

CASE STUDY

MONITORING THE FOLLOW-UP AND THE ASSESSMENT OF THE WORLD BANK'S COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE IN IRAQ

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About the parent project

In 2015, the World Bank approved a financial assistance package of \$350 million in support of Iraq's Emergency Operation for Development Project (EODP), which aims at contributing to the reconstruction of damaged infrastructure and restoring public services in the governorates of Salah Al-Din and Diyala. The project had five primary components: 1) Restoring Electricity Infrastructure and Connectivity, 2) Restoring Municipal Waste, Water and Sanitation Services, 3) Restoring Transport Infrastructure and Developing a Housing Reconstruction Subsidy Scheme, and 4) Restoring Health Services, 5) Technical Assistance. There has been also a Project Management, Sensitization and Monitoring and Evaluation component.

In 2017, the World Bank (IBRD) offered additional financing worth \$ 400 million to extend the geographic scope of the parent project to areas in the governorates of Salah Al-Din and Diyala and Anbar that had been newly liberated from the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Out of the five components of the parent project, only the health component did not receive additional funding since it had received funding from another source.¹ In addition to the supply of ambulances and mobile clinics, the health component in the additional financing would continue to focus on the repair of damaged hospitals and clinics instead of replacing the supply of mobile hospitals.

This AF also proposed five additional components: 7) Restoring Agriculture Productivity, 8) Emergency Repair of Water Control Infrastructure and Irrigation Schemes, 9) Restoring Education Services, and 10) Restoring Basic Municipal Infrastructure and Services Preserving Cultural Heritage Assets. The AF aimed at deepening and mainstreaming key citizen engagement and community participation elements across all project components.²

Emergency Covid-19 response

As part of the Emergency Operation for Development Project (EODP) in Iraq, the World Bank announced in a press release on May 12, 2020, that it has approved the re-allocation of \$33.6 million. The World Bank initially mobilized \$7.8 million from resources immediately available under the EODP to help finance the supply of essential medical equipment and supplies and strengthen intensive care unit (ICU) capacity at public hospitals for improved COVID-19 case management. Through cooperation with the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), ventilators, ICU beds, ECG machines, mobile X-ray machines, and defibrillators will be delivered to designated sites in four to eight weeks from the date of financing approval.³

In the same press release, the World Bank also announced the approval of the Government of Iraq's request to re-allocate additional financing of US\$25.8 million under the project to supply additional quantities of equipment and consumables and support the training of health workers and front-line responders on their use.

¹ The Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development has made available a grant of US\$100 million to restore health services in areas recently liberated from ISIS.

² <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/224371509674450419/pdf/Iraq-Final-EODP-PP-AF-SECPO-comments-Clean-10192017.pdf>

³ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2020/05/12/world-bank-deploys-us336-million-in-emergency-response-to-help-iraq-face-the-coronavirus-outbreak>

Presenting the research paper

The Organization for Women and Children prepared this research paper with the aim of monitoring and following up the World Bank's Covid-19 response in the Iraqi governorate of Al Anbar, of the targeted areas by the AF of the Emergency Operation for Development Project (EODP) project.

As a first step, the research paper was based on documents - available on the World Bank's website- relating to the parent Emergency Operation for Development Project and disclosed after May 12, 2020⁴ ⁵. Yet, no details were found in these documents on the measures linked to the response of Covid-19.

The paper also relied on field investigations, including face-to-face interviews with 33 representatives of stakeholders involved in the implementation of the emergency response to COVID-19, such as civil society organizations, local officials, and 20 health workers and their union representatives.

Analysis of the World Bank documents

- In its most recent update on the implementation status and key decisions, the indicator on the development of health services within the parent project shows that “*additional ambulances have been mobilized to serve more citizens after a surplus in the procurement of mobile clinics and ambulances*”. However, activities under the parent project have been stopped due to the surge of Covid-19.⁶
- The Procurement Plan approved in 2015 provided for the *procurement of 39 ambulances*. The document approved on April 21, 2020 (before the COVID-19 response was announced) states that this operation process status was **canceled** (page 1, table 2). The same document says that “*Procurement of urgent required medical equipment/supplies to enhanced MoH's response to the COVID-19 pandemic for all the Iraqi provinces except Kurdistan region*”, was too **canceled** (page 2, table 4).⁷
- A contract was signed in May 28, 2019 before the COVID-19 outbreak, stipulating the purchase of additional ambulances and communication equipment in the governorates of Anbar, Kirkuk and Nineveh. Yet, there are no details on this transaction or on their delivery to the hospitals in question (page 1, table 4).⁸

⁴ <https://projects.worldbank.org/en/projects-operations/document-detail/P155732?type=projects>

⁵ After the World Bank press release on May 12, 2020, announcing the COVID-19 response support to Iraq through the EODP project.

⁶ <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/844431619967810950/pdf/Disclosable-Version-of-the-ISR-Emergency-Operation-for-Development-P155732-Sequence-No-12.pdf>

⁷ <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/678831587455950999/pdf/Iraq-MIDDLE-EAST-AND-NORTH-AFRICA-P155732-Emergency-Operation-for-Development-Procurement-Plan.pdf>

