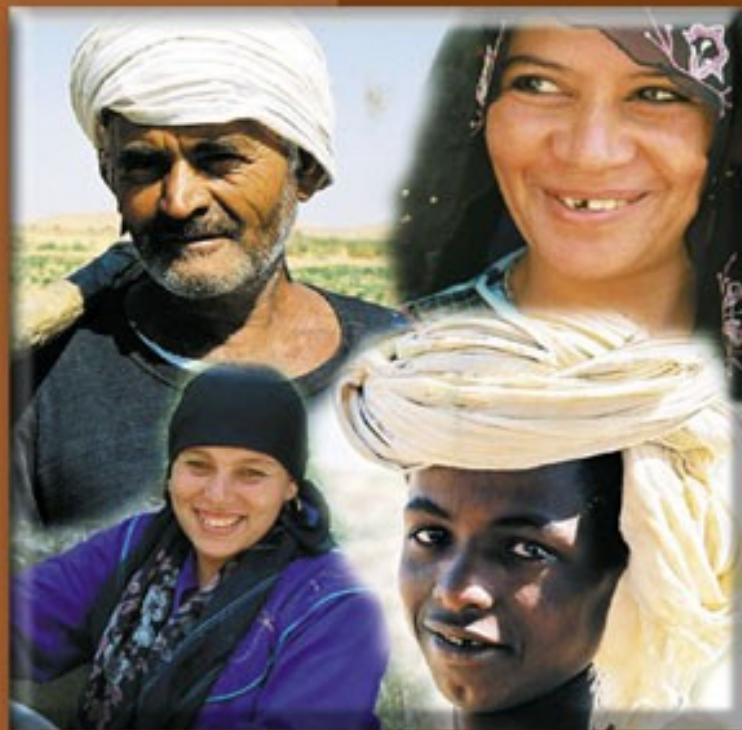


# Asset-Based Development:

*Success Stories from  
Egyptian Communities*



*A manual for practitioners*

Asset-Based Development:  
Success Stories from Egyptian Communities

A Manual for Practitioners

English translation of original document, published  
in Arabic by the Center for Development Services in  
Cairo, Egypt

2005



# CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	3
Introduction	5
Case Studies	7
Success Breeds Success	8
A Creative Community Based Composting Initiative	13
Moving Beyond Conventional Charity Work	18
Building Community Capacity	23
The Transformative Power of Art	29
Fan Sina	34
Linking Community and Government for Development	39
Peer-to-Peer Learning through the Living University	45
Bridging Gaps between Communities and Institutions	50
Rising from Modest Roots through Partnership	56
Mobilizing, Renewing and Building Assets: Methods, Tools, and Strategies	61
Identifying and Mobilizing Assets	63
Appreciative Interviewing and Analyzing Community Success	63
Mapping and Organizing	64
• Appreciative Interviewing	65
• Community Analysis of Success	67
• Positive Deviance	69
• Identifying Individual Skills: Hand, Heart, Head	71
• Mapping Community Groups or Associations	74
• Capacity Inventories	76
Linking Assets to Opportunities	78
Institutional Mapping and the Leaky Bucket	78
• Linking, Mobilizing & Organizing	79
• Mapping Institutions	81
• Leaky Bucket	84
The Role of the Intermediary	88
Fostering Broad-Based Leadership	89
Identifying “Gappers”	90
Helping Communities to Build Assets	91
Helping Communities to Link Assets to External Opportunities	92
Leading by Stepping Back	93
Tracking the Process as it Unfolds	93

Extended Case Studies	94
Success Breeds Success	95
A Creative Community Based Composting Initiative	103
Moving Beyond Conventional Charity Work	109
Building Community Capacity	117
The Transformative Power of Art	126
Fan Sina	133
Linking Community and Government for Development	140
Peer-to-Peer Learning through the Living University	147
Bridging Gaps between Communities and Institutions	156
Rising from Modest Roots through Partnership	165

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Through the generous support of the Ford Foundation, the Center for Development Services entered into a collaborative partnership with the Coady International Institute for the production of this manual.

The manual was prepared by Waad El Hadidy (lead on fieldwork and case study production) and Alison Mathie (lead on study design and manual production) with contributions from Gord Cunningham (study design and fieldwork), Laila Said (fieldwork and case study production) and Megan Foster (manual production).

We are grateful for the consultation and advice from CDS staff members: Marlene Kanawati; Alaa Saber; Hassan Hussein; Ahmed Farouk; Tandiar Samir; Ali Mokhtar; Hisham El Roubi; Mohamed Abdel Hafiz; Hamed Mohamed. We would also like to thank Milad Mowad (Arabic artistic design) and Passinte Isaak (Arabic manual production).

We are grateful to the following people for their consultation in the selection of case studies: Sharry Lapp, Ford Foundation; Robert Latowsky, NGO Service Center; Hans Rolloos, European Union Programme Coordination Unit; Nehal Kousny, World Bank; Dina El Naggat, World Bank; Rasha Omar, International Fund for Agricultural Development; Hisham Khalil, University of Hull; Ibrahim Abou Elaish, Sekem; Mahmoud El Sherif, Federation of NGOs; Roger Hardister, Near East Foundation.

We are also grateful to the following NGOs and individuals who were interviewed for each of the case studies:

*Baharia Primary Healthcare Project:* Magda El Sherbini; Mohamed Sherif Saleh; Roshdy Soltan; Ahmad Abd Elwanis; Medhat Massoud; Ahmed Ashry; Mohamed Mebed, Zakareya Fouad, Helal Abed, and Abdala Ahmed; the health educators, and the community members of the various districts of Baharia

*Bani Ghani Betterment Organization:* Samir Lotfi; Amgad Anton; Marsa Soliman; the community members of Bani Ghani

*Beni Soliman Community Development Association:* Mohamed Yassin; Badr Abdel Hamid; and the staff of Institute of Cultural Affairs in Minia and Cairo, the community members of Beni Soliman, and the members of the Association

*Boghada Youth Center:* Saad Boghdady; Mohsen Boghdady; Hamdy Abd Raboh; Alaa El Zanaty; Farag Hassan Mona Khalil; Mahmoud Khalil; Hussein Selim; Hassan Khalil; El Sayed Bakr Ali; Mohamed Abou Zeid

*Collaborative Community Action Initiative:* Mostafa Noufal; Hoda Hafez; Abd el Aal Ahmed Shehata; Mohamed Saeed Omar; Adel el Duwayati; Mohamed Nash'at Tomoum;

Saad Ahmed Saad; Camilia Hegazy; Salama Abdelmoneim; Heba Ali Hassan; Naglaa Abdelmoneim Hassan; Hala Mahmoud Mohamed; Amira Salama; and the community members of Al Montazah

*Fan Sina:* Seleima Gabali Awad; Mohamed Amin; Khaled Fathy; Mona Gabaly; Om Youssef; Suleiman Eid; Sayeda Ayad

*Fat'het Kheir:* Nora Younis; Marwa Sharaf El Din; Salma El Beblawi; Ayman Shehata; Om Mahmoud; Mrs. Karima; Gihan Ahmed; the volunteers and community members of Fat'het Kheir

*Gudran:* Sameh El Halawany; Aliaa El Gereidy; Ramy Fawzy; Ahmed Mansour; Eman Mabrouk; and the community members of El Max fishing village

*Living University:* Mohamed Seif; Mohamed Abdalla; Ahmed Fahmi; Amal Farahat Iman Ali; Khalaf Khalaf; Tarek Mokhtar; Hassan Salah El Din; Ali Rabie Ali; Ali Abdelhamid Khalifa; Mohamed Haddad; Kotb Ragab Mahmoud; Ahmed Anwar Kasim; Samah Said; Montasser Mohamed; Mohamed Seif; Ahmed Abdel Hamid; Ahmed Nour

Finally, we would like to thank Jim Delaney of the Coady Institute and Brenda Riley of St. Francis Xavier University for their help in final technical editing.

# INTRODUCTION

Among the ways people identify with a community is through the history they share with others of coping with change and responding to opportunity. Tension and struggle are part of this process of change, but those communities that have been able to move forward tend to be those that define themselves by their assets and capacities, rather than by their problems. The purpose of this manual is to shine the light on these communities, and draw out lessons for development practitioners. These development practitioners may be working with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), ranging from community development associations (CDAs) at the community level through to international NGOs operating in Egypt. They may be working with government agencies, in the private sector, or as private individuals.

## Methods for conducting and analyzing the case studies

To select these cases, individuals experienced in Egyptian community development through their work with donor and practitioner agencies were consulted. From 53 suggestions, 10 cases were chosen for closer study. They were chosen because they have succeeded in setting sustained community-driven development in motion. They were also selected to present diverse examples of types of community development work in a variety of contexts. The cases are therefore drawn from contexts as varied as Bedouin nomadic groups to urban neighborhoods in Cairo, including everything from a composting initiative to an ambitious multi-faceted urban renovation project. The development agencies represented ranged from large scale international and Egyptian NGOs, to private individuals providing professional services.

After conducting fieldwork in these communities and interviewing those people who played an active role, the cases were discussed and reviewed through an “an asset-based” lens. The following question was asked: Can success be traced to the capacity of communities to recognize and mobilize their own assets, and to use these to access opportunities? In these cases, are development practitioners viewing the community as “half full” rather than “half empty”? And are communities consciously building, as well as mobilizing, the asset base? The cases were then reviewed to see if these community stories supported the following assumptions:

- that the capacity for sustained community development, driven by communities themselves, depends on confidence in existing capacities, particularly the capacity to mobilize and organize;
- and that effective relationships with public and private sector institutions are the means to strengthening and expanding this asset base.

