

Small Grants Meet Needs

After the conflict, the transition team moved to prevent ethnic clashes and get people started on fixing things.

When looters destroyed the computer center at Mosul University in northern Iraq, the Agency's quick-response team from the Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) jumped in and provided 48 computers and internet access to serve the 32,000 students.

"If there were three times as many computers here at school," said an assistant professor, "they would be used. It was a good achievement for the Americans to set it up."

OTI was one of the first USAID offices on the ground in April 2003, quickly giving out small grants in places where security allowed relief and reconstruction to begin. Staff and contractors worked with farmers, businessmen, human rights groups, educators and others to create visible projects that gave Iraqis hope they were seeing their society begin to change.

Some 670 small grants worth \$45 million were launched to provide jobs, basic services, access to information, communications, and protection of human rights.

The region around Halabja was attacked by Saddam Hussein's forces with poison gas in 1988, killing more than 100,000 Kurds. Many survivors still suffer aftereffects. One small grant helped an Iraqi doctor travel to mountain villages to offer treatment for physical and mental problems.

"U.S. aid is paying our salaries, the cost of our vehicle and for basic medicines such as antibiotics, analgesics and anti-parasitics," said an Iraqi physician, as about 30 women and children crowded into a village house to meet with her medical team.

Some of her patients suffer from lung and nerve damage from the "cocktail" of various nerve and mustard gases dropped on the region in 1988 by Iraqi forces, she said.

"If we didn't have the U.S. funds we could not do as much as we do," she said.

Transition grants now focus on preparation for a new Iraqi government, working at the national level on civic education, civil society, media development, women's participation, conflict mitigation, and transitional jus-

tice. For example, they are funding public information on the new constitution, election plans, and the transition to Iraqi sovereignty.

To avoid conflict between ethnic or other groups, USAID gave 62 grants as of March 2004, worth \$4.3 million, working closely with the U.S. military civil affairs teams in the Sunni regions of central Iraq, the Shi'ite regions in the south and various ethnically mixed locations in the north.

Some 79 small grants worth \$5 million helped created a national network of new Iraqi human rights groups and supported the new Ministry of Human Rights. Other grants help marginalized and vulnerable groups including women, youth, minorities, and the disabled.

U.S. grants have also helped Iraqis account for and move beyond the atrocities committed by the Saddam Hussein regime. Work includes protecting and unearthing mass graves, supporting the Iraqi Special Tribunal and other forums to address past crimes; providing services for victims of past crimes; and backing the Iraqi commission set up to handle property disputes.

Another critical transitional job was to provide more than 130 Iraqi national ministries, schools, clinics and other municipal buildings with start-up kits called "Ministries in a Box" which included desks, chairs, computers and office equipment. Despite the looting and destruction immediately after the collapse of the Iraqi regime, these enabled people to get back to work in a hurry.

Transition activities also focused on helping Iraqi women, who have long had only limited participation in political and civil society. More than half of Iraq's women are illiterate, making it difficult for them to participate in political life and to defend their rights in cases of inheritance, marriage and abuse issues.

Iraq's fertility rate of 5.4 children per woman is one of the highest in the region contributing to low infant birth weight.

U.S. transition teams helped Iraqis set up women's organizations aimed at providing educational programs, vocational training and income generating projects.

Community development groups funded by U.S. teams were created to encourage women to engage in community decisions, empowering women at the grassroots levels. And parent-teacher associations also gave women both a voice in school issues as well a taste of participation in community affairs.

Results

- In order to have the quickest impact after fighting ended, the Agency's transition teams gave out many small grants.
- Mosul University's computer lab had been looted so one grant set up about 30 computers and internet service to help students and teachers continue their work.
- To reach out to Iraqi-Kurdish villagers whose village was taken over by Al Ansar terrorists, transition grants sponsored literacy classes for women.
- The "Ministry in a Box" grants paid for Iraqis to replace chairs, desks and some computers so government could resume its functions quickly.



Thomas Hartwell

Former prisoners sort through some of the millions of files that the Ba'ath Party kept on its victims.



Debbi Morello/USAID

Most government offices were stripped bare in the looting that followed Saddam's fall. Here replacement

desks are delivered to a government ministry as part of USAID's "Ministry in a Box" program.