

DART Took Quick Action

The Disaster Assistance Response Team made sure food, water and medicine were available and helped avert a humanitarian crisis.

In late 2002, the U.S. Government began planning for possible operations in Iraq. President Bush asked USAID to take responsibility for humanitarian affairs and created an inter-Agency Disaster Assistance Response Team to assess the humanitarian situation and coordinate relief. USAID technical staff went to Jordan, Kuwait, Qatar and Cyprus to prepare for post-conflict reconstruction.

To ensure basic food supplies for Iraq's 25 million people, the Agency's Food for Peace office made a grant to the U.N. World Food Program for the largest humanitarian relief project in WFP history. But first that meant fixing ports and airports so that supplies and humanitarian assistance could be landed.

The DART got the first look at Iraq's neglected hospitals and basic infrastructure and the damage caused by the looting that followed Saddam's collapse. They found high

child and maternal death rates, especially in the south, where untreated water appears to be one of Saddam's punishments for suspected disloyalty. Responding quickly, USAID chose four NGOs to distribute supplies and emergency medical kits, among other tasks: International Rescue Committee, International Medical Corps, Mercy Corps, and CARE.

These grants put Iraqi doctors and engineers back to work and began the process of restoring essential services, even if much of it was jerry-rigged by enterprising Iraqis. Beginning April 3, five shiploads of American grain left Galveston Harbor to ensure that the food chain remained intact. Some ships would land in Jordan and the food was trucked into Iraq. More food was later offloaded at Umm Qasr, Iraq's deepwater port, as it was dredged and cleared.

To assure urgent supplies and services for public health, the Agency turned quickly to the WHO and UNICEF. Vaccination campaigns began immediately reaching millions of children. No major outbreaks of disease took place.

The DART also focused on human rights, adding abuse prevention officers to the team to look for early signs of reprisals, ethnic violence or other abuse. (For a discussion of what they found, see page 21.)

DART chief Michael Marx said the NGOs "were exceptionally creative" in delivering aid. "The NGOs have been courageous," added Lewis Lucke, USAID's first mission director in Baghdad. "They've operated in less security than the contractors, and they have not withdrawn. I think they are unsung heroes."

Results

- The U.S. sent 62 experts to prepare for rapid humanitarian relief and set up DART offices in Arbil, Baghdad, Al Hillah, and Basra.

- Before the fighting began, DART teams moved to the Middle East to begin stockpiling emergency food, water, medicine and shelter.

- The speed of the military campaign and the accuracy of US weapons meant that few Iraqis fled their homes and no humanitarian emergency ensued.

- The DART focused on supplying food, restoring services and helping local towns set up democratic councils.

- Several quick DART grants helped Iraqis restore medical care, set up human rights groups, and begin resolving ethnic and land conflicts.



US food aid arrives at WFP warehouse in Umm Qasr.



(Top) Millions of Iraqi children were immunized in USAID programs.

An Iraqi doctor receives emergency health kits from the DART.