

Iraq

Community Action Program (CAP)



In 2003 ACDI/VOCA began implementing the Community Action Program (CAP) in the northern region of Iraq under a three-year, \$50 million USAID grant to provide impoverished, war-torn and ethnically divided Iraqi communities with the support and incentives necessary to identify and address their most pressing stabilization and recovery needs. Communities accomplished this through a democratic process that involved all their members, including diverse ethnic and religious groups, women and young people, to substantially improve their lives through collective action with the help of grants provided by the project.

Through CAP, ACDI/VOCA supported the efforts of 150 Iraqi communities in 8 governorates to rebuild their economic and social infrastructure after decades of wars, sanctions and repression. Mobilization begins with organizing public town hall-style meetings where priorities are discussed, working groups are formed and community board representatives are selected by their peers. Several thousand community members joined CAP community boards and

working groups, volunteering their time to design, implement and monitor hundreds of projects. Building on ACDI/VOCA's successes under CAP, ACDI/VOCA currently partners with CHF International under Community Action Program II (CAP II). ACDI/VOCA's CAP II portion, worth \$15 million, will support the building of a stable, democratic and prosperous Iraq by strengthening community-level mechanisms and capacity for citizen participation in local decision-making and development.

Through the life of the CAP program, ACDI/VOCA mobilized 150 communities and completed 1,335 projects totaling \$30 million. The program also collected an additional \$6.5 million in contributions from Iraqi communities. These activities created 334,000 days of employment and over 7,000 long-term jobs. CAP also created agricultural cooperatives and nearly 600 small businesses, while training 150 local staff members who, as professional community development workers, were the backbone of the program. In spite of the very considerable security risks of working in Iraq, ACDI/VOCA CAP staff and partners achieved remarkable accomplishments to date.

Creating Water Security to Ease Tensions

In one district of Iraq, population grew so quickly that many basic services and resources,



Project Profile

including water, were scarce. This community had been gathering its water from a pipe supplying a neighboring community, creating a water shortage there and provoking a conflict between the two. ACDI/VOCA worked with the local district board to extend the main water pipe, thus alleviating the problem. For the project, ACDI/VOCA supplied the pipes and fittings, while the people obtained the project designs from the local water authority and installed the pipes. Tensions between the communities disappeared once both were receiving adequate water.

Engaging Underrepresented Groups in Community Projects

One of the northern governorates in which ACDI/VOCA worked is rich in oil resources as well as ethnic diversity, with large numbers of Kurds, Turkmen and Sunni Arabs, as well as Chaldean and Assyrian Christians. The governorate has many conservative regions where women and young people had been playing only a limited role in public decision making. ACDI/VOCA's CAP staff identified informal associations in the area with which to organize participation of underrepresented groups, especially women, youth and minorities. Ensuring equitable participation on the part of these associations in the planning sessions translated into broader participation from diverse groups in the public meetings. Many town hall meetings

convened under the project were attended by a high percentage of women. Several women were elected to community boards, giving them a greater say in project design and approval. As a result, the community board

approved a large income-generating sewing project for women.

Providing Educational Opportunities to War-Affected Orphans

ACDI/VOCA worked also in one of the several frontier towns that attracted thousands of Kurds displaced under Saddam Hussein but also lost many of its young people to permanent exile,

service in the Kurdish militia or migration to larger urban centers. The town is home to many orphans, who had lost their parents to fighting, disease or the 1988 Anfal campaign. The downtown orphan center welcomes these children after school or on holidays and allows them to play games, watch TV and videos, and, now, learn computer skills.

A fourteen-year-old orphan, whose father was killed by a land mine, was excited to use the computers provided to the local orphan center by ACDI/VOCA. "I want to be a teacher," he said. "Learning computers will be better for my future." Another orphan at the center had been a baby when the Iraqi army took away his mother and father in the Anfal campaign and was raised by his father's parents. With his grandfather being too old to work in the fields anymore, the boy was bringing in a little money by carrying loads for neighbors but began attending the orphan center because of its educational opportunities. "I want to be a doctor," he said. "I want to help people and improve the community. Computers will teach me the sciences."

Fostering a Community

As part of the USAID-financed Marla Ruzicka Fund for Innocent Victims of Conflict, ACDI/VOCA provided assistance to individuals and families who suffered as a result of the actions of coalition forces. In one area, ACDI/VOCA worked with 30 families to help them establish a bakery that makes Lebanese-style bread. ACDI/VOCA provided the machinery, compressors and ingredients to start up this small business. The bakery is managed by a local nongovernmental organization, which provided the building for the bakery and ensured that the bakery operated properly and its proceeds were distributed equitably. The 30 families formed a committee for monthly meetings to vote on major managerial decisions and eventually take a more direct role in managing the bakery's day-to-day operations. The project benefited approximately 240 individuals from the 30 families, as well as approximately 5,000 local customers.

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