



USAID | **IRAQ**
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

SUCCESS STORIES

Meet the Beneficiaries





SUCCESS STORY

Radio Gives Women a Voice

USAID established an independent radio station that gives women a voice and a job.



Jessica Morse

A young Halabja woman broadcasts a song that blends Spanish flamenco rhythms with Kurdish words. Her first job outside of the home gives her independence and an active voice.

Unfettered by political parties or governing powers, the women who work at Iraq's first independent radio station redefine their community's understanding of freedom as they broadcast music and talk shows championing the rights of women. The Community Action Program provided a grant to purchase furniture and equipment to establish the station. This is one of 3,871 community development programs USAID has implemented countrywide.

Saddam Hussein is the first world leader in modern times known to have used chemical weapons against his own people. Hussein's goals were to systematically terrorize and exterminate the Kurdish population in northern Iraq, to silence his critics, and to test the effectiveness of his chemical and biological weapons. Hussein launched chemical attacks against 40 Kurdish villages and thousands of innocent civilians in 1987-88. The worst of these attacks devastated the city of Halabja on March 16, 1988.

After suffering decades of oppression, Halabja is now listening to the first sounds of freedom. A grant from USAID's Community Action Program (CAP) purchased equipment and furniture to support the launch of the first independent radio station in Iraq – a station operated by women and devoted to women's programming.

The station is the most popular in the city, says the founder, not just because it has the clearest signal, but "because we are independent." She explained: "There are no political parties associated with it and no foreign powers guiding or dictating it."

The 15 or so women who left their homes to take jobs at the radio station said they joined to serve women and address the problems they face. The radio station gives Iraqi women a voice in public life. The station has no director: the staff elects a three-person directing committee from among themselves to design the programs.

Although it currently plays music, the station, which has been in operation since June 2005, recently obtained a talk show license and is currently writing programs that educate women on formerly taboo subjects such as family planning, independence, and constitutionally guaranteed rights. The station will also introduce an off-the-air hot line where women can call in to find solutions to their problems.

The station has already had a profound effect on the women involved. "Before the radio station, I didn't have anything, not even my self confidence," said a woman in her mid-20s who is currently on the station's elected directing committee. She added: "I now give my knowledge and experience to other women and help them emerge from their houses and discover themselves."

The radio station is one of nearly 4,000 community development programs USAID has implemented throughout Iraq. The CAP program instills community ownership and champions local solutions.



SUCCESS STORY

Market to Market: Restoring Communities

USAID revitalizes an outdoor market in Kirkuk



A major public market in Kirkuk had grown unsanitary due to the deterioration of infrastructure (above). With a USAID grant, the market is now a paved and clean center for commerce (below).



USAID worked with a Kirkuk community to revitalize a local market. The market had degenerated and grown unsanitary. Now the market serves as an economic and cultural exchange with freshly paved roads and a drainage system.

Women and children walk comfortably down the paved streets of the Al Korea market, their shoes no longer treading through the puddles of stagnant water and mud as they make their way home with fresh vegetables. USAID's Community Action Program (CAP) has worked with the community to clean up the market. Together, they paved roads and installed a drainage system, successfully revitalizing the market as a multi-ethnic business center.

This major outdoor public market in Kirkuk had lost tremendous business as the local infrastructure of the marketplace degenerated. Pot holes filled the road and fetid water collected around the stalls, breeding bugs and attracting small rodents. Although families still frequented the market, shopping became an unpleasant burden and a health hazard.

USAID helped the community pave the market road with water-absorbing concrete. They installed new sidewalks, and dug a drainage canal for excess water. The local community contributed over \$10,000 to this \$60,000 project.

Today, people of all ethnicities and religions purchase their fresh fruits and vegetables, meats, food stuffs, and even used clothing at the market. The market is now an attractive local gathering spot making shopping safer, pleasant, and fun.

USAID's Community Action Program is a grass-roots community development program that instills the confidence and self-reliance necessary to help a community meet its own needs. USAID has established and trained over 600 Community Action Groups throughout Iraq. These consist of community leaders who learn to conduct meetings, identify community needs, and manage projects. They are encouraged to work with local government and often share the cost burden or donate labor to the project. With nearly 4,000 projects implemented to date, communities across Iraq, like this Kirkuk market, are not only improving daily lives, but learning to achieve their goals by utilizing democratic tools.



SUCCESS STORY

Entrepreneur Tastes Sweet Success

An Iraqi entrepreneur expands his sweet shop with a USAID grant



Jessica Morse

Baskets of nuts and sweets made from dates and other fruits line the walls of the Hasarat Sweet Shop, a 30 year-old local fixture. The family recently expanded their business with help from a USAID grant; they are now shipping their goods to grocery stores in outlying governorates.

A USAID grant helped the Hasarat Sweet Shop expand its business to outlying regions and create steady local employment. USAID has awarded 323 grants to Iraqi small and medium sized businesses over the last 15 months. This is part of a program to develop a competitive and efficient free market economy in Iraq.

