

**EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH DR. SANAAN
MOHAMMED, THE SPOKESPERSON OF
THE BOARD FOR ENVIRONMENTAL
PROTECTION AND IMPROVEMENT**

Noor Omer | June 3, 2026

Exclusive
Interview



Note: This interview is conducted as part of iNNOV8's Environmental Awareness Week, a special series examining four critical themes: greenery and forestation, noise and air pollution, water sustainability, women and climate change. To read iNNOV8's full report on the state of greening and afforestation in the Kurdistan Region, click [here](#).

Profile of the Interviewee

Dr. Sanaan Abdullah Mohammed is the Director of the Office of Environmental Awareness and Media, and Spokesperson of the Environmental Board. He is a member of the Supreme Environmental Council of the Federal Ministry of Environment, as well as a member of the Supreme Environmental Council of the Kurdistan Region. Dr. Sanaan has assumed the role of Chair of the Committee for the Amendment of the Law on Environmental Protection and Improvement, and serves as the Environmental Board's representative for the Ministry of Education's Eco-Friendly Schools Project. He is also a member of the Environmental Board's coordination team with the Ministry of Interior. He brings 23 years of experience in this field, 11 of which have been spent at the Environmental Board. Dr. Sanaan holds a PhD in Politics and International Relations, as well as a Master's degree and Bachelor's degree in the same discipline.

Interview Questions & Answers

Theme 1: On Institutional Governance

Question 1: Environmental governance in the Kurdistan Region is distributed across several institutions. In practice, which body is responsible for coordinating and overseeing long-term greening and afforestation strategy?

Under Law No. 8 of 2008 on Environmental Protection and Improvement, and subsequently Law No. 3 of 2010 on the Board for Environmental Protection and Improvement, the Environmental Board is a

governmental institution reporting to the Council of Ministers. Its mandate encompasses oversight, follow-up, and advisory functions. The implementing bodies are the relevant ministries, each operating according to its mandate in coordination with the Environmental Board. Environmental governance is therefore distributed across several ministries:

- The **Ministry of Agriculture and Water Resources**, responsible for forest protection, afforestation, soil conservation, tree-planting projects outside municipal boundaries, and water resources.
- The **Ministry of Municipalities and Tourism**, responsible for urban environmental management and waste management.
- The **Ministry of Interior**, which coordinates with the Forest and Environment Protection Police to enforce environmental laws and regulations.
- The **Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure**, which regulates transportation-related environmental matters.

Environmental conditions, guidelines, and standards serve as the principal instruments to which ministries must adhere. Both the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Municipalities bear primary responsibility for coordinating and overseeing the long-term greening and afforestation strategy from an implementation standpoint.

Question 2: Is there a unified institutional framework connecting forestry, municipalities, water management, and environmental bodies?

Under Law No. 8 of 2008, a Supreme Council for Environmental Protection and Improvement exists in which all relevant ministries are represented according to their respective mandates. Council members at Director General level and above oversee the implementation of the Council's decisions and directives within their respective ministries. The Supreme Council therefore constitutes a unified institutional framework connecting all relevant government bodies. In parallel, at the governorate and independent administration levels, Environmental Protection and Improvement Committees exist, comprising representatives of all environment-related ministries. Their mandate

is to follow up on the implementation of Supreme Council decisions, propose environmental protection plans, submit periodic reports on environmental conditions and activities within each governorate, and address local environmental challenges.

Question 3: What are the most significant institutional obstacles that complicate long-term environmental coordination in the Kurdistan Region?

One of the primary challenges is achieving unified action in drafting national environmental plans. As one example, both the adaptation and mitigation documents were developed in coordination with the relevant ministries. Additionally, the issuance of environmental clearances and the preparation of Environmental Impact Assessment reports constitute a key mechanism through which government ministries regulate the granting of permits for any project. It can therefore be said that a degree of coordination and a unified framework for environmental work does exist, though meaningful structural challenges remain.

Theme 2: On Measuring Success

Question 4: How does the government define success in greening projects: by the number of trees planted, or by ecosystem recovery and long-term tree survival?

In my view, the success of greening projects must be assessed in relation to the application of environmental conditions, guidelines, and standards, which form a foundational criterion for sustainable development. Success in any greening project therefore requires sound governance: effective institutional management drives project success in terms of restoring the local ecosystem and ensuring the long-term survival of planted trees. Both dimensions, the number of trees planted and their sustained survival, are essential criteria for evaluating the success of a greening project.

Question 5: Does the Board maintain data on tree survival rates several years after project completion?

Unfortunately, we do not currently hold such data. This is an area that could be developed in the future, with the aim of building a comprehensive database from which all relevant institutions as well as researchers can benefit. Within the Environmental Board, the presence of evergreen trees is counted among the indicators used to measure increases in green coverage.

Question 6: If long-term monitoring remains limited, what institutional mechanisms are still absent that could support the development of continuous monitoring for environmental and greening projects?