Because donor and practitioner agencies provided the suggestions for the case studies, the final selection is biased in favour of community development examples in which an NGO or other outside agency had a significant role. For this reason, the only case that can be described as truly asset-based is the Boghada case. Here the community mobilized their own resources first and were then able to drive their own development forward on their own terms, in collaboration with other agencies.

While the other cases described were typically more NGO-driven, they nevertheless illustrate ways in which development practitioners can help communities to build and sustain assets so that they can continue to move forward on their own.

### What is community?

The term “community” can mean different things here. Sometimes it is used to refer to a geographical community. Sometimes it refers to a “community of interest” which could be a sub-group within a geographical community or people with a common interest that cuts across geographical boundaries. The lessons drawn from these cases can be applied to “community” in all its diverse forms.

### Policy context in which communities are trying to build their livelihood

The Egyptian context presents unique challenges to, and opportunities for, community development. Bureaucracy has often slowed the pace of local initiative, whether it is the lengthy time taken to get a title deed for land, to formally register a business or an NGO, or the scrutiny of government over NGO activity. The “project” mentality of many NGOs is no doubt due to the limited time frame of their operating licenses and the barriers they face in renewing their status under the Law on Civil Associations and Institutions (Law 84 of 2002).

Nevertheless, Egypt is also entering a new era of expanded foreign investment, liberalized trade, and government reform. For example, recent reforms have been tailored to the needs of small, medium, and informal businesses. This presents some new opportunities for local communities, as is outlined in the cases. Lessons learned elsewhere, however, are a reminder that a liberalized economic environment makes it more important than ever for communities to maintain control over their own development if they are to benefit as partners with the private sector.

### Layout of the manual

In this manual, each case study is presented in a shortened form with questions for discussion. Following this, lessons learned are then reviewed and methods and tools are suggested for use at the community level. We propose some guidelines for NGOs working to promote asset-based and community-driven development. At the end of the manual, the case studies are presented in full.



# CASE STUDIES



# Success Breeds Success

Boghada, Ismailia



Theme: Community Driven Development

## Success Breeds Success

Through collective community action and strong leadership from the local Youth Center, the citizens of Boghada have secured many essential services and rebuilt a strong sense of pride in their community.

The village of Boghada, with 5000 residents, is approximately 40 km from the city of Ismailia and 100 km northeast of Cairo. Like many villages near Ismailia, it faced great hardships during the 1967 Israeli attacks and many families were forced to migrate to escape war conditions. Many of these families have now returned and residents have had to come together to rebuild a strong community.

The Youth Center is described as a “ray of light” for Boghada. It began as two makeshift clay meeting rooms until a community member donated a small piece of land on which the government allowed the construction of a proper building. The Youth Center is remarkably active – engaging citizens to support projects such as establishing a nursery and elementary school, organizing a children’s vaccination campaign, and bringing a physician to the village on specified days.

Most notable, was the Youth Center’s key role in the establishment of a community soccer field. It started with a six-feddan piece of vacant land that was causing conflicts among some community members who wanted to allocate the land for personal purposes. The Youth Center provided a forum for discussion among community members of Boghada. Being passionate about soccer and wanting to emulate the famous national soccer players that had come from Ismailia, the youth lobbied for part of the land to be used for a soccer field. The community decided that three feddans would be used to establish a health unit, a religious institute, a veterinary unit and a children’s playground while the remaining three feddans would become a soccer field.

The youth, were supported by Saad, Manager of the Youth Center (appointed by the Ministry of Youth) and Mohsen, the elected Head of the Board of Directors for both the Youth Center and Community Development Association. They contacted the head of the Ismailia City Council to borrow a bulldozer to be used for leveling the ground. Saad’s and Mohsen’s skills in building relationships resulted in a positive rapport between various levels of government and the community. They inspired the head of the city council to take a personal interest in Boghada’s initiative, and this was a strong motivator for community members.

To further improve the field, participants at a youth camp cleared the area of the weeds to prepare it for planting grass. To cover the entire area with grass by spreading a lawn mat was far too expensive, so one of the older farmers had the innovative idea of buying a much smaller piece of lawn mat and picking out grass seedlings one by one. The seedlings were successfully planted in the field and eventually grew to cover the entire area. To irrigate the grass, a local plumber designed a unique system of water pipes. The youth dug space for a well, and a water pump was borrowed from one of the villagers. The city council donated small boulders left over from restoration efforts in nearby Tal El Kebeer to create a sidewalk and youth planted trees as a windbreak. In order to generate income to maintain the field, the Youth Center planted casuarina tree seedlings on one side of the field to be harvested and sold after five years. Community members donated time, effort and money to this initiative because the Youth Center had a record of success.

The government's cumbersome procedures for registering the land presented challenges to the community but Saad and Mohsen's persistence, along with a positive record of project work in the community, added weight to their applications for governmental support.

This project, like many others in this community, is a source of pride in Boghada. In celebration, the citizens organized an event on the national Easter holiday for the entire village and surrounding areas. At this event, the Youth Center won a prestigious award from the Ministry of Youth.

Boghada continues to push ahead with new projects, showing how success breeds success. Recognizing the Youth Center's past achievements, The Egyptian Volunteer Center (EVC) has begun to work with the youth from Boghada, offering training and support for volunteerism in the community. It does not, however, take the driver's seat, but instead takes the back seat as the youth team conducts, analyzes and plans further initiatives.

# DISCUSSION

- 1) Why do you think the local government and EVC were interested in working with the Boghada community and helping them in their efforts?
- 2) What resources, skills, and assets was the community able to mobilize to complete the soccer field?
- 3) What innovations did community members devise?
- 4) Why do you think community members were willing to contribute these resources?
- 5) What do you think were the essential qualities of Saad and Mohsen's leadership?
- 6) How long did it take to achieve these community goals? What does this suggest about planning community initiatives?
- 7) What more would you like to know about what happened in Boghada?



# ANALYSIS AND IMPLICATIONS

## What can we learn from this case?

The Boghada case is an excellent example of community-driven development. Mobilizing existing assets in the community – including individual skills, social assets, and local resources – the community was able to fulfill its dream of having a soccer field. Community members had the skills to provide innovative technical solutions to problems, such as how to plant grass efficiently, and how to irrigate the land. A sense of confidence, community ownership and patient and committed leadership, took this initiative to a point where outside agencies took notice and provided the additional support needed to keep the dream of building a soccer field alive. Yet they did not take over.

It was the success of this youth group and the Boghada community that EVC immediately recognized and appreciated. From the beginning, their relationship with the Youth Center was one of partnership.

*One hand  
cannot  
applaud.*

## Implications for practice

From your discussion you can add to this list:

1. Do not crowd out the space that community members have created for themselves.
2. Recognize that the community has strengths, assets, and success stories from their past.
3. Find out about these successes. Ask questions so that you can fully appreciate what they have done.
4. Take time to build relationships with community members and listen to those people who tend to stay on the margins.
5. Identify different types of leadership in the community
6. Get the pace right: Support the community to go at its own pace.

In this way, the asset-based practitioner asks questions, listens and learns. He or she earns the trust of the community. Community members feel their own experience is validated.

While the asset-based practitioner may be able to offer the community support, the community retains control of the process.

The asset-based practitioner should ask: Who benefits from this “community-driven” initiative? They may suggest ways to ensure broader based benefit; and may be able to suggest collaboration with other agencies addressing the structural reasons for people being excluded from the benefits of development.

# A Creative Community- Based Composting Initiative

Bani Ghani, Upper Egypt



Theme: Recognizing and Mobilizing Assets

## A Creative Community-Based Composting Initiative

Bani Ghani is a rural community in Upper Egypt whose 20,000 citizens rely on agriculture for their livelihood. They struggle with extreme poverty, low life expectancy and limited access to education. Bani Ghani has a strong partnership with the Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services (CEOSS) to try to improve life in this region. Bani Ghani had first partnered with CEOSS in 1966, but work was interrupted due to demands from other communities to work with CEOSS. In 1994, a formal letter was sent from a group of community leaders requesting CEOSS to resume work, and since then a village committee has been working with CEOSS to meet community needs.

Building on the success of the community development efforts of both Muslim and Christian residents, CEOSS encouraged the community to establish its own NGO in 1997. The Bani Ghani Betterment Organization facilitates the management of further community activities. Since 1997, CEOSS has been implementing a series of projects with the Bani Ghani Betterment Organization, focusing on activities that could solve problems using existing community resources.

The women said that cleaning their animal barns was difficult and time-consuming. The men said the cost of chemical fertilizer was unaffordable. Furthermore, the fertilizer's effectiveness needed to be improved. Innovative ideas of local men and women, combined with ideas of outside resource people, solved both problems.

Certain community women suggested paving the ground of the barn so that it would be easier to collect animal dung. A resource person from CEOSS then suggested a pit be dug at one end of the slanted barn floor and equipped with a bucket to collect dung and urine. A metal chain dropping from the ceiling and attached to a pulley could then pull the bucket out of the pit. Through experimentation, flaws in this model were swiftly corrected; a local mechanic created a more stable pulley to minimize spillage, and a farmer suggested a small cart to help the women carry the heavy bucket.

