

Democracy In Iraq

Building democracy from the ground up

May 2004

Today, across Iraq, widespread efforts are fostering a more representative government. USAID, working in cooperation with the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) and Iraqis, is helping to establish functional and transparent government processes at the local level and facilitating the delivery of essential services. Iraqis and USAID have worked together to cultivate Iraqi civil society organizations, that represent the voice of the people to the government and ensure accountability of officials. At the community level, the Community Action Program works with town and village leaders to identify, prioritize and meet critical community needs. With less than two months until the transition to sovereignty, Iraqis are preparing themselves for ownership of their democratic process by participating in the CPA's Civic Education Campaign.

USAID's Iraq Local Governance Program is in its 13th month of implementation. During this first year, LGP has worked closely with the CPA and military personnel to improve living conditions for all Iraqis and lay a foundation for peace, democracy, freedom, and prosperity in Iraq. LGP began work within Iraq in April 2003, when a near total vacuum existed in the ability of Iraqi institutions to provide basic services such as water, sewer, electricity, solid waste collection and disposal – basically all local governmental services delivered directly to the population. LGP began work in each province (governorate) as it became permissive, first through LGP staff deployed in four regional hubs and subsequently to full time staff presence in each province. The project has carried out activities in all 18 provinces, with resident teams in 17 of the 18 provinces.

Local Governance Program accomplishments include:

- Assisted 445 neighborhood, 194 sub-district, 90 district, and 16 governorate councils, instrumental in advancing an understanding of representative and accountable government and improving access to basic services. Councils represent more than half the country's population and are present in all 88 Baghdad neighborhoods.
- Conducted more than 5,900 sessions with Iraqi youth, educators, journalists, local government officials and others to discuss democratic principles, stimulate civic participation, and increase understanding, support, and engagement in the political process.
- Sponsored a national conference in February in Baghdad on fiscal and administrative decentralization which is being extended to a series of regional conferences and supported by training sessions for political and technical representatives nationwide.



Najmeh council selection ballot count in Al Muthanna Governorate (USAID Photo)



Democracy and civil society presentation in Babil

Working in close cooperation with Iraqi nationals and the Coalition Provisional Authority to improve the lives of Iraqis, USAID is devoting substantial resources throughout the country to restore critical infrastructure, support the delivery of healthcare and education services, expand economic opportunities, and improve governance.



Moving Towards a Vibrant Democracy in Iraq

Sector Snapshot

Community Action Program

Under the repressive rule of Saddam Hussein, Iraqis suffered economically and socially. A lack of investment led to decreases in productivity, wages, and jobs. Social services eroded significantly, and citizens were excluded from the local decision-making process.

Working directly with communities and in consultation with local government representatives, USAID's Community Action Program (CAP) is creating representative, participatory, community groups to identify critical needs and priorities. The program focuses on community mobilization and cooperation, social and economic infrastructure development, employment and income generation, and environmental protection and management. The communities must contribute at least 25 percent of the project funding in cash, labor or equipment, thereby ensuring a stake in their efforts. In addition, the program utilizes Iraqi firms for rehabilitation and reconstruction work, thereby stimulating employment opportunities and business growth.

CAP has made an impact on the lives of Iraqis in many ways. It provides direct involvement of citizens in the rehabilitation of Iraq, and has brought great improvement to communities. CAP has improved classroom conditions for students and teachers alike by installing new heating and cooling systems, repairing leaky roofs and bathrooms and rehabilitating kindergartens all over the country. Iraqis are now living in a cleaner and healthier environment due to CAP rehabilitating sewage systems and water treatment plants.

Tribal leaders in one village near Diwaniyah praised CAP because their village now has clean water for the first time in 20 years. CAP has worked to tackle poverty and unemployment in Iraq. CAP has purchased new sewing machines for women's associations to provide women with enhanced earning power and has organized income generating agriculture cooperatives for local farmers.

CAP has established more than 660 Community Action Groups in 17 governorates and has committed just over \$50 million for 1,395 projects across Iraq. 946 projects have been completed.

Civic Education Campaign

The CPA's Civic Education Campaign informs Iraqis about democratic principles. USAID has committed \$2.4 million to contribute to the campaign. These funds support projects such as the creation of posters that contain messages on the process. More than 3 million posters and leaflets promoting themes including "What is Democracy?", Rights of Citizens, and Federalism have been distributed throughout Iraq since March 2004. National and civic symposiums and town meetings have been held to begin a national dialogue on the transition.

The Campaign has two aims: it ensures that information on Iraq's political situation and its transition to a democratic state are disseminated and understood and it facilitates Iraqis discussing the principals, rights and responsibilities of democratic governance. Three activities are pursuing these goals: organizing events that facilitate dialogue, providing educational materials on democracy and citizenship, and providing training and financial assistance for organizations engaged in democratic development and civic education.