With a deep entrepreneurial spirit and some capital support from USAID, the Hasarat Sweet Shop, a 30 year-old local fixture in northern Iraq, has transformed into a thriving business which is creating local jobs and contributing to regional growth.

Mr. Sabah, the owner of the small shop, was overjoyed when a grocery store in a neighboring governorate placed an order for four tons of his specialty, Naana Kaisi, a traditional Iraqi fruit candy. This one order equals nearly two thirds of the Hasarat Shop's annual sales of 6.5 tons.

His fruit candies—made from dried apples, figs, and apricots—are renowned throughout the region. However, due to storage constraints and inefficient production machinery, Mr. Sabah only sold his sweets from the store in his small town. USAID and the Volunteers for Economic Growth Alliance (VEGA) granted the small shop \$5,000 for stoves, drying trays, mixer machines, and workspace renovations. Mr. Sabah contributed \$1,050 of his own money to purchase storage boxes, commercial heating pots, and natural gas cylinders. The new equipment increased his production rate from five boxes of Naana Kaisi a day to 60.

He originally planned to create four new permanent staff positions with his expanded business capabilities. However, his product has been so well received in the expanded market, that the fruit candy production now employs 27 new people. Many of these workers are women who operate the new machinery from their homes, enabling them to watch their children while earning a wage.

As he expands his business into outlying cities and governorates, Mr. Sabah demonstrates Iraqi entrepreneurship at its best. USAID and partners have been working across Iraq to tap these natural business skills and provide Iraqis with the capital and training necessary to grow their businesses. Over the last 15 months, VEGA has awarded over \$2.7 million in grants to 323 small and medium sized businesses. Although a sweet shop is only a small player in a large country, it is part of the new foundation of a competitive and efficient economy in post-war Iraq.



SUCCESS STORY

By the People, For the People

Eleven human rights articles by the Iraqi people are included in the new constitution.



Members of Iraqi Civil Society Organizations debate human rights issues to be included in the constitution during a three-day national conference geared to give the people a voice in the constitution.

The three day “Incorporating Human Rights into the Constitution” national convention fostered debate and dialogue about human rights issues within the constitution and resulted in 11 recommendations being incorporated into the final draft of the constitution. Through the Iraqi Civil Society Program, USAID provided the forum for Iraqis to instill their voice within the pages of the constitution.

The “voice of the civil society” now resounds in the articles of the draft constitution. Eleven human rights recommendations drafted by Iraqi civil society organizations were incorporated into the draft constitution. These articles are the fruits of a three-day national human rights conference sponsored by USAID’s Iraq Civil Society Program (ICSP) in April 2005. Over 80 participants attended the conference, representing all 18 governorates and a mosaic of ethnic and religious backgrounds. One of the conference organizers explained that the drafting committee accepted the articles “because they represented the public needs.”

The 11 articles include basic human rights, which have not been activated in Iraq for decades, such as due process, freedom of religion, gender equality, and the right to privacy. Other articles demand that the constitution follow international declarations protecting human, children’s, and women’s rights. The constitutional drafting committee also included numerous suggestions from the ICSP regarding the care of the elderly, disabled, and social safety nets.

The April conference was the culmination of four regional conferences held in Baghdad, Erbil, Hillah, and Basrah, the four operating centers of the ICSP. With nearly 1,100 civil society organizations and countless country-wide training events, consultancies, and technical assistance, the ICSP has worked diligently to build a strong civil society and independent media in Iraq following the fall of the Saddam Hussein regime. Apart from civic education and independent media, ICSP programs also help fight corruption, address human rights, and gender issues.

The ICSP sponsored a weekly prime time TV program entitled *Our Constitution* aired by al-Iraqiya TV, Iraq’s public broadcasting service. The 90-minute show discusses controversial constitutional issues and offers drafters, experts, and a diverse studio audience a forum to speak out. This innovative program based on a concept and advice from ICSP was singled out by the United Nations as example of cultivating social dialogue.



SUCCESS STORY

A Social Safety Net Strategy for Iraq

The Government of Iraq has approved by a single vote majority \$250 million per annum to implement the USAID solution for a Social Safety Net program to help the poor and the vulnerable



Iraqi officials and USAID experts meeting with Dr. Idriss Hadi, Minister of Labor and Social Affairs (MOLSA).

In December 2005, the Government of Iraq (GOI) passed legislation to establish a social safety net targeting Iraq's most poor and vulnerable.

The social safety net initiative is an essential step in reforming national subsidies fuel, food, and electricity as required by the stand-by agreement signed with the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Currently, these subsidy programs cost Iraq over \$12 billion a year.

The Social Safety Net and Pension Reform Program, part of the USAID-funded Economic Governance II Program, provides the government of Iraq with a comprehensive, targeted social mechanism to help protect the poor and vulnerable from the negative effects of future economic reforms. Living standards for many Iraqis have fallen since the war, potentially creating unrest and low public confidence in the new leadership. Previous Iraqi governments have failed to reach a consensus for undertaking necessary macroeconomic reforms, such as removing subsidies and restructuring the state economy, due to the lack of a Social Safety Net able to help people cope with the unavoidable impact of these reforms.

