

Improving Schools With Citizen Involvement



“It’s making a big difference. Before, we were begging for money from the government. Now organizations come to us and ask to reconstruct our school.”

- Khalde Ibrahim,
headmistress of the Ibn Al-Haitham Elementary School
in central Baghdad

The Ibn Al-Haitham Elementary School, located along a busy neighborhood street in central Baghdad, was being repaired with a \$40,000 grant -- from USAID, working under the Coalition Provisional Authority -- plus \$2,100 collected by the community.

But beyond the materials and workmen's salaries, the long-neglected school system for 460 students is embarking on self-government for the first time through a new Parent Teacher Association (PTA) -- set up through the USAID aid program.

The five parents and six teachers in the new PTA are also acting as advocates for the school. They asked aid officials for computers, chairs, tables, coolers and other equipment. PTA members supervised the repairs and volunteered to clean the school. This is a new role for parents and teachers in Iraq which had long been controlled by remote and dictatorial government officials.

Ibrahim said she is thankful to Americans for helping improve salaries for teachers, which increased from \$5 per month under Saddam Hussein to \$180 per month, and for improving the condition of the school.

First Person