



U.S. EMBASSY - BAGHDAD

2008 Provincial Reconstruction Team News

-Local Iraqi Government Offers Positive Response to Drought-

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Baqubah, Iraq - Recently, the Kirkuk chapter of Kurdistan SAs temperatures soar to near 130 F in Diyala Province drought is approaching a point that threatens humans as well as livestock challenging the planning and implementation capabilities of local water departments.

The past winter's low rainfall in Diyala follows two years of reduced rainfall resulting in an alarming drop in water levels in local reservoirs. Wheat yields have also been affected as planting this year was severely reduced while livestock herds have been devastated.

After nearly two years of sustained insurgent activity and violence throughout the Province much of the water infrastructure had been damaged or neglected. Nonetheless progress on tackling water shortages has been consistent.

Facing a potential catastrophe the Diyala Provincial Government responded positively to the looming crisis with a wide range of initiatives from canal clearance, increased well-digging and innovative livestock maintenance programs

As winter drew to an end, after below average rainfall, the provincial departments of water resources, irrigation, and wells prepared a multi-pronged strategy for the summer months that included input from the Diyala Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT).

The PRTs (Provincial Reconstruction Team) are a Department of State-led civilian-military initiative that helps provincial and local governments build capacity to serve their citizens through a range of governance and economic development programs. There are a total of twenty nine teams throughout Iraq manned by over four-hundred civilian volunteers and an equal number of military personnel.



Work being done on a new well in Diyala as part of the Provincial Government's drought mitigation efforts.

Diyala's irrigation department implemented a plan for canal repair and clearance that also removed illegal taps and pumps from the water ways ensuring that water would be distributed according to schedule and that theft and hoarding would be minimized.

Responding to a request by the irrigation department, the Diyala PRT prepared draft technical specifications for the procurement of 20 horizontal pumps for irrigation purposes. This technical assistance will enable the Diyala Government to increase the flow of water for irrigation.

The department of water resources focused on potable water for human consumption and began increasing the number of water tanker trucks serving the Province. Fifteen new trucks have been delivered to the Province and 35 more have been requested.

Communities like Khan Bani Saad, which have been hit particularly hard because water from wells in the area are too saline for human consumption, have already seen a 33% increase in daily potable water deliveries.

In addition, the department of wells began an ambitious campaign of well drilling. One hundred and eighty-four sites were chosen for new well drilling and additional existing wells for rehabilitation and improvements. So far, 48 wells have been drilled with four new wells being completed each week.

Most importantly, the plan prioritized the drilling schedule by greatest need and most abundant supply of fresh water so that the communities hardest hit by the drought would receive relief first.

The Diyala PRT's water adviser was able to help when four wells in the province produced water with fine sand and he was able to recommend a course of action to identify the source of the sand, a first step in developing a strategy for either removing the sand at the source with better filtration, or by diverting the water to a treatment facility.

Livestock – cattle, sheep and goats -- are also suffering as the drought becomes more severe. Most of the feedstock and forage available to herds during a year with normal precipitation died off in the drought.

To offset the problem the Ministry of Trade has developed an emergency feed distribution program in partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture. The program allocates about 50 pounds of grain for each sheep or goat being raised.

Diyala's department of agriculture is administering the program. The grain is to be shipped into Diyala from Erbil and will be stored in a central distribution silo near Baqubah. Agriculture unit managers from Diyala's rural districts will be responsible for counting the number of animals in each herdsman's flock and verifying the quantity of grain distributed.

The supplemental feed allotment is designed to ensure that the animals remain productive and to carry the flocks into the next rainy season when forage should revive.

The water crisis in Diyala Province is not over but it is more apparent every day that the Province's Government is addressing the problem and is better able to develop solutions now than compared to a year ago.