The Government of Iraq (GOI) is considering incremental liberalization of prices for food, fuel, and electricity in its strategy of economic reform – a move that will benefit Iraqi businesses, reduce pressure on the national budget, and help establish a sound foundation for Iraq's economy. However, liberalizing prices is expected to enlarge poverty in Iraq; currently, more than 850,000 Iraqi families (20 percent) live below the poverty line of \$1 a day per individual; unemployment and underemployment have reached 40 percent.

The Social Safety Net strategy compliments the existing national welfare system, providing Iraq with a mechanism to address poverty and social welfare as economic reforms are made in the future. The USAID strategy states that these families are entitled to receive means-tested social benefits, employment counseling, vocational training, and additional financial support for school-age children.

To address this, the new Social Safety Net strategy will help adjust the purchasing power of low-income families, reduce poverty among large households, and increase school age children participation to education programs. The program will address the families hit hardest by economic reform programs. To help families quickly return to self-sufficiency, the program will require children to remain in school, discouraging child labor at the expense of education, and will encourage unemployed recipients to participate in employment seeking programs as a condition of receipt of benefits.

The Minister of Finance, Ali Allawi, recently announced that the GOI had approved the USAID Social Safety Net Strategy, allocating a \$330 million yearly budget to support the program.



SUCCESS STORY

Former Refugee Lays Foundation for Iraq

Through a USAID grant, an Iraqi businessman triples his output and employs 15 men.



Jessica Morse

Abu Yahya's new stone crusher produces fine quality sand that he can sell at a cheaper cost than his competitors. After living as internally displaced persons for 16 years, Abu Yahya and his cousins now have a prosperous business and a strong source of income.

Abu Yahya used a USAID business development grant to purchase a stone crusher and generator. USAID has distributed 323 such grants throughout Iraq worth over \$2.7 million.

After living as an internally displaced person (IDP) for 16 years, Abu Yahya returned to his ancestral land and established a business that literally provides the foundation for Iraq reconstruction. An Iraqi businessman, Abu Yahya tripled his output and created 15 new jobs when he purchased a stone crusher and generator with a \$74,000 grant from USAID.

The stone crusher pulverizes large stones into high quality sand that will neither crack nor breakdown. The Kirkuk airport and a Sulaymaniyah highway bid on his output even before the machine was operable.

In 1975 he started a stone washing business on his family's land, sifting dirt from dried riverbeds into different grades of gravel for construction. The largest stones had no use, so they simply piled up on the premises. After these stones are crushed, he can sell them for \$6 per unit, \$2 less than his competitors who import high grade sand from Iran. This local source for construction inputs significantly reduces the cost and timeframe for large infrastructure projects in northern Iraq.

Three years ago, Abu Yahya could not have had this business. He gestures to a small brown field on the horizon. "I was born in this village," he explained, "but now it is destroyed." In 1986, Saddam Hussein's Arabization campaign swept through the area and Abu Yahya's family was forced to flee. After the previous regime fell, he and his family returned to their ancestral land. "It is the most wonderful feeling," he said. "This is my birthplace that I have been deprived of for 16 years."

His business employs 35 men, all of whom were previously unemployed; 15 of these men were hired solely to support the new machinery and its increased output. With steady incomes, these men now send their children to school.

USAID's partner, Volunteers for Economic Growth Alliance (VEGA), has been working across Iraq to tap local entrepreneurship and provide Iraqis with capital and training to grow their businesses. Over the last 15 months, VEGA has awarded 323 business grants worth over \$2.7 million.



SUCCESS STORY

Freedom of the Press

Iraqi National Media Pool breaks down barriers to information



Iraqi journalists take notes during a Baghdad press conference. The new Iraqi National Media pool will give them access to higher profile stories and improve the quality of reporting.

The first Iraqi National Media Pool celebrated its successful instillation on Sept. 29, 2005. The pool represents over 25 Iraqi press bureaus, grants Iraqi reporters access to high profile stories and instills higher standards of objectivity and professionalism in reporting. "This is a real development for media in Iraq," said one participant. "It enables us to get first hand information, which before was inaccessible."

The first media pool of Iraqi journalists convened in the Baghdad Convention Center on Sept. 29, 2005 to celebrate their first successful media collaboration and coordinate future pools. "This is a real development for media in Iraq," explained a woman reporter from Dijla radio who recently toured Abu Ghraib Prison as a member of the September media pool. "It enables us to get first hand information, which before was inaccessible."

The Iraqi National Media Pool consists of more than 25 national media bureaus. Four reporters are selected from the pool on a rotating basis to cover events on behalf of all the bureaus, allowing these individuals access to high profile stories such as interviews, coverage of VIP visits, and major media events.