This waste was then used by the men in a composting technique made up of various layers of both chemical and natural materials. On the advice of a composting expert, the farmers added urine to the dung, improving its quality. The conventional system of digging a pit in the ground was replaced with a cleaner, brick-built system. Unwanted weed seeds were eliminated from the mixture, yielding a higher quality organic fertilizer.



Amgad, the community member responsible for the agricultural development committee, has a degree in agriculture. His scientific knowledge of agriculture combined with the indigenous knowledge of the farmers ensured the appropriateness of the system. Amgad was also responsible for developing an organic seed breeding laboratory. Through testing, the Betterment Organization found that the seed formula produced by the lab, when used with organic fertilizer, resulted in much higher quality agricultural produce than that produced with organic fertilizer alone. This knowledge has now been passed to the farmers.

Today this system of animal waste collection and composting is practiced by 50 families in Bani Ghani. Of these 50 families, 20 have been able to fund their own renovations. Thirty of these families required some outside support to install the system. CEOSS funded 75% of the installation for these families. There are plans to identify 50 more families for similar assistance in the near future.

There have been many economic and social gains as a result of these innovations. The upgraded barns saved the women time and also improved their daughters' school attendance, as previously some mothers made their daughters stay home to help clean the barn. The men no longer need to buy expensive fertilizers because they have home-made, less expensive fertilizers that yield better produce. The waste collection and composting initiative builds on the traditional roles of women and men in society, which are deeply etched in rural culture.

# DISCUSSION

- 1) What was unique about the way CEOSS became involved again with Bani Ghani?
- 2) What indigenous knowledge that contributed to developing the new composting system? What new knowledge was contributed?
- 3) How has innovation occurred in communities you work with?
- 4) What unexpected benefits occurred as result of the composting innovation?
- 5) To what degree is the community dependant on CEOSS to continue this project? What alternatives are there to CEOSS' assistance?



# ANALYSIS AND IMPLICATIONS

What can we learn from this case?

This case highlights an NGO in partnership with a community to using local resources to produce high quality organic fertilizer that replaces chemical fertilizer.

A relationship had previously existed between this community and CEOSS; a local leader was able to use this earlier relationship to invite CEOSS back.

Shifting attention away from the problem of the increased costs of chemical inputs, CEOSS and local farming families identified opportunities to maximize their own skills and resources to produce a superior fertilizer. The local knowledge of farmers combined with women's ideas for reducing their workload was matched with new ideas from outside to generate an innovation that has had numerous benefits.

As is often the case with innovations, some of these benefits were unplanned and unexpected.

Implications for practice

1. With well resourced NGOs, it is difficult to shift the "balance of power" so that the community itself is initiating and the intermediary NGO is responding. One way to help change attitudes is to consider community development as an "investment". The investment is made only when the community demonstrates its ability to organize and mobilize, and when the true value of its expertise is recognized.
2. Asset-based practitioners can help to create a sense of self reliance and ownership by shifting attention away from community needs towards opportunities. Identifying underutilized local resources is the first step in identifying these possibilities

*Only the tent  
pitched by your  
own hands will  
stand.*

# Moving Beyond Conventional Charity Work

El Hadaba el Wosta, Mokattam Plateau



Theme: Volunteerism and Active Citizenship

## Moving Beyond Conventional Charity Work

This case study describes the evolution of a youth-led initiative which started as an informal activity of a few volunteers. Over time, this small operation was transformed into a small but energetic NGO – Fat’het Kheir (FK) – meaning ‘the gateway to wellbeing’.

In 1997, Ehaab Abdou, a young university graduate, was a volunteer with a local NGO in El Hadaba El Wosta. About half a million people live there in residential blocks built by the government for those who lost their homes in the 1992 earthquake. The NGO did conventional charity work and almsgiving during feasts. Abdou often saw great commotion among the residents collecting their kilogram of meat and £E 5 from this NGO. This made him question the value of this charity activity. People were relying on these handouts instead of working towards a sustainable strategy to relieve poverty in their community. Through conversations with local citizens, he came to realize that lack of working capital was one of the factors preventing people from breaking the cycle of poverty.

In 1998, Abdou and three friends, all fresh university graduates, decided to pool funds from their individual incomes to form capital from which they could start providing small loans in the community. “We did not expect the money back. We thought if it was not repaid then it would be our donation, but we did not tell that to the people,” said one of the four volunteers.

Contrary to expectations, repayment rates were high and community capacity for saving and investing small funds was amply demonstrated. Through research into microfinance models, they established a simple loan scheme. Under this scheme, borrowers formed small groups through which they could receive loans ranging from £E 250-500 to start micro businesses. The loan amount increased by £E 100 as participants graduated into subsequent loan cycles. There were eight cycles in total.

The first borrower was Mrs. Karima, an educated and relatively well off woman who wanted to start a children’s nursery. Her business idea worked because women who headed households had trouble making arrangements for their children during work. While her business grew, Mrs. Karima hosted weekly meetings for FK volunteers and other women applying for loans. She also encouraged more women to participate in the loan scheme. Seven women were soon benefiting from the program and the mentorship provided by the four FK volunteers.

From the start, three community members, Gihane, Mrs. Karima and Om Mahmoud actively contributed to the development of the microfinance program. Gihane's energy and constant drive towards self improvement was an inspiration to the FK volunteers. As mentioned, Mrs. Karima showed her generosity by opening her home to host meetings. Om Mahmoud, known for her reliability, could be counted on in times of distress. These women acted as a link between the volunteers, community and the government (Gihane was a liaison with MOSA). They even helped design certain parts of the loan program. The credibility of these people within the community helped FK to run the microfinance program successfully. Now FK works with 84 loan recipients, 500 participants in various activities and 104 on-call volunteers.

FK consists entirely of volunteers who understand that development has many dimensions. Volunteers establish personal relationships with community members instead of dealing with them in an aloof manner as clients or recipients. To finance their loan program, FK relies entirely on Egyptian funds through individual donations and in-kind contributions from the private sector.

In addition to financial donations from family and friends, the volunteers also collected used clothing. Initially they planned to give the clothes away but then decided to sell the clothes to raise money for development activities. Community women mended clothes and FK volunteers sold the clothes. Half the returns went to the menders while the other half went to an emergency fund for the microfinance program.

Based on an informal identification of the skills possessed by local women, other ideas began to emerge and grow. For their part, the FK volunteers used their business skills to identify activities that were likely to be profitable. A cooperative kitchen project, a crochet and tricot workshop, and a rabbit-growing project were established. These projects provided the new opportunities for women to earn wages and learn new skills.

"If I can rank all the resources on which we [the volunteers] drew, I would put connections as the top one," said one of the volunteers referring to the social connections they used throughout their initiatives. Mrs. Karima's community connections helped the project to start growing. FK connections to the private sector gave them access to volunteers from the workforce of socially responsible companies and it was through social connections that they got thousands of pounds in donations.

El Hadaba El Wosta and Fat'het Kheir have moved beyond conventional charity work by working together. By encouraging volunteerism and supporting social networks, they are working to end the cycle of poverty in their community.

# DISCUSSION

- 1) Why did Ehaab Abdou begin to question the value of “charity work”?
- 2) When FK shifted away from charity work, how did this change the attitude of FK toward the community?
- 3) In your opinion, what has been the most enduring contribution that the FK volunteers have made?
- 4) Social connections were very important in this case. What examples do you have from your own community work that show the importance of these kinds of connections for sustainable community development?



# ANALYSIS AND IMPLICATIONS

What can we learn from this case?

In El Hadaba El Wosta, we see a community that became more confident of its ability to save and invest in small businesses. We also see the importance of the skills, assets and social connections of the volunteers of Fat'het Kheir. Bringing all these skills, assets and connections together, the volunteers and community members were able to build relationships so they could continue to access resources, information and support.

A shift in the attitudes of the Fat'het Kheir volunteers was critical to the success of this case. They did not see community members as charitable dependants. Instead they saw them as people with capacities that could be joined with their own for sustained community asset-building.

Implications for practice

1. Volunteers can help but they can also hinder. It depends on their attitude. If they treat the people they work with as *citizens*, rather than *clients* or *beneficiaries*, they will recognize the capabilities rather than the deficiencies in their communities.
2. In the present climate of corporate social responsibility, the private sector is an important source of volunteer, financial, and information resources. Asset-based practitioners can play an important role linking community members with these different kinds of support.

*Never doubt that a small, group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.*

*(Margaret Mead)*



# Building Community Capacity

Al-Darb al-Ahmar, Cairo



Theme: Asset Building

## Building Community Capacity

In 1989, His Royal Highness the Aga Khan, through the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC), presented a gift to the city of Cairo by sponsoring a project to create parkland. Darassa Hills, an area of about 35 feddans on the eastern edge of Cairo's historic city center, was turned into a large park. It has recreational and administrative facilities built using Islamic architectural design.

To the west along the old city wall, the park meets the neighborhood of al-Darb al-Ahmar, an area representing more than 900 years of continued urban settlement. Residential and commercial structures on the edges of al-Darb al-Ahmar are separated from the park only by the wall; some houses have been built on top of the wall and are just a couple of meters from the park grounds. Home to around 87,000 people, most of them poor families, this neighbourhood had all the outward appearances of a slum. However, what distinguishes al-Darb al Ahmar from other slum areas is its wealth of Islamic monuments and abundance of workshops specializing in traditional crafts.

