



U.S. EMBASSY - BAGHDAD

## 2008 Provincial Reconstruction Team News

### -Sewing center Helps Empower Women in Iraq-

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April 17, 2008

**AL-KUT, Iraq** - A women's sewing center officially opened in Muafiqiyah village April 10, providing both employment and training for local women thrust into the position of bread winners whose men have been killed or thrown out of work by terrorist actions.

The center, established with the help of the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) operating in Wasit Province, will serve as a means for local women to earn income to support their families, said Sgt. Amanda E. Timmer, head of the Women's Initiatives program on the PRT.

The Muafiqiyah center employs 11 women from the village, one for each sewing machine. Eventually these women will take apprentices, doubling the workforce, said Timmer. "The plan is not only to employ women, but to train them, provide them a skill," she added.

Selection for the initial group was specifically aimed at single mothers whose spouses had died and who had no other means to provide for their families, said Timmer.

This is the first project the PRT has undertaken in Muafiqiyah, the woman U.S. Army Sergeant said, and was done, in part, to establish a relationship with the village aimed at building trust for further development partnerships. The project could not have been mounted without the collaboration between local leaders in the village, the PRT and the Wasit Provincial Council, she added.

The initial assessment by the PRT took place in early March, after Hadi al-Yasiri, a member of the Council, asked the team to visit Muafiqiyah, his hometown, said Lt. Col. Robert Jones, PRT deputy team leader.

The future sewing center was nothing more than an empty building next to the mayor's office, he explained. After the assessment, a complete refurbishment of the building took place in just 10 days.

A chief goal of PRT programs in Iraq is local buy-in and sustainability and Timmer said the sewing center will be overseen and run by Ahmad Nouri Ali al-Yasiri, head of the Muafiqiyah local Council. In addition, all the materials used by women at the center will be provided by the Council.



Sgt. Amanda E. Timmer, head of the Women's Initiative for the Wasit PRT, speaks with an Iraqi woman with the help of an interpreter at the new women's sewing center at Muafiqiyah, Iraq April. 10. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Carlos J. Lazo)

The clothing will be sold locally and also - if there is a demand - at the al-Kut town markets, said al-Yasiri. The Council will oversee sales, with part of the profits going to maintain the center, fund operations and purchase materials.

The remaining income will be handed over to the women to support their families. In this way, Timmer said, the center not only supports the women, but allows them to contribute to the community.

In addition to the PRT in Wasit all 31 teams operating in Iraq's 18 provinces work closely with the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) on development programs for women.

These USAID programs support women entrepreneurs, business leaders, employees, and professionals to ensure they benefit from increased economic growth and increased public and private sector capacity building. For example, since 2003 nearly 60 percent of USAID's small business grants in Iraq were awarded to women.

In civil society capacity building USAID provided a \$500,000 grant to the Rafadin Women's Coalition of Iraq - consisting of more than 30 women's organizations - for conferences, leaflet distribution, media and television advertising promoting women's rights.

In agriculture USAID is training women, as well as men, in improved crop and livestock production, marketing, financial management, and rural credit.