

Improving Girls' Lives in Egypt: A Decade of Progress

Through ten years of project activity, CEDPA/Egypt supported 365 Egyptian nongovernmental organizations and youth centers in developing and implementing innovative life skills and reproductive health non-formal education courses for youth. Program impact was enhanced by integrating these courses with a broad array of supporting interventions, including community mobilization and advocacy with local civic and religious leaders. Implemented in 21 governorates, the project provided education and training to 125,000 people. Key outcomes include: breaking the silence on sensitive issues affecting women, energizing local nongovernmental organizations and activating youth as community assets.

Progressing from Individual Change to Community Change

Between 1994 and 2004, USAID/Egypt supported CEDPA/Egypt's Towards New Horizons Project. The project's initial focus on individual change evolved over time to a broader emphasis on organizational and, ultimately, community change. The overall direction was guided by a desire to reach the underserved population of girls and young women who had limited access to education, little knowledge of reproductive health, few life skills to make healthy choices for themselves and their families, and limited options to fully develop their own abilities and shape their futures. The project was implemented in 21 of Egypt's 26 governorates.

CEDPA/Egypt initially took full responsibility for project management and training of program implementers. Gradually it transferred responsibility for all phases of program activity to local NGOs until the program was completely managed by them. Select NGOs received extended technical support to enable them to become regional resource centers to train new organizations. This approach permitted more rapid scale-up and enhanced the program's potential for sustainability.

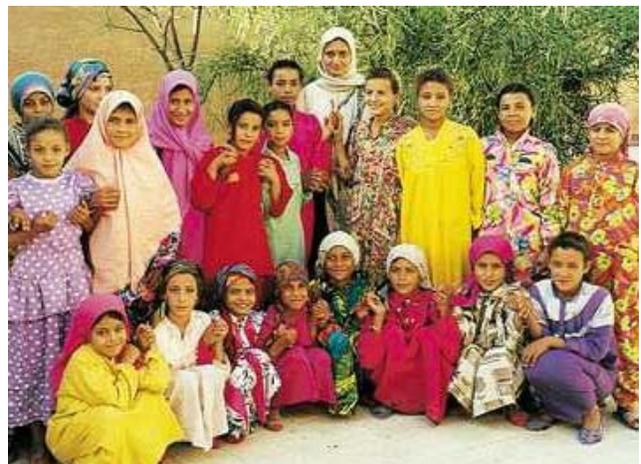
Other strategies that contributed to program sustainability were:

- Participatory program development, which resulted in culturally acceptable programs and local ownership;

Achieving Local Ownership

For all major project activities, CEDPA/Egypt worked with local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) operating at the community level. To fill this role effectively, these organizations were strengthened through a sequenced series of training courses and technical assistance. To ensure that program participants could apply their newly acquired skills and self-confidence, communities with opportunities for personal development through literacy classes, micro-credit programs and skills training were selected as program sites.

Teaching Girls Life Skills and Reproductive Health through Non-formal Education



ew Horizons graduating class poses for a group photo.

- Low-cost, durable materials;
- Low recurring costs that were assumed by NGOs; and
- Emphasis on developing a volunteer cadre for program implementation.

Using Community Volunteer Facilitators to Reach Girls Locally



The New Horizons program used locally-trained community volunteers as facilitators.

The Towards New Horizons design model sought to create options for individuals by linking education and reproductive health services with personal skills-building. CEDPA/Egypt also used community mobilization and advocacy to promote an enabling environment at the family, community and policy levels.

Imparting Life Skills to Girls

The central project activity and the entry point for community work was the development and implementation of a non-formal education program called New Horizons. Designed for illiterate girls and young women aged 9-20 in rural and urban settings, New Horizons sought to demystify and communicate essential information in basic life skills and reproductive health as well as to increase self-confidence.

To develop a culturally sensitive program, CEDPA/Egypt adopted a participatory development process. Thus, communities implementing the project were the principal developers of the curriculum under CEDPA/Egypt's guidance.

The program was implemented primarily using community volunteer facilitators. Stronger NGOs mentored

smaller NGOs to assist in scale-up, and field management of the activity was turned over to a cadre of six well-trained regional NGOs. The curriculum itself consists of 102 hour-long sessions, generally completed in six to nine months, covering the following topics:

- *Basic Life Skills*: feminine identity, rights and responsibilities of men and women, nutrition, health, first aid, child development and rights of children, the environment and small business projects; and
- *Reproductive Health*: adolescence, marriage, pregnancy and childbirth, family planning, sexually transmitted infections, violence against women and health hazards.

Nearly 77,000 girls and young women completed the New Horizons program during 1999-2004. Implemented by 365 NGOs and youth centers, the program has changed the perspective of beneficiaries and their parents toward gender roles, education and health.

Expanding Girls' Access to Education

The Girls' Scholarship Program sought to reduce the gender gap in education by targeting out-of-school girls and those at risk of dropping out. During 1994-2004 the program provided 20,879 scholarships to enable 4,626 youth from low-income families to attend school. Local education committees were responsible for the selection of scholarship recipients, program monitoring and reporting, and the development of supporting educational activities. Community ownership of the activity resulted in allocation of local resources to support girls' education.

To ensure continuing support for scholarships, CEDPA/Egypt provided grants to 17 NGOs to experiment with sustainable income-generating activities. Examples of these enterprises include: computer centers,



The New Horizons program logo.

microcredit lending, garbage collection, tent rental, honey production and a bakery.