The developers recognized that the park could not be created in isolation from the neighboring community. Rehabilitation efforts would also be required in al-Darb al-Ahmar, in part so that community members felt included and were not hostile to the park developers and visitors. Involving the community in this project would also help open the door to larger-scale development efforts within the community. With its wealth of Islamic monuments and abundance of traditional craft workshops, al-Darb al-Ahmar had great potential for social and economic renewal.

In the mid-1990s, a number of field research exercises took place in al-Darb al-Ahmar to lay the groundwork for the community development initiative. The Center for Development Services (CDS) was asked to take part in a community needs assessment. Meanwhile, the AKTC did physical and architectural surveys of the area's residential and commercial buildings and numerous monuments. The findings of these studies were used to create a comprehensive plan for the rehabilitation and revitalization of al-Darb al-Ahmar. Thus, the al-Darb al-Ahmar Integrated Project (DAP) was born.

At the project's outset a group of local volunteer youth was recruited to work with AKTC and CDS to encourage people to get involved and play an active role in building a sense of community. This group, known as the "Friends of al-Darb al-Ahmar", was composed of 10-15 men and women, aged 18-30 years and all residents of al-Darb al-Ahmar. These youth were selected because they had a high level of commitment to serve their community.

The "Friends" were trained in outreach, research methods, networking, project design, project implementation and report writing to prepare them for their day-to-day involvement in all the project's social programs. They were considered volunteers though they were given a monthly allowance to cover transport and other work-related expenses.

DAP activities were divided amongst five major project components: employment and job creation (including apprenticeships at local workshops), community services, environmental upgrading, community management, and institutional capacity building and documentation.

One example of the local community's active involvement was in the Arts and Culture program. Despite the fact that it received only very small grants from CDS and AKTC, this was perhaps the program that got the most enthusiastic response from its participants. The program organized painting and choral activities and then expanded to include workshops in theatre, poetry, paper recycling, calligraphy and handicrafts. Almost all of the program's participants were residents of al-Darb al-Ahmar, as were a number of the activity trainers. Regular public performances and exhibitions of the artists' work were held locally. These productions relied on local talents and creativity and they presented local issues such as unemployment, poverty and family problems through song lyrics and scripts written and developed by local writers.

An environmental study organized by the DAP also led to significant citizen involvement. Based on the findings, three community-based organizations (CBOs) decided to work together to reduce poverty, illiteracy and disease. Each of the CBOs had a particular strength; one of them had a large and active clinic, another was experienced in conducting literacy classes and the third was good at mobilizing partners for environmental-awareness campaigns. The idea was therefore to use each CBO's specialty to complement the activities of the others.

Another program that attempted to capitalize on citizen participation was the Housing Rehabilitation Program. Through this program local residents could apply to have a team of AKCS architects and builders rehabilitate their damaged homes. Most community participants held life-long leases on their homes and thus had a strong interest in upgrading. The project encouraged local participation in that the costs of rehabilitation would be shared between the residents and the DAP. A credit scheme was also offered to a majority of the program's participants, whereby they could repay their share of the costs over a number of years. In this way, community members had a reason to collaborate together and strengthen their physical assets including buildings and surrounding infrastructure.

Through DAP's work in al-Darb al-Ahmar, various individual, social and physical assets were built and strengthened. Many of the project activities aimed to build individual skills, talents or leadership characteristics through apprenticeship, arts and NGO staff training. Social assets were enhanced through networking amongst local NGOs and between NGOs and local government. Finally, physical assets were also built and upon its completion, the park will benefit the community as a recreational area for local people and a tourist destination for others. The restoration of the historic city wall, monuments and the rehabilitation of residential housing has helped to preserve physical assets.

Although the initial idea of AKTC was to convert vacant land into a park, the project had much farther reaching benefits through the work of DAP. DAP recognized the community's unique architecture and individual skill assets while building capacity among its citizens. Therefore DAP had a long-lasting impact in al-Darb al-Ahmar.

# DISCUSSION

- 1) In this case, the AKTC decided to involve the neighboring citizens during the rehabilitation of Darassa Hills. Why did the AKTC see this as an important part of the project?
- 2) How does involvement of youth (for example the "Friends") change and/or strengthen community development?
- 3) What do you see as the key factors behind the success of this project?
- 4) What individual assets were mobilized?
- 5) What assets were built as a result of this project?
- 6) In your opinion, are these assets sufficient for long-term, sustainable development in this region? Why?



# ANALYSIS AND IMPLICATIONS

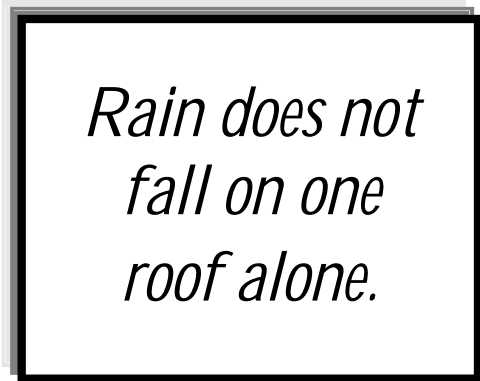
What can we learn from this case?

In this case study, the urban community of al-Darb al-Ahmar is undergoing change in several different ways. The community has found itself involved in an ambitious project to rehabilitate historic buildings and transform Darassa Hills into a park. Yet physical infrastructure, economic opportunity and social cohesion are being built all at the same time.

Agencies had to consider how to involve residents so that they had a sense of ownership in this large project. To do this they had to recognize the wealth of talents and skills of those who lived in this slum area and encourage them to organize to create employment and social opportunities. They presented opportunities for residents to build assets, to develop a sense of community and the collective confidence needed for economic survival.

Implications for practice

1. The real “bricks and mortar” of reconstruction work is the community building work. Stimulating social and economic development first requires recognizing the skills, assets, and opportunities that exist, and how to identify and access what additional assets may be required.
2. Youth are often an untapped asset. They are not just the leaders of tomorrow but can be the leaders of today. Involving youth volunteers helps to strengthen and build their capacities as active citizens.



*Rain does not  
fall on one  
roof alone.*

# The Transformative Power of Art

El Max, Alexandria



Theme: Asset Building

## The Transformative Power of Art

The NGO 'Gudran', meaning 'walls' in Arabic, was sparked by the desire of two young artists to see how art could play a role in community development. Sameh El Halawany and Aliaa El Gereidy were passionate about linking art and development to highlight a community's beauty and individuality. Art could also be a vehicle for both personal and community transformation. This is the story of their work in a fishing village of about 9000 residents in El Max, Alexandria.

The fishing village is squeezed between petrochemical industrial sites, oil storage tanks and military establishments. It is located alongside the banks of an agricultural drainage canal that the residents refer to as the 'trench'. Modest three-storey homes were built by community members on the slope of the riverbanks. The entrance from the road is at the top level of each house, and the lowest level opens out onto the canal itself where fishing boats are moored. Most houses are in need of restoration. Tragically, although fishing is the village's main livelihood, providing 35% of Alexandria's total fishing industry, industrial waste is illegally dumped in this canal. This has significantly depleted fish stocks, driven fishermen to fish further out at sea, and increased health concerns for everyone in the area.

As artists, Aliaa and Sameh saw the opportunity for art to become a tool for community development. By 2000, Aliaa and Sameh had spent time painting in this village. Through an art studio they rented they got to know the community members and started drawing classes for children.

The people were slow to accept Gudran. Previously they had bad experiences with researchers who had come to extract information without giving anything back to the community. "They used to throw stones at us. This community is particularly closed and is very suspicious of outsiders", explained Sameh. Gradually, however, through patience and co-existence, the community started to accept Gudran. Aliaa built trust by forming relationships with girls who had spare time and women were convinced through their daughters that Gudran wanted to help the community. Finally the men also came around. Demonstrating the community's growing willingness to be involved and take charge of the initiative, Gudran now has 10 volunteers from outside the community and 12 staff and volunteers from the village itself.

With external funding, Gudran assisted community members in the renovation of 20 houses and did small repairs on 60 more. The renovation work maintained the existing architecture and made use of local materials. Both volunteer and paid architects from Alexandria were consulted in the process. Through art classes, choir, literacy classes, story telling, a library, a film club, and a sewing and embroidery workshop for women, Gudran also provides an artistic outlet for many of the community members.



Gudran also organizes annual art camps inviting artists from around the world to spend time creating art in this fishing village. In 2004, international artists spent three weeks in the village. During this camp, Gudran village members could assist the artists in creating their pieces. The village developed a sense of pride by offering their assistance and artistic expertise to others.

Through such activities, Gudran aspires to change the public image of the village as 'rubbish' and 'insignificant' and create a 'front of defenders' among middle-class professional volunteers who care about the village's wellbeing. Their upcoming plans, pending funding, include a credit scheme for fishermen to upgrade their boat engines. Gudran believes that if they can attract enough attention to the village, government may not resettle the fishermen and their families.

Gudran's strategy is very different to the approach of conventional NGOs. Perhaps this is because the founders have a background in the arts, rather than in development work or civil society. While some of Gudran's activity is advocacy for changing government policy, Gudran does not confront government directly. Rather, it hopes that through indirect channels, such as generating interest in the village, changing its public image and building support among volunteers, that government will change its policies.

