

## **The Burden of Drought**

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Seeing an elevated drinking water storage tank in the middle of the village would give an outsider the impression that these people won't have to worry about drinking water. But that is not the case in many instances. Much depends on the whether conditions.

Northern Iraq has experienced drought since 1998. There has been only one third of the usual seasonal rains that year. This has reduced the ground water level, and dried up many wells and natural springs in rural areas. Water systems in the cities have also been affected, as the drought has reduced the production of hydroelectric power for the water supply in towns and suburbs, resulting in shortage of water for drinking and sanitation purposes in both rural and urban areas.

Like many others in his village, Jwamer Ali, a recently married young man, has found his own solution to obtain drinking water for his family. He has dug a seven meter deep well in his yard and installed a locally made hand pump on it.

“ I have bought this hand pump in Halabdja for 500 Dinars. It can pump out water from seven meters,” he said. “ Overall it costs up to 2000 Dinars to get a well like this. It is expensive but what can we do? The project well, as you see, has dried up since last year.”

It is not possible for most families to save 100 US \$ for digging a shallow well and installing a hand-pump like Jwamer. Every four or five families have joined to have a common well. Jwamer's well should yield water enough for five families. “ It is good that water level has risen in the well after this winter's rainfalls. But last summer it was only mud. We used it because we had nothing else to drink.”

“ I used to keep the water in a container for a while to get the dust settled before drinking,” said Hanifa, mother of several children from 6 years to 20, not recalling instantly how many she has.

The un-purified water is hardly a matter of concern for the villagers, especially in such circumstances. If the water is clear, it can be used for drinking. However the fact of the matter is contrary to that. As Hanifa herself acknowledges “ last summer some of my children got diarrhea which might have been due to the muddy water, I am not sure.”

Muhammed Faraj was more confident about it, “ my son has just been discharged from the hospital. He is 17, he had typhoid, “ he said. And certainly he was not the only one. “ Four others also got the same disease lately. It is all due to the “bad” water in the wells. It is not clean.”

Apart from keeping the water still in a bowl for a while to let the mud settle, as Hanifa does, no other method is used for purifying the water. Boiling the water needs time

and fuel. But more difficult is to change the habits of the people. During winter the wood stove is always burning, and it should not add any extra cost to boil the water.

The village had 30 families but eight of them moved out last year due to shortage of water. The water project built before the drought years by UNICEF and an NGO depends on a natural source, a pumping scheme, an elevated water tank and a network of common tap-stands to the houses. This was a perfect system when it was working. But since last year the source has dried up. To fight drought local water and rural rehabilitation authorities and UNICEF supported digging a deep well in Khakukhol. The well is now complete. What remains is installing a pump and connecting it to the tank. This will solve the problem of the villagers.

To cope with the drought UNICEF and local water and rural rehabilitation authorities started a survey in May 1999 of 3500 villages to know the water situation. As a result drinking water was supplied by tankers to 400 villages in 1999 and 500 in 2000. In addition 100 urban and semi-urban localities were provided drinking water with tankers.

In addition to the above efforts during 2000, drilling of 42 deep wells, installation of 231 hand pumps on sanitary dug wells in 134 villages, and provision of 133 storage tanks, and initiating new water projects in 38 villages was undertaken. Additional water sources have been created in urban and semi-urban areas with 37 new deep wells. UNICEF also procured and distributed 106 new water tankers in the 3 governorates.

In addition to the water system, UNICEF also supported construction of household latrines in the Khakukhol. Construction of more than 10,000 household latrines has benefited an estimated total of 90,000 people in the North. The sanitary latrines are now being used by two third of the people in Northern Iraq.

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