Recent activities conducted under the Civic Education Campaign include funding an Iraqi NGO to produce a brochure explaining the Transition Administrative Law, the production of public service announcements and documentary films in March 2004 which were distributed to CPA and Local Governance Program offices throughout Iraq to support the education of Iraqis about the country's democratic transition.



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The Iraq Transition Initiative

The Iraq Transition Initiative builds Iraqi confidence during the transition to a participatory, stable government. The program has issued more than \$48 million in 700 small grants for civic education, civil society and media, women's participation, conflict mitigation, and transitional justice. After the conflict, ITI rehabilitated Iraqi national ministries, schools, clinics and municipal buildings. It supported 23 Iraqi groups to document human rights abuses of the Ba'athist regime and promote tolerance, and reconciliation. The program began in April 2003 and ends in March 2005.

Since the conflict, USAID has been working through the Iraq Transition Initiatives Program in regions of Iraq that have recently become unstable. The program has been present in Fallujah since last summer and has been responsible for considerable work in Najaf and Ramadi.

A Legacy of Terror: Mass Graves

Since the end of the major combat operations in May, 270 mass graves have been reported. Some graves hold a few dozen bodies, while other graves go on for hundreds of meters, densely packed with thousands of bodies.

The United Nations, the U.S. State Department, Amnesty International, and Human Rights Watch all estimate that Saddam's regime murdered hundreds of thousands of people. If these numbers prove accurate, they represent a crime against humanity surpassed only by the Rwandan genocide of 1994, Pol Pot's Cambodian killing fields in the 1970s, and the Holocaust.

To help the Iraqis exhume their loved ones, USAID deployed Abuse Prevention Units that protect human rights in emergencies or conflict. The teams offered grants to buy everything from shovels to exhume graves to computers for recording the names of victims as they were unearthed. Funds were provided for training Iraqis in forensic medicine so that evidence might be obtained for prosecution of those responsible for the killings. Help was also given to several Iraqi human rights groups, including the Free Prisoners Association and the Lawyers Association. They began compiling lists of missing Iraqis, suspected mass grave sites, confirmed victims, and documents relating to disappearances.



Abdulfatah Al Edressi (L) embraces Khaled Abood Saiidi (R) after he found information about his brother who disappeared in 1984. The Association of Free Prisoners has taken the lead in collecting, recording and safeguarding former regime documentation pertaining to the imprisonment, abuse, execution and disappearance of political detainees by the former Iraqi régime. AFP will publicize this information as a resource for those abused and their families. A \$50,300 grant under the Iraq Transition Initiative provided AFP with basic office equipment, computers, desks and filing cabinets. (Photo: Debbie Morello)

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Moving Towards a Vibrant Democracy in Iraq

USAID will build on the foundation established by the Local Governance Program with four new programs that will continue to improve democratic systems in Iraq from the June 30 transition through 2005.

Electoral Oversight and Voter Education

Iraq is scheduled to have elections for a constitutional convention and a national legislature in late 2004 and during 2005. To enhance participation and prospects for credible and competitive electoral processes, USAID will promote transparent, legitimate electoral processes. Assistance will support domestic election observation, voter education, and conflict mitigation. The USAID voter education program is expected to begin in June 2004.

Transitional Government and Constitutional Development

The Iraqi transitional government that takes office on July 1 must use constitutional principles to build a nation. USAID will help strengthen the legislative branch in lawmaking, representation, and executive oversight as provided by the TAL. Experts will assist the Executive Authority, the Presidency Council, and the Council of Ministers to choose democratic governing processes, rules and directives to administer the government. The program will provide logistical support, comparative analyses and other assistance during the constitution drafting process. The program is expected to begin in June 2004.

Civil Society and the Media

USAID will build the capacity of key sectors of indigenous Iraqi civil society to promote the development of a professional and independent media in Iraq. A vibrant and politically-active civil society is crucial to the future of a democratic and pluralistic Iraq. As Iraq transitions to a fully representative democracy, its citizens must be able to exercise their freedom to associate, express their views publicly, openly debate public policy, and petition their government. Civil Society Organizations must be willing and able to take on potentially divisive issues such as civic education, women's rights, government corruption and impunity, and a free, independent, and professional media. This program is expected to begin in July 2004.

Rule of Law

USAID is designing a rule of law program to help establish an effective, independent judiciary. The program will assist the High Judicial Council; provide policy support to the Ministry of Justice; and help ensure equal access to justice for all Iraqis. The program is expected to begin in Summer 2004.

Year two of the LGP aims to focus assistance to improved local governance by:

1. Enhancing the ability of local governments to deliver and expand access to essential services
2. Strengthening local government relationships with the national government as well as constituents and civil society
3. Providing policy support for the process of decentralization.

The LGP began in April 2003 and ends in April 2005.



Marawan Manal, 26, an Iraqi studio technician, formerly an unemployed engineer and graduate of Baghdad University, tests equipment at the Al-Iraqiya studio in central Baghdad. USAID has been working with Al-Iraqiya since May 2003.



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