⁸ *Ibid.*

- After completion of the study, a procurement plan was issued by the World Bank in 15 December 2021 that was the only one dedicated to the Restoring Health Services component of the EODP after the World Bank's announcement of the COVID-19 response in Iraq. The document provides information on rehabilitation of 6 health centers in Diyala governorate and reconstruction of sub-health clinic center in Saladin governorate. It also provides information on the purchase of the following goods: *Iron safe, A4 laser printer, Laptops, Mobile devise and Sim card, Fast scanner, Mono copier, Colored A3 copier, Colored laser printer*. No mention of the COVID-19 medical equipment was found, also Al Anbar governorate was not mentioned in this document.⁹
- No precise data on the COVID-19 response to Iraq was found. This study had to check social media to find related information:
 - The World Bank Group Vice President for the Middle East and North Africa: *"The funds will provide Iraqi people with Ventilators, ICU beds, ECG machines, Mobile X-ray machines, Defibrillators"*.¹⁰
 - The Program Leader for Sustainable Development and Infrastructure for the Mashreq Countries: *" Emergency Operation 4 Development Project (EODP) financed medical equipment (ICU beds, ventilators, ...) to combat #COVID-19 pandemic delivered to Al-Shifa, Al-Salam & #Ramadi Teaching hospitals in #Ninawa & #Anbar Governorates to treat & save lives of their Iraqi citizens."*¹¹
 - The Reconstruction Fund for Areas Affected by Terroristic Operations (REFAATO), which coordinates actions under the EODP: *"Iraqi Ministry of Health signed a US\$ 7.8 million agreement with #UNOPS towards supply of medical equipment and PPEs to combat #COVID-19. Delivery within few weeks."*¹²

While checking with some doctors in the governorate of Anbar, no ambulances donated by the World Bank to counter Covid-19 were found.

Stakeholders engagement in the World Bank response

- The researcher could not find one of the major documents that should be provided to all Iraqi people, the Environmental and social Management Plan (ESMPF) on the COVID-19 response (component 4) in Al Anbar governorate.¹³ No official statement or document announcing a consultation with stakeholders was made publicly available.

⁹<https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099825012152134388/pdf/Iraq000MIDDLE000Procurement0Plan038.pdf>

¹⁰<https://twitter.com/FeridBelhaj/status/1256626206805499905>

¹¹<https://twitter.com/IbrahimKDajani/status/1340246717745258503>

¹²<https://twitter.com/RefaatoC/status/1256540617225703424>

¹³ The study assumes that the World Bank response to COVID-19 in Iraq through the parent project EODP was under the component 4: Restoring Health Services.

- No information about consultation was found except from a social medial post by REFAATO: “A workshop on Jan 27, 2021 on “Citizenship, Rights duties, Volunteering, citizen’s role in preserving public property” and a video published on November 22, 2020 with an overview of the rehabilitation progress of Ramadi/ Anbar^{14 15}. There is no clear mention whether these two posts were supposed to be considered consultations with stakeholders on the COVID-19 response in Al Anbar governorate or not. If we assume the former, they do not provide any information about the subject of the consultation, the parties involved, the agenda, the time and location, and the minutes of the consultation. No information was found on whether, or not, invitation and information were sent to the participants ahead of these events.

Access to information

- Most of the documents were available only in English. For example, the ESMPs (Environmental and Social Management Plans that provide information about the details of the projects, the actions that should be taken to mitigate risks and opportunities for stakeholders to be engaged) were not available in Arabic.¹⁶ Though the World Bank website states that some documents were available in Arabic, the documents were only accessible in English with limited recapitulation in Arabic.¹⁷
- The study encountered multiple difficulties while trying to access information and data related to the financing of the Covid-19 emergency response. The Implementation Status Reports and the Procurement Plans documents are difficult for local communities and civil society to check and understand. They require specific linguistic and technical proficiencies.
- We have not received any response to the requests and correspondences sent to the contacts provided in the project’s documents.
- The information provided in the procurement documents for this project are dispersed and difficult to find even for experts in a time of emergency. For example, EODP documents included procurement plans for a Bank funded project in Egypt.¹⁸

The Grievance Mechanism

- The GRM contacts provided in the ESMP documents are: Email: grm.wb@refaato.iq and the hotline: 80011111. Both have been contacted with no answer (Annex1).

¹⁴ <https://twitter.com/RefaatoC/status/1354322310350725122?s=20>

¹⁵ <https://twitter.com/RefaatoC/status/1330420544236376067?s=20>

¹⁶ Arabic is the official language of Iraq. As per the World Bank’s [Environmental and Social Framework \(ESF\) on Stakeholder Engagement and Information Disclosure](#), information should be available in local languages.

¹⁷ Example: [the Environmental Assessment No. 57, issued on July, 1st 2021](#)

¹⁸ Example: <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/596451624585803831/pdf/Iraq-MIDDLE-EAST-AND-NORTH-AFRICA-P155732-Emergency-Operation-for-Development-Procurement-Plan.pdf>

General findings

Against the backdrop of the available documents and in light of the situation on the ground, we concluded the following:

- No documents on the financing of the emergency response to Covid-19 were published, except a press release by the Bank and posts on social media,
- The documents of the World Bank do not mention the measures undertaken to manage the Covid-19 pandemic. They only cite current activities as part of the emergency and the reconstruction of affected areas in Iraq,
- There were no genuine tools to track the implementation of the emergency response in one governorate out of five targeted by the EODP parent project,
- We could not verify the procurement of ambulances and medical equipment for COVID-19 to the targeted hospitals.

Recommendations

- Extra efforts should be made to ensure accessibility to relevant information in local language and effective citizen engagement especially with emergency response in the context of conflict in the country.
- More availability of information that is easy to access and understand. Documents should be posted on the World Bank's website on its activities in Iraq to enable civil society groups to monitor the implementation of these projects.
- The World Bank should conduct more consultations with Iraqi civil society groups. Invitations and relevant information should be sent ahead of time and records of these events should be posted on official channels and not only on social media. The new means of communications that became mainstream with the pandemic provide an opportunity for the World Bank to reach out to a greater number of civil society groups.

Annex 1. Communications



