



TODD P. SCHWARTZ/U.S. EMBASSY, BAGHDAD, IRAQ

TIME'S RIPE FOR FARMERS

USAID Deputy Mission Director Denise A. Herbol stops at Taji Market, northwest of Baghdad, to check out tomatoes, freshly plucked from Sheikh Sabah's farm. With help from agricultural advisors and financial support from the American people, the market has expanded from 10 to 400 shops in a year and has become a hub for wholesale vendors and the local community.

A dozen Iraqi staff have left the USAID Mission in recent weeks to pursue new lives in the United States under the refugee program. Mission Director Christopher D. Crowley said the departing Iraqi staff "had made invaluable contributions despite huge risks." Plans are afoot to help resettle thousands of Iraqis who work for the U.S. government in Iraq.

Dear Readers:

Welcome to the inaugural issue of our newsletter. This newsletter is about United States assistance to Iraqi people, about building lives and restoring confidence, about partnership and possibilities, about honor and dignity.

With a mix of profiles, stories, features and reports, we hope to keep you informed of the latest developments from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) in Iraq. Inside this issue, we focus on how new knowledge and techniques are helping fish farmers to improve production and profitability, and governmental officials to build public trust. We also introduce you to our brave USAID representative in Kirkuk, who is helping entrepreneurs gain access to microfinance loans and change their lives for the better.

We hope you find this issue interesting and useful!

Best regards,
Denise A. Herbol
USAID Deputy Mission Director



FISH FARMERS WEIGH BENEFITS OF AERATION

HILLAH—Iraqi farmers raising fish in densely stocked ponds know that “drowning fish” are no laughing matter. Fish, like humans, unable to extract adequate oxygen from their environment, suffocate and die.

The USAID-backed *Inma* Agribusiness Program has been working with fish farmers to improve their production through access to water, healthier fingerlings (young fish) and higher protein feed.

To boost profitability of their ponds, farmers are advised to consider aeration. The larger the fish and the more fish held in a pond, the more oxygen must be added to the water to ensure fish survive and thrive.

Farmers in the Hillah area were recently introduced to paddlewheel aeration units that pump oxygen into closed system fishponds. Each unit’s rotating wheels splash the water introducing air through a simple mechanical motion.

A local manufacturer welded reinforced blades onto used vehicle wheels to create the paddles. He recycled a 1/4-ton truck differential and rear axle to transfer power

to the paddles. The unit can be run using a diesel motor or power take-off shafts of tractors.

For decades, Iraqi fish farmers have tried to avoid oxygen depletion by either stocking their ponds lightly, or by selling off a portion of their stock as the fish became larger and their oxygen demands increased. Farmers with generous access to water simply allowed constant inflow and outflow to refresh their ponds.

“Constant inflow and outflow isn’t as effective as many Iraqi farmers believe,” explained Duane Stone, *Inma* Aquaculture Specialist. “*Inma* is showing the beneficial effects of paddlewheel aeration on some of its 100 demonstration fish farms.”

Pond owners and fish farmers visiting the demonstrations will be able to compare the capacity of aerated ponds with similar size un-aerated ponds. This will enable farmers to make investment decisions based on the probable return from using paddlewheel units. Fish farmers who adopt this technology are likely to see their ponds turn more profitable within a year of operation. ■



ELAINE ELIAH

Top: A farm worker uses a tractor-powered paddlewheel to increase oxygen in a fishpond. Above: A close-up of a paddlewheel unit.

***Inma* (meaning "growth" in Arabic) builds linkages among farmers, agribusinesses, financial services, and domestic and international markets.**

Soccer Lifts Spirit Of Young Iraqis



BAGHDAD—Dedicated soccer fans erupted in whistles and cheers as young Iraqi men lined up to kick off this season's tournaments. The appeal of soccer lies in its power to inspire hope, unity and pride.

USAID's Community Stabilization Program (CSP) in partnership with the Iraqi Ministry of Youth and Sports has set up youth leagues modeled after leagues in American suburbs.

The soccer tournaments give Iraqi youth a productive outlet to spend their time, keeping them engaged, and making them less likely targets for recruitment by militias.

This summer, CSP is sponsoring 14 soccer tournaments, estimated at \$1.1 million, across Baghdad and its suburbs. More than 40,000 Iraqi youth, including women, are expected to participate in the tournaments held at refurbished parks.

For the young Iraqis, the basic elements of the game—namely, power, speed, tactics and teamwork—offer a measure of confi-



Community Stabilization Program

To date, the CSP is active in 18 cities across Iraq and has engaged about 162,500 young men and women in youth-related activities.