USAID—working jointly with the military's Combined Press Information Center (CPIC), Project and Contracting Office (PCO), the US Embassy, and the Iraqi media—launched the program and supported basic media trainings to instill higher standards of objectivity and professionalism among Iraq's media.

The CPIC representative explained that dissemination of information is the most important component of the pool. "CPIC doesn't want to be the central distributor because we want the Iraqis to take ownership." The afternoon meeting accomplished just that. With Iraqis actively engaged in discussion, and leadership emerging, the Iraqis have taken responsibility for the media pool.

Before 2003, the Iraqi media and public information were under full control and censorship by the former regime while the concept of free press was nonexistent. Today, Iraqi journalists are attempting to create an institutional environment where Iraqi media have access to international sources and resources that will allow them to report to the Iraqi people and the rest of the world.



SUCCESS STORY

Jobs for the Jobless

A USAID-supported carpentry workshop creates employment for the community



Jessica Morse

Najjar and his co-workers discuss plans for their carpentry co-op. Najjar, the sole breadwinner for his family is able to return to school and support his family thanks to his job at a carpentry workshop funded by USAID.

USAID's Community Action Program (CAP) supports a non-profit carpentry workshop that employs 12 men and has trained 35 others, all of whom have since found employment as carpenters. This is one of nearly 4,000 small community development programs USAID supports throughout Iraq.

Eighteen-year-old Najjar abandoned his dreams of becoming a mathematician after his father died suddenly. As the sole bread winner in his family, Najjar quit school and started working in construction. When his small wage didn't cover rent, his family found themselves evicted. "We had no where to go" he said.

Out of desperation, he applied for a job at a small carpentry workshop that is part of USAID's Community Action Program (CAP), which empowers local residents to identify and meet community needs. This particular workshop focuses on youth development. It fosters leadership, independence, and financial stability among youth between the ages of 18 and 24. The proceeds from the furniture, doors, and bookshelves sold by the carpentry shop are reinvested in the youth center to purchase sports equipment, internet access, and secondary school supplies.

The manager of the carpentry workshop explained that this is an effort to provide "jobs for the jobless." Najjar is one of 12 full time employees in the not-for-profit carpentry workshop. With his wage he can pay the rent and support his family. The work schedule allows him to attend school in the afternoon. The youth center has offered Najjar a university scholarship upon completion of his secondary school studies.

This carpentry shop also holds periodic training seminars to improve the carpentry skills of local residents. The training resulted in sustainable jobs for all 35 attendees. Three different 15-day workshops—*An Introduction to Carpentry*, *Book Shelf Making*, and *How to Establish a Carpentry Workshop*—gave community members sufficient skills to either join an existing carpentry enterprise or start their own.

This is one of nearly 4,000 small community development programs USAID has implemented throughout Iraq. Designed as a grass-roots community development program that instills self-confidence and self-reliance, the CAP program also champions local solutions to local problems, building ownership and capacity in neighborhoods across the country.



SUCCESS STORY

Art Rallies Constitutional Support

Art Exhibition at National Assembly Rallies Constitutional Support



Jessica Morse

"The blue hands represent Iraq emerging from their barbed wire bonds of oppression" explains a veteran Iraqi artist. The constitutional art exhibit featured 26 paintings by different Iraqi artists, sponsored by USAID's Iraq Civil Society Program to rally support for the Oct. 15, 2005 referendum.

USAID's Iraq Civil Society Program sponsored a constitutional art exhibit which toured Iraq a week prior to the referendum, encouraging people to vote. The exhibit also showcased other ICSP programs including anti-corruption, women's rights, and human rights educational and advocacy programs.

To rally support for the October 2005 constitutional referendum, six Iraqi artists showcased their perspectives on *Our Constitution* in a touring art exhibition, including an exhibition at the National Assembly. The exhibit was a small part of a much larger USAID supported "get out the vote" campaign which resulted in record turnouts at the Iraqi polls.

Assembly members wandered through the exhibition, awarding them a rare opportunity to hear the "voice of the civil society," said Dr. Issam Adawi, head of the USAID sponsored Civil Society and Media Program. One of the key drafters of the constitution was moved to tears when he saw a picture depicting Iraqi children living in a land free from corruption.

Many of the paintings depict Iraq emerging from a struggle. Some are hopeful, others a simple map of Iraq with the word "constitution" boldly in the center. All of the paintings demonstrate hope for the future and a freedom of expression unparalleled in Iraq for years. "The artist is a combination of freedom and imagination; these two concepts were not in the dictionary of the former regime," said Basil, a veteran artist from Basrah.

"Artists are sensitive about the environment surrounding them. With the constitution, we can now breathe freedom," explained one of the artists.

The art show, sponsored by a Basrah community, complements USAID's Iraq Civil Society Program (ICSP). This program establishes community councils throughout the country and educates voters about the constitution including women's rights, human rights, and anti-corruption. ICSP succeeded in including 15 human rights recommendations in the final draft constitution.

