



COUNTERPART



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

**ASSISTANCE
FOR IRAQ**

2345 Crystal Drive Arlington, VA 22202 Tel: 703.236.1200 Fax: 703.412.5035 Email: communications@counterpart.org

Women Break New Ground in Falluja

A Community Action Group comprised of women with disabilities and widows has created a sewing factory to generate a sustainable source of income in Falluja, Iraq.



Photo Courtesy Counterpart Iraq

The Sewing Factory has created 250 long-term jobs for handicapped women in Falluja as seamstresses, embroiderers, marketers and managers.

Counterpart International, in partnership with the Falluja Handicapped Association, mobilized a Community Action Group comprised of female residents with disabilities and widowed heads of households from Falluja. During the participatory appraisal and action planning process, the Community Action Group identified a critical need for sustainable income generation for women with disabilities and widows in Falluja, based on the fact that many of these women are the sole income earners for their households; women with disabilities often remain unmarried and there has been a sharp increase in the number of widows in Falluja due to Coalition Forces/insurgent conflict over the past four years.

The women with disabilities and widows' participation in the design and implementation of this two-part Community Action Project was exceptional for a number of reasons:

- 1) Elected representatives of the Community Action Group, supported by Counterpart and the Association, secured the donation of a public building and the use of building equipment appraised at over \$96,000 (nearly 80% in cost-share) from the Falluja Municipality;
- 2) The Community Action Group developed several innovative marketing strategies to ensure the long-term sustainability of a Sewing Factory, signing contracts with the Iraqi Red Crescent, the Widows and Orphans Institution and several local primary and secondary schools to manufacture uniforms at a discounted price; and
- 3) Although sewing is already considered a culturally appropriate vocation in Falluja, the Sewing Factory is the first time that seamstresses have mobilized as a group, developed a joint venture (outside individual household sewing) and taken responsibility for factory management.

This two-part Community Action Project, valued at \$122,000 in USAID grant funding, was implemented during January and February of 2007 and included the physical renovation of the donated public building, supplying of sewing machines, office furniture, a generator and other equipment and the training and long-term job creation for more than 250 women with disabilities and widowed female residents of Falluja in sewing, marketing and business administration by Counterpart and the Falluja Handicapped Association staff, as well as several local businessmen.

The factory's general manager, Ms. Aum Hassan, led an inauguration ceremony to officially open the Sewing Factory on March 14th. The event was attended by Counterpart, the Falluja Handicapped Association the Falluja Widows and Orphans Institution, local NGOs and social service providers, tribal and religious leaders and some leading members of the private sector, including clothing wholesalers.