Left and Below: Iraqi boys display their skills as they play soccer in Al Mahmoudiya in southern Baghdad.



dence and assurance in their individual skills. Besides winning trophies, the sporting icons gain admiration of the young and old in their communities.

The CSP is designed to restore economic and social stability in communi-

ties hit by insurgency, while paving the way for long-term development. The program actively integrates ethnically and religiously different youth, while fostering tolerance and managing conflict. ■

Governance Program Aims To Build Trust

BAGHDAD—Iraq has made considerable political and economic gains in recent months, but sustained progress will depend on the government's ability to establish transparent and accountable practices that build public trust.

The Local Governance Program (LGP), supported by USAID, held the first of a series of workshops on Aug. 3-4 to improve governmental accountability and transparency and encourage citizen participation.



About 100 people, including members of the Baghdad Governorate Council, attended the workshop designed to provide training to combat fraud, waste and abuse in local government;

impart mentoring skills to select council officials; and promote educational tools and handbooks on accountability practices and standards.

The success of the inaugural accountability program will pave the way for similar programs in other governorates across Iraq.

A series of posters has been developed in English and Arabic to encourage accountability by appealing to national pride, tradition, and the preservation of a legacy for the next generation. ■

In Kirkuk, Ashley Backs Microfinance Plan To Woo Entrepreneurs

KIRKUK—When he was five, Jeff Ashley ran away from home only to be picked up and brought back a few hours later. Before long he was flying to some mountaintop, as the sun rose, or diving into deep waters, off the Indian shore. With his restless energy and curiosity, Jeff has traveled to 105 countries and almost every continent on the globe. Except that he has rarely gone anywhere just for pleasure—mostly for purpose.

Drawn to Challenges

Iraq drew him for the challenge of its present. He has been in several war zones in his 20 years of service with the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and non-governmental organizations. He has also had his fair share of hair-raising brushes with nature: crash-landed in Angola; swept away by the flood waters in Mexico City; train-wrecked on the mountains of Peru; and marooned on an uninhabited island in the Pacific. Since he has survived all that and more, Jeff felt he had the most important attribute of any aid worker: good luck.

Six months on, Jeff still wears the same expression of awe that he had the day he landed on the sun-baked Iraqi soil. As USAID representative for the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Kirkuk, Jeff and his colleagues from the military, State Department, and other U.S. agencies have formed meaningful alliances to help Iraqis reopen schools, set up market centers, provide entrepreneurs access to loans, share technical know-how with farmers, and train public officials in the rule of law and local governance.

Nearly 65 people work at the PRT site in Kirkuk, a city of about one million people with significant numbers of Arabs, Kurds and Turkmens.

Behind a jumble of concrete slabs, American military and civilian advisors chalk up finely-tuned plans, with flip-charts and Power Points, on how best to use resources to match the needs and vision of Iraqis. Speaking in his precise, academic manner, Jeff says USAID and the U.S. military operate in strikingly similar ways—they both have strategic objectives, expected timeframes, phased implementation processes, lessons learned, and indicators to measure successes. Everything is done with hard-headed calculations based on local knowledge and conditions.

Generating Optimism

To see the progress of USAID projects, Jeff is escorted in and out of the PRT site in a convoy to meet government officials, tribal sheikhs, implementing partners, and business owners. Slowly and determinedly, Jeff and his team have racked up gains through a direct, inclusive approach with the Iraqis.

The recent uptick in loans at the Iraqi-run Al Aman microfinance center in Kirkuk is a clear sign that private-sector development efforts are paying off. Set up by the PRT in 2006 to woo local entrepreneurs, the center has doled out 1,095 loans to small- and medium-size businesses, estimated at \$2.1 million. The value of Al Aman center's outstanding portfolio is \$1 million with a stellar repayment rate of 99.7 percent. The number of centers has risen to four within two years. And more than 2,630 people have found jobs, inspiring confidence and hope in the communities.



Jeff Ashley is ready to roll

Tribute to Soldiers

Jeff says the newfound Iraqi ebullience is here to stay. The reopened markets and businesses are potent symbols of interagency achievement. And the rapturous responses of the Iraqi men, women and children whose lives have changed for the better are a tribute to the fallen soldiers. He claims, “working with the men and women of the 1st Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division in Kirkuk is one of the greatest privileges and honors of my life and career.”

Away from work, Jeff spends his time in a trailer catching up on e-mails, reading camp classics, and swapping stories with military colleagues and friends. He says the comic relief offered by the young soldiers, many of them offensive-tackle size, keeps the morale up in a place where emotional demands are exhaustingly high.

In his relentless pursuit of new and noble experiences around the world, Jeff says PRT Kirkuk ranks at the very top, perhaps, next only to Mount Everest. ■

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