

Iraq

Background

Iraq is in a phase of fragile transition following several years of crisis. The security situation has improved dramatically, with a 75 percent drop in both violent incidents and civilian casualties since mid-2007. However, as the dust of conflict settles, Iraq's humanitarian needs remain extensive and acute. Twenty-five years of sanctions and violence, compounded by the recent war, have led to widespread unemployment and left pockets of severe deprivation throughout the country. Moreover, militia activity, military operations and random outbreaks of violence continue to limit access to health services, food, sanitation and education, with particularly serious impacts on women and children.

While improvements in security are encouraging displaced Iraqi families to make their way home, the overall rate of return remains very low. Between January 2007 and September 2008, only 5 percent of Iraqi refugees and 7 percent of IDPs returned

to their areas of origin. Many are discouraged by the poor living conditions, lack of social services and continuing insecurity in areas of transit and return, while others have made the journey only to find their homes occupied or destroyed. With falling oil prices and reduced foreign aid cutting into Iraq's capital budget just as more investment is needed, careful prioritization of humanitarian assistance in 2009 will be key to reaching those most in need.

KEY FACTS

- Population: 28.4 million
- GNI per capita (USD): 1 224
- Population below poverty line: 42%
- Life expectancy: 69.2 years
- Total arable land: 13.12%
- Population in agriculture: 4.16%
- Population undernourished: no data
- Total land area: 439 000 sq km
- Human Development Index: no data

(Source: UN; World Bank; World Factbook)

Challenges facing food security and livelihoods

Compared to other countries in the region, Iraq suffers from low cereal yields owing to shortages in improved seed and fertilizer, high soil salinity and degraded irrigation and drainage systems. Furthermore, soaring agricultural input prices and severe drought in 2007 and 2008 have seriously diminished the country's existing food production capacity. Yields of wheat and barley, two of Iraq's staple crops, have dropped by an estimated 35 and 55 percent respectively as a result of the drought, and many small-scale farmers are at risk of losing their livelihoods. Reduced production has in turn contributed to a 60 percent increase in food prices since 2005, pushing household coping mechanisms to the limit.

The price hike also presents challenges to the Iraqi Government's Public Distribution Systems (PDS) food aid programme, while PDS operations are further compromised by continuing insecurity in a number of governorates. With almost half of the population food insecure or dependent on Government food aid, such disruptions to the PDS could have serious consequences in terms of national food security. Recent reports indicate that poorer households in Iraq lack the purchasing power to supplement their PDS ration with fresh food and are equally unable to grow their own crops in the face of high input prices. The result is a lack of dietary diversity and widespread malnutrition among Iraq's most vulnerable communities.



FAO response

While joint UN efforts in 2009 will assist Iraq through a regional approach across neighbouring countries hosting Iraqi refugees, FAO will focus on in-country assistance. Specifically, FAO's proposed interventions aim to support rural households in establishing home gardens for year-round production of vegetables. In addition to high-quality vegetable seeds, fertilizers and hand tools, beneficiaries will receive training in vegetable cultivation to enable them to obtain the best possible results with the inputs provided. FAO also endeavours to assist landless rural families, among the most vulnerable in the country, by advocating for local councils to allocate land for communal farming.

These interventions will significantly enhance the dietary diversity and nutritional intake of beneficiaries and provide them with an occupation in the form of home gardening. In addition to producing fresh food for household consumption, beneficiaries will be able to sell surplus vegetables to generate income for other basic needs, such as education and healthcare. Moreover, increased food availability will have a positive impact on the nutritional status of surrounding communities.

“Iraq’s humanitarian needs remain extensive and acute”

PROPOSALS: FAO EMERGENCY AND REHABILITATION ASSISTANCE

Total funding required: USD 3 000 000

Emergency support to food-insecure rural households through establishing home gardens in Iraq	
Objectives:	Mitigate the impact of rapidly rising food prices by supporting home gardens through the provision of vegetable seeds and other basic inputs. The assistance will benefit food-insecure households engaged in part-time agricultural activities either as marginal farmers, non-skilled labourers or agricultural wage earners.
Activities:	Distribute high quality vegetable seeds and other necessary inputs (fertilizers and tools) to selected beneficiaries for year-round production of fresh vegetables in home gardens; and train beneficiaries on best practices in the utilization of the inputs provided.
Beneficiaries:	32 000 farmers and their household members (including 13 000 children and 9 500 women).
Implementing partners:	Mercy Hands and the Ministry of Agriculture.
Duration:	January 2009 – December 2009.
Funds requested:	USD 3 000 000.