Gudran is careful not to create dependency. For this reason the volunteers have switched their organization of the art camp so that the village residents assist the artists and not vice versa. Gudran also welcomes local people to join and manage activities, and there are several examples of this happening. The volunteers believe that the 'institution' of Gudran, or the NGO itself, is not the end. There are several community members who started out as volunteers and are now handling specific activities in Gudran.

Gudran's strategy was not problem-based. In fact, it was through appreciation of the uniqueness of the village that Gudran came into being. Its presence in El Max was in the spirit of genuine partnership, a mutual exchange of artistic talent. As they say, "art helps people discover themselves, not discover art". Such "self-discovery" contributes to the confidence a community needs for its own survival, or for the younger generation to explore alternatives.

# DISCUSSION

- 1) The community did not welcome Gudran at first. How did Gudran build trust in the community? How does this compare with your experience?
- 2) What role does Gudran see for itself? How does that compare with the role you see for your organization in communities?
- 3) What capacities and skills did the community have before Gudran? What assets, skills and capacities have they built?
- 4) In what ways is Gudran's approach "sustainable" community development?
- 5) How do you think that volunteer interest in this fishing village may help its future survival?



# ANALYSIS AND IMPLICATIONS

What can we learn from this case?

Its future may be uncertain, but this fishing village in El Max has benefited from Gudran's presence in a number of ways. First, the involvement of volunteers results in increased public awareness of the issues faced by this community. Sometimes, the best advocacy strategy is to build a constituency of support with middle class citizens who may be able to influence public policy.

Gudran's work at the community level illustrates efforts to build community confidence in its own skills and strengths. Recognizing and working with the innate artistic abilities in the community was the starting point for other community building activities.

At the same time, the exposure of children to new skills helps prepare them for an alternative future.

Implications for practice

1. Build relationships of trust, rather than build expectations.
2. Volunteers can provide valuable skills and important social links. Volunteers who sincerely assume that they have something to learn from the community are providing the most important service.
3. The role of the outsider may be valuable in providing a channel for people to "discover" and express themselves.
4. "Catching the energy and passion" is a critical step for working with local communities, especially local youth.
5. Links made between middle-class volunteers and local communities can enhance efforts to advocate for change in public policy at the national and local level.

*You may be deceived if you trust too much, but you will live in torment if you don't trust enough.*

# Fan Sina

St. Catherine's, Sinai



Theme: Linking Assets to Opportunities

## The Bedouin Support Program

This is the story of a development initiative which began as a conventional component of a bilateral aid program, but has since become a successful company involving and benefiting many women in the region. The initiative began as a sub-item of a multi-million Euro agreement between the European Union (EU) and the Government of Egypt to set up nature protectorates in South Sinai. St. Catherine's Protectorate, spans 4300 Km<sup>2</sup> and was one of the most important programs under this protectorate is the Bedouin Support Program. This program offers health services, veterinary support, vocational training and sponsors other activities to enhance the well-being of the local Bedouin people.

The Protectorate administration prides itself on adopting a participatory management approach, involving the local Bedouin community. Of the 80 staff members, 56 are Bedouins including 25 community guards appointed by the communities and endorsed by tribal leaders to promote conservation. This is in line with customary law which entrusts Bedouins with responsibility for stewardship of their resources.

A Craft and Income Generating Project (CIP) was initiated in 1997, based on an assessment of women's craft potential in the area. Two consultants conducted this assessment of available talent and materials in order to establish an income generating project for the women. The main craft-making skills of Bedouin women are embroidery, beading and wool weaving. These traditional skills have been passed down from generation to generation, yet little attention was paid to consistent quality. This meant that the transition to selling the crafts to tourists and for export was challenging. As well because the women rely on the unstable tourism market sales are difficult to predict. Through the guidance of the consultants, the Bedouin women began to produce crafts to be displayed and sold at the Protectorate visitor center. Initially sales were low but momentum had begun. At that time, about 40 women were benefiting from training provided by the Protectorate and earning a small income through sale of the crafts.

Meanwhile, a Bedouin woman named Seleima was working as a secretary at the Protectorate and assisting the consultants with their work. Being the first Bedouin woman to gain a secondary school certificate, Seleima was asked to assume a leadership role in marketing the women's crafts.

According to Seleima it was initially very difficult to market the crafts in South Sinai. Poor quality was one constraint. Another was that women were producing traditional crafts as souvenirs, but these items had no functional value to people who lived in the region.

Another consultant, Mohamed Amin, was hired in April of 2000 to develop the CIP into a sustainable venture in preparation for the withdrawal of EU funds. Amin took a different approach to his assignment. He looked at how to sustain traditional skills while producing crafts that were marketable. Together with Seleima, and through financial support of the EU, new materials and craft designs were introduced to adapt to changing consumer tastes. On-the-job training was provided in setting up a craft-making operation. Four women and one man were selected to run the operation, including Seleima who was chosen to lead it. Salaries for the staff of five were provided by the EU and the name 'Fan Sina' was chosen for the operation, this literally meaning 'The Arts of Sinai'.

Seleima visited various Bedouin settlements around St. Catherine's in order to identify more talent. Women interested in participating were provided material and asked to show off their skill. Those who had skill and passion were coached on design, colors, and other elements of the product, so that they would eventually become suppliers for Fan Sina. Talented women were asked to coach younger women so that traditional skills could be preserved and the operation could grow.

When the operation was up and running, several options were considered for its sustainability. The option of registering it as an NGO was excluded because of a desire to stay away from Ministry of Social Affairs' surveillance. So in July 2002, it was decided to register Fan Sina as a limited liability company with 15 partners, all who were women. The women were selected by Amin and Seleima to represent the different tribes of St. Catherine's.

Today, Fan Sina's craft makers earn an average monthly income of between £E 60 and £E 150. Some women even earn as much as £E 1000 per month. In 2003, the company sold products worth £E 200,000 an increase of almost 300% from 2001.

As more women are producing crafts and earning income, Fan Sina has achieved widespread recognition and support. Since Fan Sina became a registered company, high ranking officials who happened to pass through St. Catherine's heard of their success and offered support. The Minister of Industry arranged a two-week training on fashion design for Fan Sina and the women craft makers. Italian cooperation also assisted with training on fashion design, an activity which resulted in a joint fashion show in Sharm El Sheikh. The Governor endorsed an application to register a piece of land that Fan Sina needed for expansion; even the Prime Minister expressed an interest in the project. As the women reach new markets, some quite far from St. Catherine's, they are able to bring in much more income. These craft producers could never have achieved this type of broad recognition and success without the support of Fan Sina.

# DISCUSSION

- 1) What difference has Fan Sina made to the livelihoods of local women craft producers?
- 2) These women's traditional skills as craft producers are obvious. What other skills and assets did these women have that made it possible for Fan Sina to succeed?
- 3) What particular qualities do you think helped Seleima assume a leadership role?
- 4) What additional assets and skills were contributed by outsiders?
- 5) Fan Sina's success relies on catering to buyers in urban and foreign markets. What connections will Fan Sina have to make to remain successful as a business?



# ANALYSIS AND IMPLICATIONS

What can we learn from this case?

In this case, traditional skills of the Bedouin were combined with the entrepreneurial skills of a consultant who had the foresight to help women adapt their crafts to appeal to consumers in urban centers and overseas.

Linking local skills to global market opportunities may require the combined interest and effort of local community members, the NGO sector, and the private sector

Most notable here is the building of local capacity so that Bedouin women could run the business themselves. Cultural traditions are valued, while innovations are introduced slowly. Such innovations are women's access to and control over their income, and their training in business management.

Implications for practice

1. The challenge for Fan Sina is to ensure that the benefits of private enterprise are earned and result in a fair return on investment of indigenous knowledge, skill, and labour. This requires specific attention to *ownership* by actual producers, in this case women, adapting management and entrepreneurship skills to those that already exist so that they can hold their own in a competitive world.

2. "Knowledge is power". Asset-based practitioners can contribute to this by introducing popular education tools that help communities analyze a) the local economy and b) the craft sector in the global economy. The leaky bucket is one such popular education tool.

*Every woman can cook, but not every woman has 'breath'.*



# Linking the Community and Government for Development

Baharia, Giza Governorate



Theme: Creating a Space for Community  
Leadership

## Linking Community and Government for Development

This is a story about a health care initiative in Giza Governorate that recognized the importance of making a link between the community and a government-organized project. In this case, women health educators bridged this gap effectively. With their knowledge of the communities' specific health issues, they provided information to health care providers and helped government service agencies get educational messages out to citizens. Therefore, the role of the health educators was critical to the success of this project in Baharia. The project began as follows.

Being remote administratively and geographically, the people of Baharia in Giza Governorate had always found it challenging to secure reliable primary health care. The community of 30,200 had long experienced a lack of public services and little attention from aid organizations. By 1999, however, as incidences of preventable health conditions, including female genital mutilation (FGM) continued to climb, the Social Fund for Development (SFD) and Ministry of Health and Population (MOHP) finally recognized the need for some intervention.

These two organizations signed a protocol of cooperation to 1) develop the skills of district health teams, 2) refurbish a number of health units, 3) refurbish the district hospital, and 4) develop a database of all families and their medical histories within each health unit's service area.