Strengthening NGOs

CEDPA/Egypt's capacity building training and technical assistance were designed to build the ability of NGOs and community development associations to perform functions effectively and efficiently and ensure sustainability. Emphasis was on problem-solving, defining and achieving objectives, and understanding and addressing organizational needs. All training sessions were linked to actual outcomes specific to each NGO and the staff and volunteers being trained. This element of the project activity was deemed as important as the program areas to engage NGOs as full partners, not just as implementers.

Advocating for Gender Equity

The Advocacy and Strategic Communication Skills component of the project aimed at preparing a select group of active NGOs, community development associations, community leaders and members of the local branches of the National Council for Women to be advocates for issues affecting girls and young women in their communities. The program was implemented using an action-oriented training model based on the actual design and implementation of an advocacy campaign, instead of theoretical training.

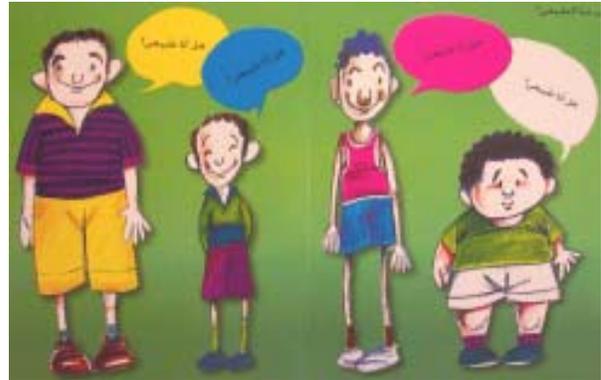
Involving Boys and Young Men



The New Visions non-formal education program taught boys and young men life skills and reproductive health essentials, while building support for the education of the girls in their families and communities.

Building on the core advocacy groups already developed, CEDPA/Egypt expanded the model to form a network of trained advocates in 17 governorates. This network linked the trained NGO members with key

Reinforcing Messages with Visual Images



Horizons and New Visions developed innovative visual materials that reinforced the messages of the curriculum, such as this poster that demonstrates the different shapes and sizes of boys.

social institutions, including the media, government of Egypt officials, key individuals and religious leaders.

Another major advocacy initiative took advantage of the young program facilitators' growing community activism. Selected facilitators were provided leadership training to further prepare them to undertake advocacy or program activities in their communities.

Creating an Enabling Environment

New Visions, a non-formal education program for boys and young men aged 12-20, is similar to New Horizons except that it is geared to youth who have attended school. The program's objectives are to increase the gender sensitivity and reproductive health knowledge of young men and to encourage the development of important life skills such as planning, communication and decision making. These skills and knowledge were considered essential to providing family and community support for girls participating in the New Horizons program. Implemented by 216 local NGOs and youth centers in 11 governorates, the New Visions course has reached 15,802 boys and young men.

Results

The Towards New Horizons Project directly touched many lives and set changes in motion that have led to a

better quality of life in many communities. Among the project's quantifiable outcomes are:

- **125,000 individuals** received education and training, primarily through the New Horizons, New Visions, NGO Capacity Building, Advocacy and Scholarship programs.
- **365 NGOs and youth centers from 21 governorates** were involved in all or some aspects of the project. Their staff or board members participated in one or more of the hundreds of training sessions provided through CEDPA/Egypt funding.
- **46 NGOs** received specialized advocacy training.
- **37,000 individuals in 24 communities** were educated about the harmful practice of female genital mutilation (FGM) through group discussions and home visits.
- **80,000 educational materials** were distributed.

Beyond these numbers, however, CEDPA/Egypt believes that the Towards the New Horizons Project contributed more broadly to creating a climate for social change and equipping Egyptians to take advantage of this new climate. Contributions include:

- **Breaking the silence** on key issues such as gender equity and FGM, thereby fostering and legitimizing public and private debate around them. This is a critical first step for bringing about change.
- **Energizing and building the capabilities of local NGOs**, a long stagnant element of civil society. CEDPA/Egypt supported many NGOs as well as small community development associations, which have played an increasingly important role in giving local voice to solving local issues.
- **Activating youth as community assets** committed to creating a better future for themselves and all youth in their communities.

The project entry point was the New Horizons non-

formal education program, which focused on individual knowledge and skills-building to bring about changes in knowledge, attitudes and behaviors. As local NGOs and youth centers became engaged as designers and implementers of program activities, their view of their role and relationship to the community began to change. Many of them took on issues significant to advancing the rights and roles of women and even transformed themselves by recognizing the need to

adjust their internal governance to reflect their new mission. Women were added to key staff and board positions.

Eventually, communities began to experience the impact of this individual and organizational change. CEDPA/Egypt began to observe shifts in community norms. These centered on attitudes toward education, the role of youth, women's social and political participation, and appropriate male/female interaction. While community-level change is difficult to assess, the following examples emerged as positive signs:

- Youth centers that were once considered "unsafe" places for girls are now viewed as viable

venues for their activities.

- A community where schooling for girls was not initially a priority not only supported a scholarship program but also raised funds for constructing a girls' school.
- Communities where FGM was not even mentioned in public organized public discussions to bring its practice into question.
- Rural community institutions supported young women and men participating in joint leadership training camps.
- Community youth activists banded together to challenge government allocation of services and resources.

Using Non-formal Education to Improve Girls' Lives



w Horizons program development

May 2005