Building effective continuous monitoring requires, in my view, several criteria: greater inter-institutional coordination; the provision of advanced and modern technology for project monitoring; binding project owners to the application of environmental standards; issuing environmental clearances for defined periods so that project owners remain bound by environmental conditions throughout; and establishing a centralized data collection system for environmental clearances and Environmental Impact Assessment reports, so that all relevant ministries can digitally and collectively monitor projects on an ongoing basis. For greening projects specifically, the implementing party must conduct continuous monitoring, while the Environmental Board's monitoring committee carries out regular site visits to verify the project's sustained progress.

Theme 3: On Monitoring and Accountability

Question 7: One recurring challenge in environmental programs globally is the gap between planting and post-planting maintenance. In the KRI context, who is institutionally responsible for sustaining forests and green areas after planting campaigns conclude?

This is a challenge that exists in every context, and the Kurdistan Region is no exception. Annual tree-planting campaigns are held, but I must acknowledge that the emphasis tends to fall more heavily on the act of planting than on what follows, despite the fact that the measure of a tree's survival and persistence is the quality of monitoring it receives. Responsibility for that monitoring

lies with the Ministry of Agriculture for areas outside municipal boundaries, and with the Ministry of Municipalities within municipal boundaries. Planting campaigns should therefore be grounded in a combined principle of planting and monitoring, with long-term survival as the guiding objective. This should be established as the standard framework for all campaigns and initiatives.

Question 8: Are monitoring and maintenance responsibilities formally embedded in project planning and budgets?

In principle, they should be, given the direct service these obligations render to environmental protection. Whenever a budget is allocated for a planting campaign, it should include a dedicated line item for monitoring and maintenance. The early phase of a campaign is the planting phase; the closing phase should be defined by monitoring and maintenance, allocated in proportion to what is required to ensure the project's success.

Question 9: How is monitoring and law enforcement carried out with respect to environmental violations, such as illegal forest clearing and tree destruction?

At the Environmental Board, environmental violations, including illegal tree-cutting and threats to forest integrity, are addressed under the Law on Environmental Protection and Improvement and Directive No. 2 of 2023. Given that forestry falls within the mandate of the Ministry of Agriculture as well, greater coordination between the two bodies is necessary, both for the purpose of strengthening forest monitoring, and for the enforcement of environmental laws and regulations, which the Forest and Environment Protection Police carry out within the scope of their designated responsibilities.

Theme 4: On Water Integration

Question 10: Can large-scale tree planting realistically be sustained without a regional-level water allocation strategy?

The context we are operating in is defined by the compounding impacts of climate change: variables such as declining rainfall, a projected water crisis, advancing desertification, shrinking green

coverage, and rising emissions - all of which place intensifying pressure on available water resources. Tree planting must therefore be carried out in a planned and consultative manner, ensuring that water supply is guaranteed in advance and that species are selected for their resilience to climate change and challenging environmental conditions.

Question 11: How are the water requirements of greening projects coordinated alongside agricultural and household water demands?

Given current environmental pressures, most countries are actively encouraging farmers to adopt modern irrigation systems, such as drip irrigation as well as the reuse of treated greywater for parks and green spaces, and the responsible management of groundwater as a national resource for future generations. In the Kurdistan Region, a clear balance must be established between the water demands of greening projects and household consumption, with household water use taking precedence. Water security and food security are two essential factors in protecting the ecosystem and supporting the long-term stability of communities in their places of residence. The Region's water management system must therefore be strengthened to reliably guarantee both.

Question 12: Has climate change pressure and water scarcity changed how the government approaches species selection and afforestation planning?

To a significant degree, yes. The first phase of the Erbil Green Belt, for example, planted olive and pistachio trees - a decision reached following detailed study by the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Municipalities, and other stakeholders, who identified the species best suited to the environmental conditions of the Kurdistan Region and to its evolving climate.

Theme 5: On Policy and Long-Term Strategy

Question 13: From your perspective, what would successful environmental governance in the Kurdistan Region realistically look like over the next ten years?

Achieving meaningful success over the coming decade would require, in my view the followings:

- A unified and integrated environmental management system.
- A clear long-term vision for the environment, underpinned by short-, medium-, and long-term plans.
- Full participation and coordination across all relevant parties in implementing environmental protection measures.
- A rigorous and well-resourced monitoring system.
- Strategic utilization of modern technology in support of environmental protection.
- Meaningful investment in individual and societal environmental awareness and engagement.
- Strong legal literacy and consistent enforcement of environmental laws and regulations.
- Treatment of water and the environment as a single, interconnected system.
- Full implementation of the domestic adaptation and mitigation documents.
- Establishment of a centralized data and information center for environmental matters.
- Active encouragement of specialists and researchers to conduct further scientific inquiry into environmental challenges and their solutions.
- Systematic learning from the successful environmental governance experiences of other countries.



ABOUT

Nestled in the mountains of Sulaymaniyah, the Culture Capital of KRI, iNNOV8 Research Center pioneers cutting-edge research and innovation. We aspire for excellence as an independent research center by providing valid, valuable, and timely products to the public. We deliver impactful solutions and contribute to our industry's vibrant and forward-thinking community.

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