in Iraq requires sustainable policy action and inclusive dialogue. The climate challenge exemplifies this need. With coordinated governance reforms, strategic planning, and regional cooperation, Iraq can turn its vulnerabilities into strengths, cultivating green growth, creating jobs, and safeguarding communities for decades to come. The time to act is now.

Appendix A Clarification of Referenced Recommendations and Annexes

1. Rationale for Thematic Structuring of Appendix A

The remainder of this section explains why the policy paper's Appendix A references are organised by theme. Appendix A details Iraq's Climate Investment Pathways (CIP) 2025–2030 suggestions and add-ons.

This approach integrates fundamental principles of academic and policy analysis:

1. Cognitive Accessibility: Organising items by policy domains, including fiscal reform, private sector investment, and institutional innovation, enhances alignment with readers' cognitive frameworks and expectations, thereby facilitating comprehension (OECD, 2020).

2. easy to understand: the paper is arranged according to theme, and the appendix serves as a source for each section, rather than merely a compilation of references.

3. Evolution: Evidence-based policy principles facilitate the organisation of institutional documentation by theme for decision-makers (Nutley et al., 2007; Cairney, 2016).

While the original CIP recommendations are not organised thematically, this reorganization complies with recognised academic standards for clarity and analytical effectiveness, without modifying the content or purpose of the source material.

2. Thematic Clarification of Recommendations and Annexes

A. Fiscal and Financial Policy

Recommendation 1.1: demands that fiscal policies take climate change into account. Climate screening should be applied to all budget lines and public investment plans. A Medium-Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) with climate indicators should be adopted, it is also advised.

B. Climate Investment Institutions

CIP Recommendation 4.2: Proposes developing a National Green Investment Bank or Climate Fund to raise both private and public funding for green energy and efficiency projects.

C. Private Sector & Innovation

Recommendation 3.1: Establish a working group between the government and the private sector, with banks and businesses as members, to promote green investment and climate finance innovation.

D. Monitoring, Research, and Implementation Support

Recommendation 2.2: Advocate for the establishment of a national monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system aligned with Iraq's climate objectives (e.g., NDCs), as well as the dissemination of regular progress reports.

Annex IV: Lists climate research and policy advisory academic institutions and think tanks like VFSS. Emphasizes project design and evidence-based implementation.

E. Project Pipeline and Resilience Initiatives

CIP Annex V: Outlines proposed investments in climate change, mainly in energy, water, and agriculture, along with community-based and resilience-building projects.

Abbreviation	Full Form
СІР	Climate Investment Plan
VFSS	Vision Foundation for Strategic Studies
GHG	Greenhouse Gas
NDC	Nationally Determined Contribution
IFI	International Financial Institution
MTEF	Medium-Term Expenditure Framework
РРР	Public-Private Partnership
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
SOE	State-Owned Enterprise
GCF	Green Climate Fund
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IRENA	International Renewable Energy Agency
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNDRR	United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction
SDS	Sand and Dust Storms

Appendix B Abbreviation Table

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