

Building Foundations for Local Governance in Iraq

In 2003, all upper-level government positions in Iraq lay vacant after the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime. The economy had foundered, basic services had deteriorated, and public infrastructure had sustained substantial damage. Sectarian violence pervaded the nation as Iraq's prewar institutions struggled to restructure in response to the dramatically changed political system.

That year, RTI International began implementing the first of three consecutive U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) contracts to build local government policy and capacity, and increase citizen participation during Iraq's transition to democracy. Work under the Local Governance Program (LGP 1, 2003–2005), Iraq Strengthening Local and Provincial Governance (LGP 2, 2005–2009), and the Iraq Local Governance Program, Phase 3 (LGP 3, 2009–2010), has extended into all 18 provinces, while continually adapting to meet the country's evolving local government policy needs.



Setting the Stage

Prior to 2003, the government in Iraq was highly centralized; local government was nonexistent. Under LGP 1, which began in April 2003, RTI helped Iraqis define the role local government would play within their shifting political structure. After the post-Saddam transitional government was replaced by council members elected in January 2005—the first elected local officials in the history of Iraq—LGP 1 helped strengthen local government by training 85% of the council members on their new roles and responsibilities. The project also helped spur public participation through civic dialogue events that drew 750,000 Iraqi citizens.

When LGP 2 began in May 2005, Iraq was operating under an interim elected government and writing its constitution. To assist local governments voice views on their future role, LGP 2 held regional workshops involving all 18 provinces, allowing local council members to convene with the constitution's drafters to provide input.

Building a Formal Government Structure

In October 2005, Iraq adopted its constitution, which established a federal political system that includes national and local governments. However, the constitution addressed these roles broadly and required more elaboration. To assist this effort, the U.S. government increased its support of local government building in Iraq and began implementing provincial reconstruction teams (PRTs), led by the Departments of State and Defense, to help empower local governments and coordinate all U.S. efforts at the local level. LGP 2 provides up to three advisors to each PRT in areas such as governance, public services/public works, and budgeting/finance.

Simultaneously, LGP 2 continued to assist in further clarifying the structure of local government in Iraq by enabling national-level legislation and policy reform. For example, LGP 2 supported the formation of the Iraq Local Government Association (LGA), a membership organization for local elected officials from all provinces. LGP 2 staff helped the LGA draft legislation to more clearly



define local government powers and lobby for its passage. The legislation, the Law of Governorates Not Incorporated into a Region, was ratified in March 2008. This law will become effective following provincial elections in early 2009.

“Without LGP, there would be no local government today in Iraq,” said the chairman of the Iraq Local Government Association, at a national meeting, February 2007.

Strengthening Leadership and Systems

Following ratification of the constitution, the national government began transferring a portion of its budget to provincial governments to finance capital investments in infrastructure and public works. Provincial governments had limited experience handling budgets and contracting for capital projects, so LGP 2 assisted them in developing a budget execution process and created a customized computer-based information system called GAPTIS, which automates financial accounting and project tracking while improving transparency. The system has been implemented in 11 provinces and is scheduled for implementation in three more in 2009.

LGP 2 also worked with representatives from each province to help them create five-year Provincial Development Strategies (PDSs), or broad vision statements for development with capital investment strategies to reach those visions. All provinces presented their PDSs formally to the central government, including the prime minister, in March 2008. The central government agreed to incorporate these PDSs into the five-year National Development Plan. Subsequently, LGP 2 assisted provinces in transforming the PDSs into more detailed Provincial Development Plans (PDPs).

To simplify the planning process, LGP 2 assisted Iraqi provinces in geographic information system (GIS) base-mapping for major cities in each province to support urban planning, development, and service delivery. The project has launched the system, piloted successfully in Basrah, to all provinces and trained local engineers to work in GIS base-mapping centers.

Easing the Transition

As LGP 2 draws to a close, a portion of the project will remain active through 2009 by continuing to provide governance, public service/public works, and budgeting/finance advisors to PRTs.



Women's leadership conference sponsored by LGP 2, March 2008. LGP 2 supports female leaders and assists them in influencing the power dynamics in politics through its Women's Leadership Program, which delivers frequent workshops on topics such as analyzing draft legislation and addressing violence against women. [Photo: LGP 2 staff]

In January 2009, LGP 3 began work in selected provinces, with an emphasis on the implementation of the Law of Governorates Not Incorporated into a Region. Capacity-building efforts will focus on training in advanced local government management tools and practices, such as assisting provinces in setting service delivery performance measures, completing multiyear capital investments plans, and educating newly elected provincial council members on their roles and responsibilities under the recent legislation.



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