The project started with the appointment of a project manager, Dr. Magda El Sherbini. At the time, Dr. Magda was the Undersecretary of MOHP, creating a valuable link between the community and the government. Dr. Magda had two main focuses to her approach to the project in Baharia. First, she wanted to build on existing physical and human assets in the community. Although there were £E 700,000 in the project budget allocated for new equipment, Dr. Magda only procured new equipment after determining that the existing equipment was in good condition. Second, she wanted to create an opportunity for different government departments to collaborate together in addressing health issues. She encouraged department representatives to provide input and support throughout the project.

Committees of local political leaders and stakeholders from the education, health and social affairs sectors were formed. Committees working at the village, district and governorate levels met monthly to resolve local health related and other problems. They tackled health problems at the core by addressing broader social, educational, and economic issues. A team of local health educators, who became the "cornerstones" of this project, provided information on these issues.

This team was comprised of 50 educated and unmarried women from Baharia who attended MOHP & SFD training. They became the link between communities and project activities; they were primarily responsible for awareness campaigns, conducting surveys and collecting information for the database. At first, people looked down on them because it was unorthodox for women to work outside the home, let alone go on home visits. But as the community realized the value of their work, people sought them out, asking them to visit more often. These educators were exceptionally committed to their work in the community; when a community member was skeptical of vaccinations, some educators vaccinated themselves to reassure the person. They are now seen as role models for other women and have elevated the perception of women's potential in the community.

The project's objectives were more than fulfilled. Six health units were renovated, extensive training was provided to medical teams and the health educators, and a database/filing system was set up registering all families within each unit's outreach area. Doctors from Cairo volunteered their services weekly. As well, Dr. Magda negotiated with SFD to obtain £E 1 million allotted for hospital renovation to build a new hospital as the original building was not suitable for renovation. She also secured an additional £E 1.2 million by convincing the Minister of Health to incorporate the new hospital into MOHP's investment plan.

Through the project manager's connection with the World Health Organization (WHO), Dr. Magda became familiar with the Problem Solving approach. This three stage plan engages health teams in the identification of solutions to priority health problems. Using the Problem Solving approach, one of the teams in Baharia worked to eliminate the practice of female genital mutilation (FGM). With the support of various levels of government, they held public discussions, put on plays and visited people in their homes to encourage dialogue about FGM. Using a variety of educational strategies, the team was able to reach religious leaders, schools, youth clubs, doctors, midwives and private citizens. After only one year, in Baharia the incidence of FGM was dramatically reduced. What's more, the community has made great strides in its willingness to discuss openly this taboo subject.

The project officially ended in March 2004. Parts of the project, such as the doctors' caravans and the rigorous filing practice in some health units, were discontinued after the funding ended. However, the project's overall impact can still be seen in the community because of the extensive community involvement in the project.

The Baharia PHC project is largely defined by a national health strategy, with the purpose of upgrading current health services. It was only logical that it would have renovation of health establishments as one of its major components. Much of this project was almost a copy of projects done in other governorates. Hence its original design did not allow for citizen input. The critical difference in Baharia was the involvement of women health educators and the collaboration of government departments, thanks largely to Dr. Magda's leadership and managerial skills. The success of this project in Baharia illustrates the positive impact of having a strong link between institutions and community.

Although this project was largely driven by a government agenda, the educators used a mechanism allowing for citizen decision making about solutions to community health problems. Various individual assets, in terms of skills and attitudes, and the social assets of a tight community made the educators effective intermediaries. The community-based health educators helped create a mechanism for voicing people's needs and the collaboration of government helped address these needs.

# DISCUSSION

- 1) How did health information reach the community?
- 2) How did this project help to get different levels of government talking to each other?
- 3) What was the role of the health educators? Why do you think they were considered “cornerstones”?
- 4) In what way did this project help citizens to voice their concerns and shape policy?



# ANALYSIS AND IMPLICATIONS

What can we learn from this case?

In this case study, we learn about the key role of female health educators in the implementation of a primary health program designed at the Ministry level. What is their key role? They act as mediators between the government and the communities that this health program serves. As such, they are two way educators – providing advice and awareness to communities, while also seeking advice from them about community health concerns that they could then pass on to government officials. Indeed, it is through the health educator program that citizens have begun to find their voice to influence government policy.

We can also see from this case study that in order to have effective community health programs, the following are important:

- Analytical capacity among community members to understand the causes of illness and health. With this understanding they can advocate on their own behalf.
- Alliances and collaboration among government and non-government agencies such as churches, schools, and workplaces. Good health needs to be recognized as everyone's responsibility.

Implications for practice

1. "Leadership is action, not position". Sometimes leadership exists where it is least expected.
2. Leadership does not have to come from only one person – it can be shared by many people. Allow community members to take leadership of the process.
3. Help develop analytical skills. In the case of specific health issues, being able to identify causes of problems ensures that health educators can correctly identify the appropriate educational message.
4. Note that analyzing success can also be effective: Explaining why a family is very healthy can be as effective as explaining why they are sick. This approach may highlight some of the important non-medical determinants of health in a community.

*Leadership is action,  
not position.*

# Peer-to-Peer Learning through the Living University

Tella, Zohra & Estal, Minya Governorate



Theme: Creating Space for Leadership

## Peer-to-Peer Learning through the Living University

The Living University was developed by Save the Children USA to promote peer-to-peer learning between Community Development Associations (CDA). It is based on the idea that the best learning comes from an environment where people or organizations learn directly from the experiences and expertise of their peers. In this case, successful CDAs were chosen to help build the capacity of other CDAs. This process has created an expanding network of CDAs with valuable skills and abilities for community development.

Save the Children identified certain CDAs to become Living University "Trainers". Each association had such qualities as a committed leadership, a sense of mission, experience in managing successful community development projects, and the capacity to provide knowledgeable and dedicated training to other CDAs. After being introduced to the Living University concept, the "Trainers" then trained other CDAs ("Learners"). At the end of the Living University program, each "Learner" submitted a project proposal to be considered for funding by Save the Children. Some "Learners" even went on to become "Trainers" themselves, thus expanding the network of the Living University and the capacity of even more CDAs.

Tella and Zorha CDAs were two of the original "Trainers" in the first phase of the Living University. Tella CDA, established in 1969, did not become active until 1990 when a group of enthusiastic and determined youth used Tella to bring about social change in their community. After joining and being elected to the board, these self-described "rebels" started new activities, secured funding and established relationships with various external agencies. Tella is now engaged in over 30 initiatives including vocational training, a women's club, a nursery and a microfinance program. In recognition of this exceptional work, the Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services (CEOSS) awarded Tella CDA an award for excellence in social work and the £E 30,000 prize money was matched by the Governor of Minya.

Since it began in 1970, Zohra CDA has been engaged in a variety of community development activities, including a rug factory, a nursery, literacy classes, water connections to local houses and a micro-credit program. Zohra's activities continue to expand as they secure more funding and succeed in income generating initiatives.



The successes of these two CDAs led Save the Children to select members from Tella and Zohra to participate in a six month training course to become Living University "Trainers". Save the Children was pivotal in establishing linkages between CDAs which made this learning approach possible. They also provided funding for the capacity building training sessions and certain proposed projects.

Estal, originally trained by Zohra, has become a notably successful second generation "Trainer". For 30 years its activities were limited to a carpet and rug factory, but an active group of local youth breathed new life into the Development Association in 1997. Long-standing board members had traditional and somewhat rigid ideas about community development, but when these young people and women became board members, they changed and broadened the CDA's focus. Although Estal was originally a "Learner" CDA, however, other CDAs recognized its strengths and expertise and asked Estal to hold capacity building sessions. To date, Estal has trained 480 individuals and has forged strong relationships with many government community health agencies.

The achievements of these three CDAs stem from their establishment of a high degree of cooperation with the stakeholders in their projects. The stakeholders include funders, local and national government agencies, and community members. Such relationships can open important doors, as they did when the local office of the Ministry of Social Affairs introduced Zohra CDA to Save the Children. Social linkages are so important that networking and building successful relationships is a standard component of the capacity building program administered through the Living University.

# DISCUSSION

- 1) Based on your experience of Community Development Associations, why do you think Tella and Zohra were so successful?
- 2) In Zohra and Estal, youth provided essential leadership. What do you think motivated youth to take this initiative?
- 3) What role do youth play in your organization? What ways have you found effective for encouraging youth leadership?
- 4) Youth challenged long-standing leadership in Estal to get more representation from women and youth. What experience do you have of young women taking community leadership roles? How can you further encourage women to take on leadership roles?
- 5) Living University assumes that there is much to be learned from exceptionally successful CDAs. Are there CDAs in your region that stand out as being particularly effective? Why do you think they have been so successful? What could others learn from them?



# ANALYSIS AND IMPLICATIONS

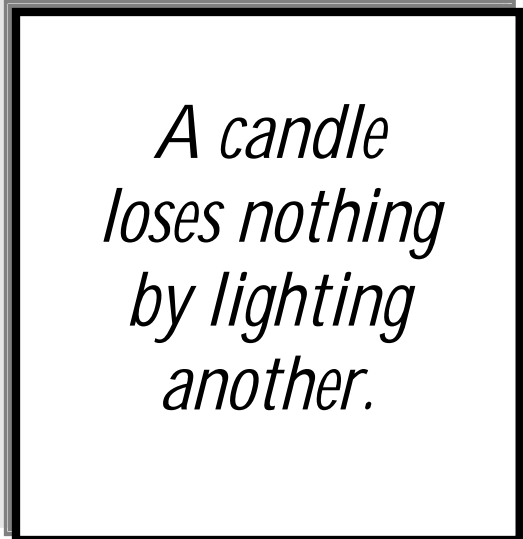
What can we learn from this case?