USAID distributed hundreds of thousands of posters, and pamphlets throughout Iraq, held thousands of constitutional dialogues, and sponsored weekly television programs to educate voters about the constitution. The efforts paid off when 1.5 million more Iraqis went to the polls than did during the January 2005 elections.



SUCCESS STORY

War Victim Becomes Entrepreneur

USAID's Marla Ruzicka War Victim's Assistance fund helps a bomb victim reclaim his life



Nawfal Sahar sells meat to a young man in his shop. Paralyzed from the waist down after a bombing, Nawfal used a USAID grant to build this shop, which generates income for his family.

USAID has dedicated \$20 million to help Iraqis who were injured by Coalition Forces during the 2003 conflict. The Marla Ruzicka War Victim's Assistance Program has helped over 350,000 Iraqis reclaim their lives after losing their homes, livelihoods and loved ones to the conflict. Using a small USAID grant, Nawfal Sahar built a shop outside of his home which generates income for his family and helps him re-integrate into the community.

Twenty-five year-old Nawfal Sahar was traveling along the road from Tikrit to Ramadi when air bombardment hit his car, injuring both Nawfal and his brother, and killing his uncle.

Although they were not the intended targets of the air raid, Sahar and his brother found their lives suddenly altered by war. Left completely paralyzed from the waist down, Sahar could support neither himself nor his family. His helplessness dragged him into poverty and depression.

Through USAID's Marla Ruzicka War Victim's Assistance funds, Sahar has reclaimed his life. The program granted him \$3,860, which he used to establish a small shop attached to his home. His brother helps him run the shop. The grant enabled Sahar to provide for his family. As he sells supplies and groceries to his neighbors, Sahar's confidence improves. Despite of his disability, the shop has re-integrated him into the fabric of the community.

Since May 2003, USAID has helped Iraqis injured by the coalition forces to piece their lives and livelihoods back together. Over 350,000 Iraqis have directly benefited and 1.5 million indirectly from the 631 completed projects under USAID's War Victims Assistance Program. The projects cover health care, income generation, and rehabilitation of destroyed homes, schools and clinics. Many of the programs establish sustainable income for families that lost their main bread winner, while others offer prosthetics and medical treatment. According to Sen. Patrick Leahy, this program shows the Iraqi people "the face of a compassionate America."

The program in Iraq was initiated by the late Marla Ruzicka, a vivacious American woman who made it her mission to help the conflict's victims reclaim their lives. Ruzicka was killed in a roadside bomb in spring 2005 on the Baghdad airport road. Ruzicka's legacy continues with the courage of Iraqis like Sahar who allow Iraq's spirit to emerge.



SUCCESS STORY

Sewing Shop Provides New Opportunities

A USAID-supported sewing shop employs widows and the handicapped from diverse groups.



Two women from the sewing workshop, one Muslim, the other Turkman, demonstrate their expert measuring skills.

Coordinating with Iraqi communities, CAP assists local groups identify needs, developing and implementing responsive projects. The program works to mitigate violence, providing citizens with an opportunity to participate in decision-making and local development initiatives that affect their everyday lives. Iraqi youths and others benefiting from the employment and development projects are turning away from violence to settle local conflicts.

“If Kirkuk is a little Iraq, then our sewing shop is a little Kirkuk,” says the director of a local NGO supported by USAID. “We are the littlest Iraq.” This sewing shop near Kirkuk employs 35 widows, handicapped people, and other disenfranchised members of society across all ethnic and religious groups. Over the past year it has trained 120 community members in sewing, a skill that will provide many with much-needed income.

USAID’s Community Action Program (CAP) supported the opening of the sewing shop in June 2004. Since then, all profits have supported the managing NGO in its efforts to train and employ otherwise disenfranchised members of society, generating sustainable employment. The group has also expanded to provide computer training and lessons in maternal health. Other members of the community have received specialized health care through the center’s support. The shop also produces school uniforms at subsidized rates.

Salah, an employee of the sewing shop has been crippled since birth and had to depend entirely upon his family for support. “I applied for hundreds of jobs,” he explained, “but no one would hire me until now.” His income now supports his family.

As a woman, Ban could not find employment and had been forced to pull her children from school so they could work. “It was painful” she said. Now she works for the shop during the day and sews out of her house in the evening. Her income now supports her children’s school fees and her husband’s health treatment.

USAID initially provided the NGO with office furniture, followed by a grant to supply sewing machines and material to establish the shop and training center. Over 120 people responded to the NGO’s advertisement in a local newspaper offering training in sewing. Although the shop could only hire 35, most of the other trainees have now established cottage sewing businesses.

Funding for the sewing shop and NGO comes from one of nearly 4,000 grants implemented throughout Iraq by the CAP program.



SUCCESS STORY

Independent Media in Iraq

The National Iraqi News Agency serves as a source of fair, independent reporting.



