



Iraqi veterinarians inoculate livestock at a PRT-sponsored event.

Fertile Ground

RECONSTRUCTION TEAM PROMOTES GROWTH IN IRAQI PROVINCE
BY AARON D. SNIPE

PHOTOGRAPHS: AARON SNIPE

Muthanna Province rarely makes international headlines. Roughly the size of Maine, Iraq's second-largest province is that nation's least economically developed. A place where temperatures can reach upward of 140 degrees, unemployment is high and agriculture supports a large percentage of residents, Muthanna faces myriad challenges.

Located far from the decision-makers in Baghdad, the province might seem fertile ground for violent extremism, but in the almost two years since the troop surge in Iraq, the Provincial Reconstruction Team in Muthanna has seen residents embracing peace, striving for a brighter future and eagerly starting to rebuild.

"We benefited from the surge," PRT Team Leader Brad Lynch said, "but there are provinces in Iraq where the citizens decided, even long before the surge, that they would not stand for violence and extremism, and Muthanna is one of those provinces."

Stable Environment

The stable security environment gave the PRT the chance to spend a great deal of time in the province and to interact with residents at every level. Additionally, the PRT's work has been very well received because years of neglect had left this province with few resources. Whereas many essential services elsewhere were destroyed or disrupted by war and sectarian violence, Muthanna simply lacked many of these services to begin with. In many cases, PRT Muthanna is helping provide citizens access to clean water, electricity and health care for the very first time.

PRT Muthanna is involved in multiple projects that affect practically every sector and has a diverse bench of experts in such areas as agriculture, government and public diplomacy. One of the sectors where the PRT has engaged with the community is journalism. Soon after the new team arrived, it reached out to the local media and conducted a training seminar for local journalists. This training helped expand the important relationship with the Fourth Estate established by the prior team. Led by the PRT's public diplomacy officer, the training was held in a "mudhif," or traditional Iraqi meeting house, the PRT constructed. Completed in January, the mudhif has been an integral part of the team's engagement with local Iraqis.

"Building a traditional Iraqi meeting house where PRT members and Iraqis can assemble, break bread and discuss the business of the province in a culturally sensitive atmosphere was a terrific investment made by the previous team," Lynch said. "Meeting Iraqis on their own turf reinforces our message that we are doing all that we can to understand and help remedy the concerns of all Iraqis."

Not long after this training, members of the PRT were invited to give an hour-long interview on the province's most-watched

trip to India that focused on agricultural development. The visit reflected how the PRT leverages its expertise to reach beyond Iraq's borders.

Within the province, the PRT is working on an important bovine artificial insemination program. The decline in the number of breeding bulls has created an agricultural and financial crisis for Iraq's farmers. Government neglect, war and other economic factors have forced many of them to slaughter their livestock to feed their families. The PRT-inspired and Iraqi-led



PRT Team Leader Brad Lynch and tribal sheikhs participate in a ribbon-cutting for a water pump in rural Muthanna.

television station, where they briefed the people of Muthanna on the role and projects of the PRT.

Agricultural Effort

Of all the reconstruction assistance and goodwill the PRT has generated in Muthanna, no sector has benefited more than agriculture. The team's agricultural and water experts have traveled the province and beyond, working with the relevant Iraqi ministries to tackle the complex challenges in both fields. In August, the PRT's senior agricultural adviser led a delegation of high-ranking Iraqi agricultural officials from Muthanna and Maysan provinces on a 10-day research

artificial insemination program will help revitalize a central part of Muthanna's agricultural sector and economy.

Measuring the impact of development is often difficult to do quickly. However, at a recent visit to a project on the banks of the Euphrates, Lynch said, "Helping Iraqis repair this water pumping station that the government is now helping maintain is what our work is all about. This irrigation project has had an impact on thousands of people, and it was brought to you by the Iraqi government with a little help from the PRT." ■

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