

One Year of Relief and Reconstruction

\$3.3 billion in U.S. aid fixed schools, vaccinated millions of children, restored electricity and created Iraq's first democratic councils.

The emergency relief and reconstruction aid delivered to Iraq during the 12 months since the fall of Saddam Hussein in April, 2003, was the biggest U.S. foreign aid program since the Marshall Plan, obligating \$3.3 billion in help to Iraq's people.

This text explains how the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) have supported Iraq's recovery from three decades of tyranny and mass murder.

Advance members of USAID's disaster teams reached Iraq in the spring of 2003 even before fighting died down. They found much less war damage than feared. The 62-member Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART), one of the largest ever fielded, found little damage to housing or roads, limited civilian casualties and no widespread hunger or disease. The rapid collapse of Saddam Hussein's army and modern precision-guided weapons limited most war damage to military, police and Ba'ath Party targets.

Within a few weeks after the fighting ended, life began returning to its normal patterns. But another pattern soon became evident: the neglect that characterized Saddam Hussein's rule had permeated every aspect of Iraqi life. Although Iraqis had among the highest levels of education and medical care in the Arab world before Saddam Hussein began his wars, Iraq's oil wealth had been diverted to palaces and to the huge military he used to attack his neighbors and intimidate his people.

Meanwhile, the country's 1,000-year-old canals filled with silt, and sunken ships choked the country's only deep water port at Umm Qasr. Sewage plants poured raw filth into rivers, schools crumbled, foul water spread disease, women's literacy fell, and child mortality approached levels seen only in sub-Saharan Africa, especially in southern areas populated by Shiite Muslims.

Reconstruction after conflict or natural disasters is one of USAID's principal jobs. We helped rebuild Bosnia, Serbia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, East Timor and Mozambique. After Hurricane Mitch in 1998, we helped rebuild Honduras and El Salvador. In Sudan, Colombia, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Nepal and the West Bank/Gaza, we supply aid even as conflict remains a problem.



Secretary of State Colin Powell consoles mourners at a mass grave site in Halabja in September, 2003.

“Real progress is being made on the ground that gives Iraqis hope that life will get steadily better. Electrical generation capacity already exceeds pre-war levels. Working with our Iraqi partners and other volunteers from the international community, we have repaired more than 1,700 critical breaks in Iraq's aging water network... We have renovated more than 1,500 schools. We have distributed 22 million vaccines to Iraqi children and pregnant women.”

Secretary of State Colin Powell
November 4, 2003

Need for democracy

Under Saddam, Iraqis had no experience with democracy, no control over public services and saw the government as a predator. They lived in fear of the knock on the door at night, prison, torture, and mass murder.

As Saddam's forces fled, Iraqis dug up mass graves in search of their loved ones who had vanished in the terror. Between 300,000 and 400,000 are said to lie in those graves—rivaling the Rwandan genocide of 1994 and the killing fields of Cambodia under Pol Pot.

USAID grants helped Iraqi human rights groups record the names of the victims and the circumstances in which they were slain. Coming to grips with the mass graves will help people recover from their trauma.

A February 2004 poll by Oxford Research International reported that 70 percent of Iraqis say their lives are now “good” while only 19 percent say their lives are “bad.” Seventy one percent also said they expect things to improve in the future while only seven percent said things would get worse.

In Germany and Japan after World War II,

it was mainly people under 30 who accepted democracy. That's why mass media and education are vital and why one of our first priorities in Iraq was to repair more than 2,000 schools, help students complete annual exams and reopen schools on time for the 2003-2004 school year.

All our efforts also aimed at bridging the ethnic division that has been used to divide the Iraqis. The Kurds, Marsh Arabs and Shiites—about three-quarters of the country's 25 million people—had been cut off from political power and from much of the country's economic and social benefits. Our goal was to help bring all the peoples of Iraq together, including the Sunnis and the ancient Christian community, and create a new national identity. We also began to end government abuse and corruption.

As we worked to rebuild power plants, schools, health clinics and water plants, a complex insurgency made delivery of aid difficult, costly and dangerous. But many courageous, skilled staff, NGO partners, and contractors worked with equally courageous and



The *Free Atlas*, carrying food for 2.3 million people, unloads in Aqaba, Jordan. It was the first shipment of U.S. emergency food for Iraq.

capable Iraqis in rebuilding the country.

In Fallujah and the Sadr City area of Baghdad, for example, we hired thousands of Iraqis and worked with moderate clerics to clean up garbage and to fix water, education, power and other services. All over Iraq we helped Iraqis form local councils to decide for themselves which projects to support—schools, roads, markets or other programs.

In Al-Hillah, Karbala and Baghdad, our staff and contractors opened women's centers providing literacy training, business skills and a place to organize against violence directed at women. Two former USAID contract workers working for the CPA, Fern Holland and her Iraqi translator Salwa Ali Oumashi, paid the ultimate price when they were slain as they drove from one of the women's centers they had helped set up in Karbala.

In the giant marsh areas of southeastern Iraq, Saddam deliberately drained the water and destroyed a way of life 5,000 years old, driving out hundreds of thousands of people to punish them for suspected disloyalty. We worked with Iraqi engineers, scientists and

other donor governments to begin restoring the water, rising inches per day to cover the desert wasteland and thorny plants Saddam had left behind. Driving along the roads in the marshlands, one could soon see the return of the water buffaloes, aquatic birds, and the proud fishermen in their slim wooden boats.

It is ironic that in the very cradle of civilization—the place where Hammurabi's Code

in 1,780 BC gave some of the earliest official rights to individuals—we have come to help our Iraqi colleagues restore some of those ancient rights. And we are committed to remain in Iraq in the coming year as sovereignty is transferred to a new Iraqi government, to assist the capable and willing people of that country as they endeavor to create an open, accountable system of government.



USAID Administrator Andrew S. Natsios greets Iraqi children during his June, 2003 visit.

“Thanks to early, prudent, and thorough contingency planning, the pre-positioning of emergency supplies, and careful coordination with U.S. and international humanitarian organizations, the humanitarian crisis in Iraq that many had predicted was avoided.”

USAID Administrator Andrew S. Natsios,
Senate Foreign Relations Committee, June 4, 2004



Marsh Arab boatmen



A mosque in Sulaymaniyah in northern Iraq