



SUCCESS STORY

A safe walk to school in Basra

Zyneb and Hajer's best friend was killed by a car on the way to school- one of six students who have died in accidents in the last three years in Basra.

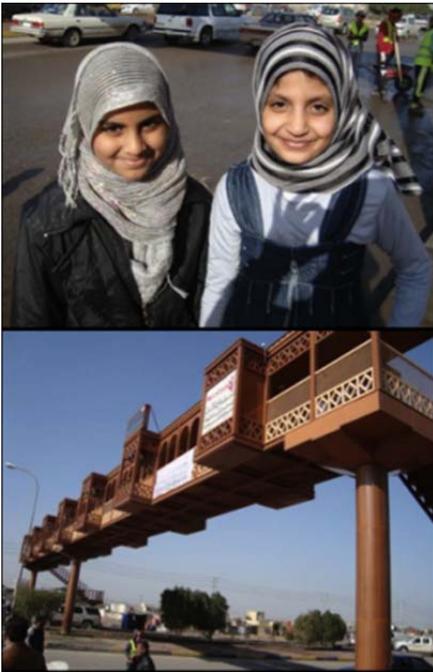


Photo by Mercy Corps

The only pedestrian bridge, opened last week in the center of town, has brought a splash of color and hope to the children in Basra. As a result of USAID's and local community's joint effort, the new bridge now allows children to avoid a dangerous highway as they cross the street to school.

Children in Basra, in southern Iraq, face numerous impediments to their education, from overcrowded classrooms to the lack of hygienic washrooms, desks and teaching aids. Yet, those living in the Al Resala community in Central Basra faced an even more looming threat: for years, they have dodged cars and prayed for their lives simply to walk to school.

Cars race along the main street in Basra only to come to a sharp stop at one of the numerous checkpoints around town. There are no lanes along what should be a four-lane highway and no traffic lights. The citizens of Basra find it too dangerous to drive in the area, never mind attempt to cross the road.

Zyneb and her friend Hajer, schoolgirls from Al Resala, both 11, have been living in fear since their best friend was struck and killed by a car while crossing the street to the school. "Our school is on the other side of this wide and dangerous street, which has caused my neighborhood to suffer daily tragedies," Zyneb said. Over the last three years, six students and one teacher have been killed in pedestrian traffic accidents on the street. "Losing our friend made us live a nightmare everyday as we feared that we would have the same destiny," Hajer added.

The new bridge is located on a main thoroughfare where traffic can be unpredictable and where accidents happen frequently. The bridge is the result of successful collaboration between USAID's Community Action Program (CAP), the Al Resala Community Action Group and local government officials. USAID's efforts began dialogue between the community and the local government; encouraged the community to advocate for its needs, and the government to support Al Resala residents. The bridge is just one of 633 infrastructure projects in southern Iraq completed since CAP has begun in 2009, where USAID teams worked with local groups to identify the need and help gather funds to turn the idea into a reality. With one of their fears now relieved, the children of Al Resala will be able to focus on their learning and get a chance to enjoy their childhood.