



Taking their future in their own hands

Hundreds of Iraqis, many of them young,
join UNIDO project to acquire marketable skills



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Rebuilding micro-industries in Iraq's Anbar Governorate

Iraq's recent history of wars, sanctions, isolation and rampant sectarian violence has imposed a devastating toll on the quality of life and the prospects for human development. Despite its size and economic growth potential, Anbar Governorate in western Iraq continues to suffer severely from the effects of this prolonged crisis with most of its population lacking access to basic services and sustainable incomes.

Over the last two decades, conflict has led to the destruction of infrastructure and the near collapse of the general education and vocational training systems. Surviving support institutions are plagued by insufficient funds and trained manpower. Furthermore, the young are among the most seriously affected due to a lack of marketable skills and of means to initiate income-generating activities. These dire educational and economic realities exacerbate the widespread poverty, food insecurity, out-migration and criminality.

The fate of recovery efforts in post-crisis situations is largely determined by the degree of success in making the transition from the initial emergency and relief stage to rehabilitation and reconstruction and ultimately to sustainable development.



The new political situation in the country brought hope to Anbar, which by the summer of 2008 was almost completely pacified. This turnaround created opportunities to develop support programmes aimed at enabling the local population to rebuild and sustain their livelihood.

The United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) has recently completed an ambitious project to revitalize the non-food micro-industries in Anbar Governorate. *Support for job creation and self-employment through promotion of micro-industries in Anbar Governorate of Iraq* also included a food-sector component



which was simultaneously implemented by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). The project was designed to be a key player in the overall UN assistance strategy in Iraq, whose main objectives are to support economic and human development and to assist in the provision of basic services and the promotion of community development. By adopting as a core objective the creation of employment and entrepreneurial opportunities for vulnerable population groups such as the young, women and displaced persons, the project was in tune with two major national development priorities of the Government of Iraq: revitalizing the private sector and improving life quality.

Capitalizing on past achievements Both UNIDO, largely through its Agribusiness Development Branch, and FAO have provided extensive assistance in post-crisis environments in Iraq and several other countries. Two other similar interventions in Iraq (with the participation of both organizations) were carried out in the northern governorates of Erbil and Sulaymaniyah and the southern Thi-qar Governorate respectively; the latter benefited some 1,500 households by helping in the establishment of micro-industrial enterprises and was singularly praised by the Iraqi Government. This experience has strengthened the conviction of the two UN agencies that close cooperation with national partners and the full engagement of crisis-affected communities largely account for the success of such initiatives. Moreover, in Iraq, security constraints make reliance on national project staff and local expertise indispensable. The Anbar project benefited from the effective involvement of the Ministry of Planning, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and the Ministry of Agriculture in assessing local needs and resources, in laying out the project strategy, and in field implementation and progress monitoring.



Training: the project groundwork A widespread lack of marketable skills, most notable among women and the young, largely caused by the dire condition of Iraq's educational system, posed the most immediate challenge. Initially, the local trainers

selected by the project management had themselves to be trained, an activity which was carried out in Amman, Jordan. Another urgent need was to establish adequate training facilities in the region. In the provincial capital of Ramadi, the project rehabilitated a building belonging to the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs to set up a modern Vocational Training Centre (*see photo on page 1*). The project also provided the equipment for three additional training facilities at Haditha, Ana and Al-Qae'm; moreover, special training sessions were held on such premises as schools and local administration buildings in various parts of the Governorate.

The overall training programme for non-food micro-industries covered a wide range of skills for which there is significant demand in the region, such as metal working, carpentry and marquetry, sewing and garment making, plus repair and maintenance skills for air-conditioning and refrigeration equipment, vehicles, generators, pumps, and mobile telephones. Most of the young trainees also attended courses in information technology.

One fundamental task was to facilitate access to income-generating activities by providing suitable technology and supplies to production groups and hundreds of individual beneficiaries. From metal working and carpentry equipment and sewing



machines to computers and tool kits, technology transfers accounted for over 50% of total funding for the project's non-food component.

The project target of 700 training beneficiaries in the non-food sector was met long before the end of implementation, and following a special request made by the Anbar Governor, an additional 300 joined the skill development programme. During the later stages of project implementation, all vocational coaching was closely monitored for relevance and effectiveness, an evaluation process which covered both trainees and trainers.

Strengthening the weakest links A defining feature of the project was the direct assistance provided to people regarded as most vulnerable in this post-crisis environment. Based on beneficiary selection criteria agreed upon by all stakeholders, the project primarily targeted women (particularly those who were the sole or main providers of their households), internally displaced persons and returnees as well as people with very low incomes. In total, over 1,000 households in both rural and urban areas benefited from training in the use of non-food technologies. Approximately half of all individual direct beneficiaries were women, and the project improved significantly the skills – and thereby the employment prospects – of about 500 young people.







Production groups foster community development Another project challenge was to ensure the operational effectiveness of training beneficiaries who were now capable not only to secure employment but also to set up their own micro-enterprises. Consequently, they were encouraged to join forces in micro-industrial production groups for which the project management developed business plans that pursued improved efficiencies in the use of available resources as well as better and more profitable access to markets.

Beyond the direct economic benefits rendered to the initial participants, the production groups became showcases capable of enhancing the awareness of local communities regarding project opportunities. At higher levels of participation in the future, these partnerships are likely to play an important part in the development of their communities. They will be in a position to extend a helping hand to new returnees by providing employment opportunities, will engage an increasing number of households in a variety of sustainable activities that generate auxiliary incomes, and will drive the development of their communities as well as contribute to the overall economic recovery of the region.



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