

Hawr Rajab Sees Significant Economic, Quality of Life Improvements

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Capt. Gregory Curry II, commander of Troop A, 6th Squadron, 8th Cavalry Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division signs over a micro-grant to a general store owner in the Hawr Rajab area. Curry, of Walnut Creek, Ohio, said the purpose of the micro-grants is to improve and jumpstart the local economy. U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Michael Paredes.

FOB KALSU — With security improving in Hawr Rajab, stores and schools are reopening and a number of programs are revitalizing a community once on the brink of chaos.

In November 2007, al-Qaeda launched their last well-coordinated offensives into Hawr Rajab, killing a total of 12 members of the Sons of Iraq (Sol) and wounding eight. In the same firefight, two Iraqi Army (IA) Soldiers were killed and another nine wounded; four U.S. Soldiers were injured in the attacks.

When the insurgents attacked, the Sol program in the region was still in its infancy, but the members were not deterred. With the assistance of Coalition forces and IA Soldiers, residents began to reclaim their community and insurgents not killed or captured were forced to flee.

As rebuilding of the rural farming area began, community leaders ramped up efforts to re-establish ties with the government of Iraq (GoI).

Sheik Ali Majeed Mushir Al-Dulaymi, leader of the Sol in Hawr Rajab, began meeting with Yousif Yaqoub Bekhaty, Rashid District Council chairman, and other council officials to request government assistance with reconstruction efforts.

“The present challenges we face are maintaining security, promoting economic growth and stability, while helping Hawr Rajab establish an efficient local government with supporting entities,” said Capt. Gregory Curry II, commander of Troop A, 6th Squadron, 8th Cavalry Regiment. “It will not happen overnight, but it is happening one day at a time.”

Curry, of Walnut Creek, Ohio, said Troop A, 6-8th Cav. Regt. Soldiers are key players and a driving force behind various programs in Hawr Rajab.

His troop coordinates with Team A, Company B, 426th Civil Affairs Battalion, and the U.S. State Department’s Baghdad-7 embedded Provincial Reconstruction Team.

The combined efforts of the groups, assigned to the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division, mean residents of Hawr Rajab have access to resources for rebuilding their town.

Life is returning to normal with the improvements, made possible by partnership between Coalition forces, Sol, officials from the Gol and Iraqi security forces. Hawr Rajab is becoming a beacon of change and potential for sustainable economic improvements.

The following outline current area economic initiatives.

The Micro-grant Program:

More than \$50,000 in micro-grants has been distributed to approximately 50 stores. The purpose of this program is to reopen businesses, jumpstart the economy and provide employment.

The effects are further-reaching than the local community. To stock and replenish stores, products are brought in from other areas - some as far as India and China - making Hawr Rajab a member of the global community.

The Poultry Revitalization Program:

The program will provide starter chicks to poultry farms that were shut down due to violence. Two types of chicks will be provided; one type will be raised for the purpose of producing eggs and the other for meat. First Lt. Michael E. Falk, platoon leader, Troop A, 6-8 Cav. Regt., said a processing plant in a neighboring town will process the poultry.

Faulk, a native of Clifton, Va., said the poultry industry of Hawr Rajab has the potential to profit from commerce between itself, surrounding communities and other area markets.

Next week, eight chicken coops will be the first to receive a scheduled delivery of approximately 25,000 heads of young poultry.

The Seed Distribution Program:

The Agricultural Committee of Hawr Rajab coordinated a seed distribution program with Coalition forces in December 2007. It distributed more than 900 starter packets of seed as well as plastic to local farmers. The starter packets contained seeds for cucumbers, eggplants, bell peppers and tomatoes.

At present, success of the seed distribution is being measured by the 2nd BCT and the outlook for the program is positive.

School renovation projects:

A girls' school is currently undergoing extensive renovations to give the facility a much-needed facelift.

A similar renovation plan for the boys' school is currently pending funding. Presently, there is a shortage of school buildings and boys attend classes in two shifts, with the morning reserved for primary school and afternoon for secondary school. Despite overcrowding at the schools, educators make due with their resources and school remains in session.

The Hawr Rajab Medical Clinic:

This facility is being repaired and is scheduled for completion this month. Medical personnel will be provided by the Iraqi Ministry of Health and will return prior to the completion of the facilities. In the meantime, limited services are provided by a local physician assistant.

Women's initiatives:

Women of the area formed a committee to discuss problems facing women and find solutions.

The group formed in February 2008 and has since brought to light a very serious issue. Many men have been killed by insurgents, leaving families without their traditional heads of households. Now a fund exists to care for families left behind by Sons of Iraq who paid the ultimate price for protecting their homes during the fight against al-Qaeda.

“The Village of Hope”:

With the revitalization of the area and need for skilled labor, a vocational school was constructed by U.S. Air Force construction engineers, who will also provide the instructor staff.

A large number of Sol will be retrained as electricians, carpenters and construction laborers. This vocational school has been dubbed “The Village of Hope.” The program is currently in a final approval stage at 3rd Inf. Div. headquarters.

(Story by Staff Sgt. Michael Paredes, 3rd Infantry Division Public Affairs)