“Living University” shines light on success. Recognizing success can result in increased confidence and greater initiative. When we analyze success, we can understand what motivated people to take initiative. Usually the motivation for action comes from both personal conviction and incentives such as business opportunities or financing through government grants.

Youth played a significant role in the CDAs mentioned in this case. They took the opportunity to become involved in their local CDA. They applied their skills, capacities, talents and energy to directing community development activities. Recognizing and utilizing the potential for fresh and energetic leadership among youth is essential for on-going community driven development.

Implications for practice

1. Identify, analyze and celebrate the positive.
2. Create the space for leadership to emerge. This applies to institutional leadership as well as individual leadership.
3. Examine motivating factors. There are push factors and pull factors. “Being asked to give” is sometimes all the motivation an individual needs!



*A candle  
loses nothing  
by lighting  
another.*

# Bridging Gaps between Communities and Institutions

Al Montaza, Alexandria



Theme: Relationship with External  
Institutions

## Bridging Gaps between Communities and Institutions

Al-Montaza is Alexandria's most populous district, home to approximately one million people a quarter of the city's inhabitants. Farmland was once extensive in al-Montaza but due to overpopulation and encroachment, unplanned communities have sprouted in formerly agricultural areas. Over the past few years, measures have been taken to regulate these communities and to provide basic services and infrastructure. Though most of these efforts to regulate represent a top-down approach, the local El Salam Association has used the unique idea of collaboration to achieve success. Recognizing the benefits of collaborating directly with representatives from local institutions, this association created valuable networks for community development within Al-Montaza.

El Salam Association operates several nurseries, daycare centers and sewing workshops in al-Montaza. It also has projects aimed at limiting child labor, raising environmental awareness and installing infrastructure in communities. Because of its good reputation, the Centre for Development Services (CDS) approached El Salam to take part in a "Collaborative Community Action" (CCA) initiative. CCA recognizes the importance of institutions collaborating with each other and with the communities they serve. To promote institutional collaboration, CCA brings representatives together at the beginning of a project to create a feeling of collective ownership. Members of El Salam Association's Board of Directors were enthusiastic about using the CCA process to improve their development efforts. They contacted potential partners in the government, NGO and private sectors operating in al-Montaza District in hopes of creating a large network for collaborative action in their community.

The CCA committee began to meet once every month or two. People attended in a personal capacity, rather than in their official capacity. This created a less formal atmosphere in meetings, allowing open and frank discussion about priorities and projects. Members of the committee did not focus on a predetermined project; it was common interests and a readiness to commit resources that brought them together.

After lengthy discussions, the CCA committee members agreed that the unregulated and disorganized street markets in al-Montaza caused such problems as poor traffic flow and non-hygienic handling of produce. They decided to design an upgraded 'model' marketplace. They involved their respective organizations in the process by committing resources and services to upgrade the market. For example, the General Authority for Literacy and Adult Education (GALAE) agreed to give literacy classes to vendors inside the marketplace, and the Ministry of Health planned to provide health insurance for the vendors and assist in the creation of a first aid unit at the market. El Salam Association was to act as a liaison between the authorities and the market vendors and oversee management of the project.

The next step of the process was to select one of the area's markets for this project. The required fieldwork was done by the El Salam Association through a team of volunteer researchers called 'Youth for Development' ("*Shabab El Tanmeya*"). This group, along with CDS staff members, studied several local markets and gathered information on the problems the markets faced. The volunteers also got suggestions from the vendors and customers about how to deal with these problems. The committee chose al-Haramain market, which sells vegetables, fruit, meat and fish. Al-Haramain had typical problems found in street markets including obstructed traffic flow, unhygienic handling of produce and a lack of access to utilities like water and electricity. It was also relatively small, making it a more feasible location for the 'model' marketplace.

After deciding on the main elements of the market rehabilitation project, the CCA committee began to approach the authorities for approval. The Governor of Alexandria allocated a plot of land for the marketplace. The District Head authorized payment for leveling and paving the new market site, and extending plumbing and electricity services. These developments provided more security to the market vendors, and some of them began to move spontaneously to the new location. However, the District Head was reluctant to relinquish control over the market's management from the District Authorities to the CCA and vendors. He was worried that this would give the market vendors too much ownership and entitlement.

Recognizing that the District Head's approval of the project was not forthcoming, the committee began thinking of another project that could not be blocked in this way. They shifted their attention to another concern – the reserve water tanks that are installed on the top of many apartment buildings. The improper cleaning of these tanks was causing a number of health problems.

Again, Youth for Development was enlisted to identify a priority location for this initiative. Al-Mandara Qibli area, in al-Montaza, was selected. A wide-ranging public awareness campaign on the proper usage of water resources and the importance of cleaning water tanks began. The campaign was implemented in elementary, middle and high schools, as well as in local associations such as youth clubs and NGOs. El Salam hired 13 people to provide the water tank cleaning services and widely publicized its services in the area of operation.

This is when the potential of CCA began to be demonstrated. Several CCA committee members made contributions at various stages of the water tank project's implementation. The Undersecretary of the Ministry of Education greatly facilitated access to schools to conduct the awareness campaign, overcoming the resistance of school officials. Another committee member, the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Health, provided technical assistance in training the water tank cleaning team.

When the Ministry of Health refused to grant permission to an NGO to do the water tank disinfection, the Association modified version their plan. The tank-cleaning team now cleans water tanks and purifies the water in the tanks of buildings where they are hired to do this service. They do not chemically disinfect the tanks so as not to incur legal liability. In the two months since it has begun providing its services, the team has cleaned water tanks at 14 apartment buildings in the project area, and have been asked to work in four of these buildings cleaning the water tanks on a monthly basis.

There is no doubt that the paths to implementing both of these projects were bumpy. Being forced to modify plans and cancel them altogether, would have made it easy for the El Salam Association to give up. However, because they chose to persevere, the community now has a strong network of government, NGO and private sector representatives that is willing to work with the community for sustainable development.

# DISCUSSION

- 1) Why do you think the people on the committee attended CCA meetings in a “personal capacity” rather than a “professional capacity”?
- 2) The CCA was trying to bring about community-driven change by linking community interests to a wide range of government, NGO and private sector agencies. What are the different assets and skills of these institutions that came together in this case?
- 3) What are the key factors explaining the success of the water tank cleaning initiative?
- 4) Why do you think the initiative for the ‘model’ marketplace met with resistance from government authorities? What might be done to resolve these differences?
- 5) “Youth for Development” played an active role here. What is your experience of youth volunteers who come from outside the community?





# ANALYSIS AND IMPLICATIONS

What can we learn from this case?

Local institutions are essential to community development. They provide services, facilities, business opportunities, expertise and information. Often their potential to work with communities is frustrated by the lack of collaboration between institutions.

If communities organize to improve services and livelihoods, sooner or later they will need the collaboration and 'investment' of government and other agencies. Ideally, by bringing together government, NGOs and community members, opportunities for collaboration can be explored. Red tape and regulations may be negotiated more easily because personal relationships have been forged among collaborating partners.

As this case shows, creating these relationships may be challenging; it may take time before this kind of collaborative culture can penetrate resistance in government bureaucracies.

Implications for practice

1. Explore the idea of partnership. Help government agencies treat CDAs as partners. Each partner has something to contribute to the success of the initiative.
2. Identify "gappers". These are people who work in institutions, but who are committed to community development activity. They wear two hats - that of a bureaucrat in the day time and a community volunteer in the evening. Identifying "gappers" will point you in the direction of potential partnerships.
3. Who else can be involved? Identify other groups or associations in the community who may be interested in working with the CDA.

*You cannot pick  
all your fruit  
from one tree.*

# Rising from Modest Roots through Partnership

Beni Soliman, Beni Souef



Theme: Role of the Outside Agency

## Rising from Modest Roots through Partnership

From its small beginnings as a project of an international NGO, Beni Soliman CDA is now an autonomous, self financing CDA. It is active in its community's social and economic life, and a magnet for media attention. This is its 28 year story.

The Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA), an international development organization, started working in Egypt in 1976. ICA targeted Beni Souef because it is one of Egypt's poorest governorates. It focused on the more isolated eastern area which consists of one mother village and five satellite villages. Information about the communities was gathered from discussions with local leaders, such as members of parliament and local councils and informal heads of towns. Community meetings were organized in these six villages and people raised their concerns about poor drinking water, insufficient primary healthcare, very low income, and outdated agricultural practices.

While some local leaders were skeptical about ICA's intentions others were naive in thinking that this international organization could solve all their problems. The government and the US Embassy pressed them to accept the presence of ICA and be more realistic in their expectations. Seeing no other alternative, the local leaders overcame their skepticism and started working with ICA. By the early 1980s, ICA had well functioning programs in primary health care, micro-credit, and agricultural development.

Six years after entering the region, ICA began to think of how to sustain its activities. Since it is almost impossible to operate something in Egypt without a legal structure, ICA encouraged the villages, including the village of Beni Soliman (pop. 7000), to set up autonomous Community Development Associations so they could gradually take over these programs and activities.