NINA's chief editors discuss last minute operational changes prior to the referendum on Oct. 15, 2005. USAID equipped these offices with state-of-the-art news agency technology to be complemented by a WiFi-based independent transmission system.

USAID's Iraq Civil Society and Media Support Program (ICSP) helped develop the National Iraqi News Agency (NINA), Iraq's first independent news agency. USAID equipped its Baghdad headquarters with cutting edge technology and trained its journalists in editing and international reporting standards. Amid a sea of noise and deception, NINA strives to be a voice of fair, honest, reliable reporting for Iraq.

On Oct. 15, 2005, as Iraqis voted on the draft constitution, a few Iraqi journalists launched the National Iraqi News Agency (NINA). The reliable, professional coverage supplied by the NINA will help Iraqi media outlets provide their audiences with impartial, accurate information. "Iraq needs an independent, professional news agency," said Dr. Ayer, a veteran reporter and co-founder of NINA. "Creating NINA is a challenge, but we believe the agency will grow and become a service very needed by the media."

NINA, making its debut during the constitutional referendum, will offer news and feature articles in Arabic on the country's political, economic, and social life. The agency will strive to become synonymous with fair, honest, and reliable reporting that Iraqis can rely on amid an abundance of unverifiable sources. The Iraqi media professionals who own and operate NINA have received support from experienced international news agency managers and technical assistance through USAID's Iraq Civil Society and Media Support Program (ICSP).

Journalists recruited for NINA underwent training from ICSP to improve their reporting and editing skills, and enhance their understanding of international media standards. NINA's headquarters in central Baghdad is equipped with cutting-edge news gathering, editing, and transmission technology provided through ICSP.

Fulltime correspondents in Erbil, Hilla, Basra, and the International Zone bureau in Baghdad, will contribute to coverage, along with freelance reporters in other parts of the country.

NINA is an important link in ICSP's strategy for strengthening independent media in Iraq. The goal of the program is to develop media outlets throughout the country that provide accurate, high quality information to their audiences. Through skill development training and business development assistance, USAID provides the foundation for this media friendly environment. USAID also guides media law advocacy, intended to establish a legal environment supportive of an independent media.



SUCCESS STORY

“Our Own Constitution”

Iraqis show national unity as they vote for a new constitution.



An Iraqi woman slips her ballot into the voter box at a polling site on Oct. 15, 2005. USAID supported the logistical and technical needs of the election.

As Iraq voted on the October 2005 constitutional referendum, a glimpse of Iraqi unity resounded throughout the country. USAID supported the vote by training tens of thousands of election monitors. It also funded a national constitutional education campaign by distributing hundreds of thousands of posters, pamphlets, and sponsoring TV programs and community discussions.

Women with children, men in suits, and a young woman in a ball cap quietly milled about an empty school. These people deeply divided by ethnic, economic, and religious rifts, today have one distinguishing characteristic in common – a purple index finger. Although tribal and ethnic lines divide them, as they mark a ballot in Iraq’s constitutional referendum, they stand for a unified Iraq.

“We need our own constitution,” said one election worker, “we need to understand our duties and our rights.”

A Turkoman woman wearing a colorful shawl across her graying hair manned the ballot station. She stamped each numbered ballot as she tore it off and handed it to a voter; her stamp ensures that the ballot is official. When asked why she came to support the election – a dangerous risk, as polling stations are clear insurgent targets – she replied that although she is a Turkoman, “I want to be part of Iraq.”

Each polling station had one political party observer and one domestic observer, both previously trained by USAID partners. In all, 10,000 accredited monitors and over 30,000 trained political party observers trained by USAID partners assisted in the October 2005 referendum.

The polling stations were run in an efficient, orderly and fair manner thanks to the dedication of thousands of Iraqi election workers. USAID provided the technical expertise, equipment, and logistical support that helped to establish the Independent Election Commission of Iraq (IECI) and Iraq’s electoral law.

Although only about half of the voters had actually read the constitution, explained one of the poll workers, many of them knew what was in it. USAID supported a massive campaign to educate voters about the constitution to include them in the process. Over 78,000 Iraqis attended 3,000 constitutional dialogue discussions sponsored throughout Iraq. Over 700,000 pamphlets on the Constitution were disseminated in both Arabic and Kurdish throughout the country. USAID sponsored television programs, discussions, and posters throughout the country to ensure that all Iraqis included their voice in the constitution.



SUCCESS STORY

Iraqi Communities Fight Corruption

USAID Anti-Corruption campaign educates the public and instills legislation to liberate Iraq from corruption.



A poster reading "Iraq without Corruption" hangs on the wall of a public office in Diwaniyyah. These posters are part of an educational anti-corruption campaign sponsored by USAID's Iraq Civil Society Program.

USAID launched a national anti-corruption campaign under its Iraq Civil Society Program. The program resulted in 15 recommendations from Iraqi civil society organizations being incorporated into the constitution, a public education campaign, and public surveys to determine the extent of corruption in an organization.

