

WATER KNOWLEDGE NOTE

Iraq

Interventions to Urgently Improve the Quantity and Quality of Drinking Water

Due to years of conflict and political instability, Iraq has long faced complex institutional challenges. Water and sanitation services were sorely lacking, posing a threat to public health and quality of life. With a comprehensive approach that included supporting state-level management of water supply and sanitation services, the Emergency Water Supply Project (2008–15) improved the quality and quantity of water supply across four regions in Iraq.

Challenge

For the past 20 years, Iraq's human development indicators decreased due to political instability, growing population, and economic sanctions. Persistent war, illiteracy, and high poverty rates present additional challenges to the country. Water and sanitation service delivery have particularly suffered, with deteriorated



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infrastructure and inadequate policy frameworks. Many governorates (provinces) in Iraq have limited access to potable water, sanitation, and electricity. Less than 70 percent of the urban population had access to potable water, and rural areas were even worse off with approximately 48 percent coverage. Outside of Baghdad, as little as eight percent of the population was connected to sewerage systems.

Insufficient water supply and sanitation compound existing issues of an overburdened health system and compromised environmental quality. Old and malfunctioning water supply schemes characterized the Iraqi landscape and building national capacity for water and sanitation services was therefore an issue of strategic national importance.

Approach

Investments in water supply and sanitation services have the capacity to address many issues at once for maximum impact, ranging from improving living standards to avoiding public health crises. To this end, four Iraqi towns and districts, as well as their surrounding communities, were identified at the appraisal stage as being in urgent need of interventions to provide clean drinking water and sewage collection: Wasit district (in the Wasit governorate); Ghammas (in the Al-Qadisiyah governorate); Al-Nasr (in the Thi-Qar governorate); and Maimoona (in the Maysan governorate).

With the overall aim of providing safe drinking water and adequate sewage collection to vulnerable populations, the project focused on rehabilitating and upgrading water supply and distribution schemes. To continue the project's benefits, it also emphasized capacity building activities to improve long-term reliance on Iraqi water and sanitation professionals.

Results

With a targeted approach, the Emergency Water Supply Project contributed to the recovery of water supply infrastructure across the four selected governorates. From the project start in 2008 to project closure in 2015, the following key results were observed:

- More than 192,400 people across four governorates benefitted from improved quantity and quality of water supplies;
- The project resulted in the addition of approximately 75,000 meters cubed per day of safe drinking water;
- More than 78 kilometers of new transmission piping and distribution networks were distributed across the project areas;
- 11,000 new piped household water connections resulted from the project interventions;
- 3,900 new piped household water connections benefitted from rehabilitation works undertaken by the project; and
- 118 water and sanitation staff members were trained to enhance local capacity to plan and operate vital assets.

Moving Forward

Problems with security and public-sector governance persist in Iraq. However, the project left a positive legacy by providing Iraqi water providers and practitioners with the opportunity to independently design, implement, and manage water supply schemes.

The Iraqi government aims to continue the project momentum by upgrading services in other parts of the country in cooperation with interested development partners. Given the foundation of construction and rehabilitation work provided through project activities, work opportunities were created for multiple individuals to operate and maintain the water and sanitation facilities moving forward.

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