

AAIB'S COVID-19 INTEGRATED RESPONSE

For more than 55 years, as one of Egypt's largest banks, Arab African International Bank (AAIB) has not only grown financially but also developed a deeper commitment to support community needs. With the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Bank has been working hard to uphold its commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). We recognized the critical need to act with urgency to support our people and communities hit hardest by the impacts of the pandemic, where the Bank undertook several procedures and precautions to contain the spread of the virus and manage its economic impacts.



By Dalia Noureldin, AAIB

Covid-19 has created an increasing number of challenges to individuals, communities, and businesses. As the health crisis has been affecting lives and rocking economies all over the world, AAIB quickly adapted and implemented an integrated strategy that considers the needs of its employees, clients and society to make the best of this situation.

Supporting the Vulnerable and the Valuable

With the rise of the pandemic, we wanted to ensure that we are not only supporting our customers but our communities as well. Accordingly, AAIB undertook a comprehensive approach to face the repercussions of the outbreak and address the needs of all impacted community groups – from patients to medical professionals and vulnerable groups struggling to stay afloat – where the value of the Bank's contribution amounted to 51 million Egyptian pounds (EGP).

Initially, AAIB collaborated with Ahl Masr Foundation to cover the needs of the health sector, prioritizing governorates with limited resources and

capacities to help them withstand the pandemic. Both entities collaborated in three mega projects.

The first project was to fully purchase and install four intensive care units featuring state-of-the-art equipment, including ventilators to support all patients and ensure they receive the medical care they need. The second project involved providing medical staff in nine hospitals with 6,480 units of medical gear (known as personal protection equipment, or PPE) to cherish their heroic role on the frontlines while standing up against the pandemic. The third initiative was to inaugurate a new, fully equipped quarantine hospital with the capacity of 150 beds to complement the initiatives and precautions undertaken by the Government to manage this crisis.

Moving forward, as we observe the socio-economic landscape, we found out that the government undertook several precautionary measures, among which were partial lockdowns and curfews to manage the spread of the virus. These measures, despite their importance, resulted in severe social and economic impacts on

several groups, especially on daily-wage workers. Accordingly, in addition to our commitment to manage the health impact of this crisis, we continue to make a meaningful contribution to the society, where AAIB proudly participated in the Federation of Egyptian Banks' initiative to support these vulnerable groups who have been affected by the pandemic.

Uninterrupted Business with High Hygiene Standards

It has been decades since the global economy and the financial industry have witnessed a crisis close to what we and our customers are currently facing.



Having our customers are at the heart of everything we do, we are working tirelessly to ensure they are kept safe, supported, and satisfied as they face new and uncertain financial situations and to balance their needs with public health measures.

All employees and clients entering the branches are required to wear facemasks and have their temperatures screened. Adding to this, Plexiglass shields were placed on all customer services desks in all branches to maintain social distancing and protect our colleagues and customers. We also installed sanitization towers at the entrances of our branches so that clients entering can sanitize both their hands and shoes.

In addition, our Business Continuity Manual has been put into action to ensure that we provide seamless and uninterrupted services with no delays during the pandemic and thereafter.

Additionally, acknowledging that it is not just a health crisis but a socioeconomic one as well, AAIB followed the comprehensive range of support initiatives introduced by the Central Bank of Egypt during the Covid-19 outbreak. AAIB postponed secured and unsecured loan installments and credit card minimum payments for six months automatically with no commission or late payment fees. In addition, to make transactions easier for clients, all ATM cash withdrawals and balance inquiry fees have been exempted and debit card limits for cash withdrawals and purchases have



been raised. Adding to this, all Point of Sale fees have been waived among all merchant clients.

The Bank also conducted awareness campaigns on its social media platforms to provide its clients with safety tips to follow not only in banking transactions, but also in their daily activities among which were using masks and disinfectants and promoting contactless payments.

Supporting employees in and beyond the workplace

Our employees are doing incredible work to serve our customers during this challenging time and we are committed to be there for them in this new and uncertain situation. We are working tirelessly to be there for our customers as they face new and uncertain financial situations and be there for our employees working to serve them as safely as possible while facing the same challenges. To this end, AAIB has put strict measures in place to prevent and slow the spread of COVID-19 within the workplace. We conducted awareness campaigns among our people, put into practice high hygiene and sanitization measures, imposed social distancing and ensured that our employees get the full health care whenever needed.

We have stepped up social distancing measures in our offices and limited the work capacity of employees in the office to a maximum of 50 percent. We also introduced work-from-home practices to limit our employees' exposure without compromising their ability to remain connected and productive while working securely. For employees working on site, they are exposed to daily temperature screening prior to entering the building and are obliged to wear facemasks.

For employees feeling unwell, there are clear instructions to not show up and quarantine. In addition, all employees suspected of being infected are not allowed to enter the premises until taking a polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test. If the results are positive, the whole de-

partment/branch is closed and sanitized and all employees there must take the PCR test. Also, if an employee is well but has an infected family member, they have to stay home.

In addition, to ensure employees receive the appropriate care if needed, the Bank has enabled access to several hospitals and was responsible for covering employees' tests and treatments fully. Also, a Covid-19 exceptional leave has been provided to all pregnant women and staff with critical or chronic health conditions.

To guarantee that all these measures are known by employees, awareness campaigns are circulated continuously via email and SMS. Additionally, awareness signs have been placed in trafficked areas with all the measures to be considered in different situations.

Leadership involvement: A caring culture

The Bank has also established a dedicated Crisis Management Committee, which is composed of members from the highest managerial levels, to assess and quickly respond to current and future changes. Additionally, a new Head of Security, Health and Safety Matters was hired to ensure that the highest safety, stability and security standards are implemented.

There is no doubt we are living in an unprecedented time in which Covid-19 has taken over the global agenda. With the situation changing every hour, we are following the global situation very closely and are committed not only to responding effectively, as well as controlling the virus and its socioeconomic consequences, but also to accelerate our learning curve to enhance the business resilience in the future.

While we can't predict the speed or shape of this recovery and with much uncertainty ahead, one thing we are sure of is that through our collaboration, solidarity and support for one another, we will emerge from this pandemic even stronger. ■