Working with civil society organizations, USAID's Iraq Civil Society Program (ICSP) has supported a national anti-corruption campaign which includes classes for officials, survey polls, legislative advocacy, educational posters, and mobile theaters. The results have been spectacular. A national conference entitled, *Incorporating Transparency and Accountability in the Iraqi Constitution*, yielded 15 recommendations that the constitutional drafting committee incorporated into Iraq's constitution. These include holding ministers accountable for their actions (Article 59 (7) (c)), and securing an independent auditing body (Article 101 & 104).

In a survey funded by the ICSP, the Al-Rafhaa Organization discovered that Iraqis value transparency and accountability (33 percent) as the top attributes in a gubernatorial candidate; while political experience (9 percent) and tribal alliance (4 percent) finished at the bottom of the priority list. Stopping corruption was a high priority (25 percent), second only to security issues (38 percent). Other surveys help monitor the level of corruption within an organization or government body, revealing areas where the government and organizations need to improve accountability and transparency. The anti-corruption team in Hillah surveyed the Midwifery Hospital to determine the extent of corruption. Al-Mada newspaper and Radio Babil covered the survey.

Through USAID's Iraq Civil Society Program, civil society organizations have promoted an informed, sustainable, and active Iraqi civil society and an independent media – key components of a prosperous and democratic Iraq- through focused training and technical assistance to media groups and civil society organizations. With USAID's help, Iraq now boasts over 125 different media outlets. The program's efforts in voter education, community dialogues, and constitutional development helped expand public awareness and participation in the January election and October constitutional referendum.

The civil society program focuses on civic education, anticorruption, and human rights; it undertakes three core activities:

1. Establishing four Civil Society Resource Centers staffed and managed by Iraqis, to act as regional hubs that deliver training and technical assistance to Iraqi civil society organizations.
2. Providing training and technical assistance to Iraqi groups, supporting Iraq's emerging democratic processes and institutions.
3. Providing a small grants program to CSOs to reinforce training and technical assistance and support advocacy and public awareness projects and activities.



SUCCESS STORY

Training Iraq's Future Leaders



Directors of the SUNY/SB program interviewing an applicant from one of the Iraq partner universities.

“Iraq has been kept apart for a long time. It is especially important now to get out and learn about the new methods and techniques so that we can go back home and teach others. ...

“Studying in the United States has been a wonderful experience. The only real way to really learn is to live and work in a wholly different environment.”

– Zaid, an Iraqi student studying at SUNY/SB

Nine Iraqi academics are currently studying and conducting research at U.S. universities with the support of USAID's Higher Education and Development (HEAD) program. Four students are studying and conducting field research in a master's degree program in archaeology at the State University of New York at Stony Brook (SUNY/SB). Another five, at the University of Hawaii (UH), have enrolled in graduate coursework and are conducting agricultural research.

In helping re-establish the higher education system, USAID combines investment in schools and equipment with investment in human capital. The HEAD program has brought together U.S. and Iraqi universities to form partnerships for strengthening Iraqi leadership and building capacity for Iraqi universities and ministries.

SUNY/SB: Archaeology and Environmental Health

Four Iraqi students have begun their second year at SUNY Stony Brook's program in archaeology. They have already completed a semester of language training, a semester of course work, and summer field work at dig sites in the American Southwest.

The students, chosen in coordination with two large Iraqi universities, come from a variety of academic and research backgrounds. Two of the students, Zaid and Zainab, worked in the Iraq National Museum in the Library of Archaeology. “When we go back home, we will bring great knowledge from here,” Zaid explained. “I want to help make a new system there, to [draw from] much of the work I have been able to do over here.”

Helen, a recent graduate and the only participant to already have an advanced degree, plans on returning to her Iraqi university to teach. “When I arrived here, I was a different archaeologist. I have learned so much here, a new archaeology.... We will go back and start again to study our heritage. Especially after the war, especially after the looting [of the National Museum], this is important.”

Archaeology is a matter of national pride in Iraq, but study and scholarship stalled in the nearly two decades of war and isolation. “Archaeology in Iraq is still basically descriptive,” explained Elizabeth Stone, co-leader of the SUNY program. “Academia there typically doesn't pursue the analytical questions or quantitative analyses that characterize modern scholarship.” In revitalizing this field of research, the program helps lay the foundation for new standards and methods across academia.



SUCCESS STORY, cont.



One student's project is taking a new approach to intercropping research, focusing on new methods to determine the best possible combination of crops for Iraqi farmers who rely more heavily on animals.

USAID's recently completed HEAD program created partnerships between five American and 10 Iraqi universities to aid the re-establishment of academic excellence in Iraq's higher education system. Since January 2004, more than 1,500 Iraqi faculty and students participated in workshops, trainings, conferences, and courses in Iraq, the Middle East, Europe, and the United States. University facilities, such as libraries, computer and science laboratories, lecture halls, and buildings, have been rehabilitated at colleges of law, engineering, medicine, archeology, and agriculture. A mini-grant program supported new, innovative research throughout the country. In addition, books and electronic resources were provided to university labs and libraries.

