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Clean water - a first for millions of Sadr City residents

By Kendal Smith
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USACE project engineer Simeon Francis examines filter actuators as they are being cleaned at the R-3 Water Treatment Plant in Baghdad. [USACE Photo]

Baghdad, Iraq - "I am very happy for the 2 million people of Sadr City. I have been working here at the R-3 Water Treatment Plant for more than three years, since the start of the project. It's the first in Iraq, fully automatic and with American standards of best quality. We meet the people in the streets of Sadr City and they are very happy. They feel that we are interested in them and their health. We are very proud of the success of this project," said Iraqi Engineer Aqeel Lami of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

The $27 million Sadr City R-3 Water Treatment Plant construction originally began in 2005 as a USAID contract. It was handed over to the U.S. Army Corps

of Engineers, Gulf Region Division in July 2007 to finish the remaining 15 percent.

"The plant location came as a result of a government study on water pressure and supply," said USACE water expert, Simeon Francis, who has been with the plant as a technical expert from its beginning with USAID. "There is simply not enough water to Sadr City from the Kharkh and Shark-Dijilih Water Treatment Plants for the area." Experts decided to add a plant on the northern fringe of Sadr City to remedy that, he said.

The plant began operation in mid-June with some interruptions due to power restrictions, but today, R-3 produces 4,000 cubic meters of treated water per hour into the distribution system through a 1.2 meter outlet line. It is currently providing 27 sectors in Sadr City with clean potable water - sectors that historically have had no centrally distributed water. With the plant at full capacity as of September 27, 2008, a performance test in October confirmed the quality of the daily output of 96,000 cubic meters per day (about 25 million gallons per day). That output equates to clean, quality water for a total of 1.5 million people in Sadr City and Baghdad, Francis said.

"Operating at full capacity, the R-3 Water Treatment Plant drastically increases the potable water to the people of Sadr City. The plant is operating at 100 percent capacity right now. It's a great success story for USACE," said project engineer Roland Belew.

The plant will employ 150 people for operations, maintenance and management, Belew explained.

Sedimentation basins at the Sadr City R-3 Water Treatment Plant allow collection of clean water through a system of weirs. [USACE Photo]

"This project is special to me," concluded Francis, "because I've been here from the beginning, and I am here for the end of it. It is really something to see the clear water sample from R-3's output. I know what the raw water is like from the Tigris and to be able to look at the R-3 water and see nothing but water is very gratifying," he concluded.

Note: Kendal Smith is the public affairs officer with the Gulf Region South district, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Iraq. For more information, contact GRD Public Affairs at 540 665 5339 or email requests to CEGRD.PAO@usace.army.mil. For more information on the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in Iraq, visit www.grd.usace.army.mil.