



## IRAQ AND TURKEY: SOUTH-SOUTH KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE ON SOCIAL SAFETY NETS

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**Introduction:** South-South knowledge exchanges present an excellent model for knowledge sharing between countries, organizations, and individuals. They create opportunities for peer-to-peer learning and dialogue among policy makers, practitioners, and the broader community of CSOs, academics, etc. To this end an Iraqi delegation from the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs (MOLSA) visited the Social Assistance and Solidarity Fund (SASF) in Turkey in January 2012 to learn from the Turkish experience in developing social assistance programs and social safety nets.

The World Bank's First Annual Report on Knowledge identified three knowledge roles for the Bank: as producer, customizer, and connector. This Quick Note will focus on the role of the Bank as a connector and underlines the importance of this role. It also highlights the momentum that South-South knowledge exchanges are gaining and its role as an effective catalyst for capacity development.

**Learning from the Turkish Experience:** The main objective of the learning visit was to provide the Iraqis with in-depth insight into advanced social assistance programs in a developing country, with particular focus on

cash transfers and conditional cash transfers. Turkey serves as a good example for Iraq because it has a well-established program that has gone through several development stages and achieved significant positive results in the areas of education and health. For this reason, Social Protection experts view Turkey's program as an example of one that is on the right track. Furthermore, Turkey's SASF (??) serves as an appropriate example for countries in the region considering the adoption of CCTs as part of their poverty reduction and risk mitigation strategies.

"We are always keen to learn from other neighboring countries to bring an international perspective to the reforms Iraq is undergoing" noted Mr. Hamel Kadhim, Assistant Director General, Social Safety Nets, MOLSA.



Iraqi team meeting with the Turkish Social Assistance & Solidarity Fund

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### **The Bank's Emergency Social Protection**

**Project:** The Iraqi visit, which lasted for three days falls within the framework of the World Bank's Emergency Social Protection Project (ESPP) that started in 2006 in an effort to support developing, managing and monitoring Social Safety Net (SSN) reforms in Iraq. It was financed by the World Bank administered Iraq Trust Fund<sup>2</sup>. A workshop was held prior to the visit by the World Bank team which covered all aspects of social safety nets, including country cases based on impact evaluation results.

The subsequent learning visit covered different technical aspects of cash transfers including: targeting, registration, payment systems, conditionality enforcement, Management Information Systems (MIS), and monitoring and evaluation. The participants received briefings, participated in round table discussions, and visited a local social center and a community shop in the field. The visit was an opportunity to provide insights on key issues that would help MOLSA in developing its own program. For broader knowledge dissemination, the Iraqi delegation prepared a detailed report to the Minister outlining main lessons learned and proposing action steps to improve the operation of SSN in Iraq.

**Diverse Teams Working Together:** The Iraqi team participating in this visit was purposefully diverse in background and field of expertise, ranging from policy making, program management, monitoring, budgeting to human



Learning directly from the Turkish experience

resources, IT and others, along with governorate branch office staff. From the Turkish side, there was also a great diversity of participation, which allowed for personal networking and one-on-one interactions at different levels and rendered the visit even more fruitful.

“We are very pleased to have had the opportunity to exchange knowledge on social assistance with the Iraqi delegation. The introduction of the CCT program brought a new dimension to social assistance in Turkey but we are now working on taking it to the next level by integrating programs under a single system and improving service delivery through social workers. To this end, we are also very interested in learning about good practices from other countries and it was good to learn about some of the good initiatives the Iraqi government is undertaking” added an official from SASF in Turkey.

**A Sustained South-South Exchange:** This visit is not the first under ESPP, it builds on an earlier brief visit by the Iraqis to the Social Assistance and Solidarity Fund in March 2011, from which the exchange between the two organizations started and sparked the interest of the Iraqis to undertake a second more intensive visit that included a larger Iraqi delegation in order to learn even more. Turkey and Iraq have strong historical linkages and share a number of cultural values and characteristics, which makes such cooperation more relevant and valuable.

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<sup>2</sup> The International Reconstruction Fund Facility for Iraq (IRFFI) was launched early in 2004 by the United Nations and the World Bank to help donor nations channel their resources and coordinate their support for reconstruction and development in Iraq. The Facility has two trust funds for donor contributions, each with its own characteristics and procedures: 1) The WORLD BANK IRAQ TRUST FUND, administered by the World Bank Group and The UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT GROUP (UNDG) IRAQ TRUST FUND (ITF) is administered by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) on behalf of itself and Participating United Nations Organizations. Of the US\$1 billion pledged to the Facility, about \$496 million is for the World Bank-administered trust fund, and over \$1.33 billion for the UNDG-administered trust fund.

“Similar learning visits are integral to the development process in Iraq, as they offer an invaluable and rich exchange of experiences on both sides. Exposing the Iraqis to other social assistance programs like the one in Turkey will help them re-think their current programs and design customized systems that are in line with international standards,” said Ghassan Alkhoja, Senior Operations Officer and Task Team Leader.

The World Bank has also been supporting Turkey in the design and evaluation of its Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) program and co-financed the program until 2008. The program was then solely financed by the government of Turkey and managed by the Social Assistance and Solidarity Fund.

**Social Assistance in Iraq:** Social assistance in Iraq has been mainly confined to the public distribution system (PDS) and cash-based safety nets that are very small - accounting for 2% of GDP as opposed to 14% for PDS, and have not been well-targeted in their ability to reach the poorest. Therefore the Government of Iraq (GOI) has recognized the critical need for strengthening its social safety net in order to become more effective in reaching the poor, and better mitigating future risks associated with price increases.

**Iraq’s Reform Efforts:** In 2006 the GOI began to reform social protection policies in alignment with the National Development Strategy and in line with international standards. The World Bank has been supporting the design and

implementation of these reforms through the ESPP project. The reforms included expanding SSN programs, increasing the coverage rate, improving targeting mechanisms, enhancing program administration, and establishing a long-term vision for poverty reduction and risk mitigation. The cash-based SSN program administered by MOLSA has expanded to reach nearly one million families (based on categorical targeting), with an expected budget of about US\$800 million.

**The Evolution of the Turkish Model:** Although Turkey’s social assistance program is well-established with over ten years of experience. Still it has undergone constant reforms, adjustments and improvements culminating in the current comprehensive, well- targeted, and effective social assistance system. This system is essentially a combination of programs targeting different segments and sectors.

The CCT program is one of the benchmarks of social assistance in Turkey; it provides cash transfers to the poor conditional on their taking specific actions related to education and health (school attendance and health visits and vaccinations). This design is based on the premise that it can provide immediate relief through cash transfers while preventing intergenerational poverty through human capital investment. The results have been very positive in terms of improving the outcomes of education and health in the country as well as the program’s targeting and ability to reach those most in need.

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