In addition to the student graduate program, SUNY/SB has helped upgrade both facilities and training in environmental health and archaeology at two major Iraqi universities. Other successes include establishing five environmental health research and training centers in Iraq, and a 10-week training session in modern methods in archaeology, benefiting 55 Iraqi faculty, students, and museum staff. The partnership between the universities will continue after the HEAD program; plans have already been made to bring six Iraqi faculty member to the United States for a semester of training in remote imaging and GIS. One of the current students is planning on staying an extra semester, in part to aid this project.

University of Hawaii: Agricultural Higher Education

The five Iraqi graduate students at the University of Hawaii (UH) are continuing their work on agricultural-related issues and intensive English. They have already completed their first year and are making great strides in their research projects. The HEAD program, a partnership between UH and two universities in northern Iraq, is helping these students earn graduate degrees in agricultural science with specializations in natural resources and environmental management, plant and soil sciences, plant and environmental protection sciences, and biosystems engineering.

The agricultural sector, which suffered willful destruction and neglect under the previous regime, provides employment for as much as 25 percent of the Iraqi workforce. Agriculture is the third largest value sector, the country's largest employer, and an effective way to generate momentum for economic recovery.

By training top Iraqi students in modern approaches and recent developments in the agricultural sciences, the HEAD program seeks to give future professors and institution leaders the tools necessary to revitalize the Iraqi agricultural sector. Through the program, these students will be better able to contribute to advancing northern Iraq's agricultural agenda for economic growth, high and sustainable productivity, enhanced environmental quality, improved food security and safety, and increased employment.

The HEAD program helps to build institutional capacity at the partner universities, strengthening academic programs and extension training in agricultural sciences. In addition to the graduate degree training project, the program sponsors a visiting scholar program, graduate research fellowships, and workshops on agricultural economics and production held in Iraq and neighboring countries. The HEAD program has also provided for new research facilities, computer hardware, and facility restructuring and repair.



SUCCESS STORY

Iraq Increases Non-Oil Revenue

After the initial conflict was over in 2003, collection of several taxes and all customs duties and fees ended, leaving the government almost completely dependent on unpredictable oil revenue. With USAID support and technical assistance, the Government of Iraq (GOI) reintroduced the personal income tax on May 1, 2004, with lower rates and increased personal allowances. The introduction of the Reconstruction Levy on April 15, 2004, provided badly needed operating revenue and gave the Customs Service a period to reorganize and restructure its activities. Since then, revenue from these two sources has steadily increased.

USAID is helping Iraq create a transparent tax system, relieving dependence on unpredictable oil revenue

The Economic Governance II program continues reforms in tax, fiscal, legal, institutional, and regulatory frameworks. In coordination with the Ministry of Finance, USAID helps policy makers formulate and implement policy decisions based on international best practices. Capacity building efforts at the Central Bank of Iraq (CBI) are helping expand the ability of the CBI to develop and monitor an effective monetary policy, strengthen its supervisory role, and modernize banking operations. At the same time, assistance is being provided to the electricity and communications industries, as well as other relevant government ministries. USAID technical assistance also supports the development of a reliable social safety net, ensuring assistance to displaced workers and the provision of sustainable pension benefits.

To resume collecting non-oil revenue, the Iraqi General Commission for Taxes (GCT) reintroduced the personal income tax, drawing on assistance from USAID's Economic Governance II project. To increase taxpayer compliance, USAID helped design a simplified tax code and new operational procedures to complement an automated system. GCT employees received extensive training in the new systems and international best practices.

Established in the absence of a functioning Customs Service, the reconstruction levy places a 5 percent tariff on nearly all imports. USAID, which provided technical assistance in establishing the reconstruction levy, has worked closely with the General Commission for Customs (GCC) to improve the system and increase efficiency. Since May 2005, a USAID-funded customs team has worked with the GCC to improve reporting processes. Efficiency and transparency in the GCC are key requirements in preparing Iraq for full participation in the global trade community.

Taxpayer education has also improved taxpayer compliance. Supported by USAID, the GOI developed and distributed taxpayer guides to employers across Iraq. Already, employers have begun paying a substantial amount of back taxes that would otherwise never have reached the government.

After 16 months of operation, the personal income tax and reconstruction levy have led to definite improvement in Iraq's revenue. The GCT collected 15.2 billion Iraqi dinars from private sector employers during the first eight months of 2005, almost six times the amount collected in the previous period (2.3 billion). The GCC showed a 25 percent increase for the period.

USAID's Iraq Economic Governance II (IEG II) program is continuing to work with Iraqi government counterparts to build capacity to implement tax and customs reform. In addition, over the next year, the GCT plans to expand its efforts while the GCC is scheduled to increase the levy to 10 percent for 18 more months while at the same time modernizing operations. The combination promises to significantly increase tax revenue for the Government of Iraq.