The Beni Soliman CDA was established in 1983 but it had been inactive for several years. The CDA was reactivated with 30 new members. With a mission to "enhance quality of life through raising people's awareness on how to use local resources to combat their livelihood problems," the CDA decided to start a nursery. An old building was registered to host the nursery. Salaries and other operational costs were paid for by ICA until 1994 when the nursery was incorporated within Ministry of Social Affairs (MOSA) and was allocated £E 5000 annually. A community leader prepared a contract to lease his house for free to the CDA so that MOSA would recognize it to have legal premises. This lease arrangement continued until 1990, when another piece of land was registered, and a building for the nursery was built through the financial support of ICA.

During this period, ICA's strategy shifted from one of direct implementation to capacity building for the CDA, in this way preparing the CDA for ICA's eventual withdrawal. In 1994, all programs were transferred to the Beni Soliman CDA including the nursery, two credit programs and a primary health awareness program. ICA also deposited £E 24,000 in a bank so that the income from interest could be used to cover some of CDA's program and operational costs. However, interest rates kept declining, forcing the CDA to come up with another innovative idea to keep their programs alive. The members decided to register and divide another piece of land to rent to small service shops created by the CDA. In addition to creating jobs in the village, £E 1500 in rent was collected per month in comparison to about £E 200 per month under the bank deposit scheme. The idea was so economically viable, that another 15 shops were created in 2002, this time generating a monthly income of £E 3800 for the CDA.

Having political careers, the members of the Beni Soliman CDA Board repeatedly mentioned the importance of their powerful connections to effectively deal with government bureaucracy in terms of paperwork and the registration of land and buildings. The CDA's strategy was to use policy makers to lobby government functionaries. For example, when the head of the district refused to provide a tractor for use by the CDA's environmental project, this was the strategy followed until the district head eventually succumbed. The board mentioned that this was something they learned from ICA training about advocacy and communication.

Since 1994, ICA has shifted from being a service provider to a facilitator of external linkages the CDA needs to sustain and expand its program activities. These linkages include education, women's rights, environment, income generation, health, youth, and capacity building. It has funding of over £E 800,000 from diverse international sources. The nursery, women's club, training center, credit schemes, and membership fees generate an additional revenue of £E 80,000 annually. There are now 49 staff members, of which 29 are women and 13 are salaried.

Beni Soliman rose from modest roots to recently being recognized on national television as a model Community Development Association that has succeeded in a number of ways. Its entrepreneurial spirit has generated local funding to support its community service activity. In this way, it has demonstrated its strong organizational and administrative capacity, making it worthy of further investment by outside agencies.

# DISCUSSION

- 1) What are the different roles that ICA has played since it began working in Beni Soliman? Was Beni Soliman too dependent on ICA? Was there any alternative?
- 2) When the interest on ICA bank deposits started to decline, what assets did the CDA use for income generation?
- 3) Why do you think ICA changed its approach to community development in Beni Soliman six years after it started working there?
- 4) What lessons can be learned from this for future partnerships between a local CDA and an external NGO such as ICA? Is it appropriate or realistic for an international NGO to have such a long relationship with a community? If not, what would recommend that ICA do differently?



# ANALYSIS AND IMPLICATIONS

What can we learn from this case?

ICA had a long involvement in Beni Soliman. Do we then have to assume that this length of commitment by an external agency is necessary? Reading this case, we can see how one CDA saw opportunities within the community to sustain itself financially. We can also see how important it is for a CDA to be independent and yet have strong external connections. The Beni Soliman CDA identified its own assets and opportunities to reduce its dependence on an outside agency. Having demonstrated its own initiative and organizational capacity, it attracted other outside interest. Beni Soliman became a good investment for community development funding from a variety of sources.

Implications for practice

1. In poorly served areas, NGOs or other asset-based practitioners may begin as a substitute for services and opportunities already available elsewhere.
2. To avoid dependence, the asset-based practitioner should step back as soon as possible. It should facilitate linkages with government and other potential stakeholders to ensure sustained development.
3. An economic analysis of local community opportunities, conducted by the local community, may be the spark for such innovation.

*A little and a little, collected together, becomes a great deal; the heap in the barn consists of single grains, and drop and drop makes an inundation.*

# MOBILIZING, RENEWING AND BUILDING ASSETS:

METHODS, TOOLS,  
AND STRATEGIES



## Mobilizing, Renewing and Building Assets: Methods, Tools, and Strategies

These case studies illustrate diverse examples of “successful” community development. What does “successful” mean? At the minimum, it means that community members have been active decision makers, and positive changes have occurred as a result. More importantly, it means that a development process has been set in motion that shows promise of being self-sustaining. The first case shows community members in Boghada driving their own development, without any intervention from outside agencies. The question then for the Egyptian Volunteer Center (EVC) is how to assist without undermining the capacity built by the citizens of Boghada themselves. In other instances, such as Beni Soliman, the outside agency has dedicated over 20 years to building capacity, withdrawing gradually as the community gains confidence in its ability to sustain capacity.

We know that development is dynamic, complex, and dependent on many factors. Given unpredictable factors beyond the community’s control, it rarely follows a straight path. Action at the community level is therefore about the ability to respond to opportunity, and to better predict what is going to happen in a rapidly changing world. Action at the policy level is to help create such opportunity.

For a self-sustaining process, policy makers and local citizens both have responsibility for ensuring that local assets can be renewed, created and expanded. As we have seen in these cases, these assets are varied. They include: the capacity of communities to organize to get things done; the skills and talents of individuals, including leadership, entrepreneurial, and technical skills, and other more conventional assets such as natural resources, financial assets, and cultural assets. In addition, linkages between individuals and institutions that provide access to information and additional resources are essential social assets. Without these social assets it would be difficult to sustain development in the longer term.

This guide does not prescribe a model for community development. Instead, we offer some tools and activities that can be used by development practitioners and communities to encourage community-driven initiative. These tools have to be used with common sense, as an aid to rather than a replacement for, relationship-building and community mobilizing.

The tools and activities included here can be used at the community level to mobilize, build and renew community assets so that communities can respond to opportunity. Communities already have strengths, skills, and assets but these are often ignored. The community development practitioner, who only sees problems that need to be solved, may inadvertently stifle the community’s confidence in its own abilities, and create an attitude that development can only occur with outside assistance. The role of the practitioner is to help bridge the gap between community capacities and opportunities that will strengthen and expand their asset base. Building the asset base is the way to sustain community-driven development.



On the following pages you will find:

1. Tools and methods that can be used by community development practitioners and local communities to:

- recognize, identify, and mobilize their assets
- link local assets to economic opportunities

2. Guidelines for the role of the intermediary organization.

## Identifying and Mobilizing Assets

### Appreciative Interviewing and Analyzing Community Success

Appreciative interviewing is a way to generate pride in past successes among community members, and to help communities understand why and how they have been successful in the past. Not only does this create energy and excitement as people tell their stories, it also helps people to start thinking about how they can mobilize in similar ways for new initiatives. At its core is the idea that people are motivated to act when they feel confident, and when confidence and a sense of pride outweighs the frustrations they may be experiencing.

Appreciative interviewing can be the first step in focusing community attention on the skills, assets, and capacities they can mobilize for community action. It can also be an effective way of identifying assets and skills that have not been noticed or recognized before. For example, in the Baharia case, appreciative interviewing would have been an effective strategy to identify the female health educators, by asking women in the community to recount stories of those who have shown leadership qualities.

Living University, by following a “positive deviance approach”, uses methods very similar to appreciative interviewing, for similar reasons. Having applied it in a wide range of situations (for example, to identify the reasons for some women having very healthy children, or why some children do exceptionally well in school), Save the Children has now applied it to identify which CDAs work effectively and why. “Trainer” CDAs, then share the lessons learned with “learner” CDAs.

## Mapping and Organizing

Another activity that can be done with the community is building a comprehensive list of all the assets communities have. These include physical assets and natural assets (which can be identified when community residents draw a community map), as well as financial, social and institutional assets. In particular, we focus here on the capacity to organize as a key social asset. Some examples are farmers organizing to sell their produce or to help one another at harvest time, the way in which market vendors collaborate to negotiate with municipal authorities, youth organizing a social event, and community members working together to organize a funeral. It is important to recognize temporary informal associations as well as the more formal associations such as the local Community Development Association. As long as they are active and effective, they are recognized as community assets. With this capacity to organize, communities can mobilize the other skills and assets they have towards future community activities. In fact, this "mapping" has less to do with creating lists than it has to do with organizing.

We can see how an informal asset mapping exercise was carried out in the Fat'het Kheir case, where the marketable skills of local women were identified. As well, in the case of Al-Darb al-Ahmar, local CBOs were listed and active CBOs were identified. The potential of these tools goes much further. Through a comprehensive asset mapping exercise, communities are often impressed when they realize their existing strengths and assets. This is often the spark for new ideas about what the community can do next.

## TITLE

## Appreciative Interviewing

Effective community development work begins with building relationships at the community level. Appreciating the achievements and strengths of the community is an important aspect of this relationship building.

ï

## OBJECTIVES

- e To enable community members to recognize existing strengths and assets
- e To allow the NGO to recognize a community's strengths, assets and capacity to drive its own development
- e To analyze the community's achievements and use these as reference points when collaborating with community members to design further action
- e To develop community confidence both within the community and within the NGO.

ï

## METHODOLOGY

- e Start informally, talking to people about their past achievements when working together as a community.
- e Focus conversations by asking specific questions such as, "Tell me a story about a community project that you consider to have been successful?" or "Is there a project you did in this community with no direction or help from outsiders?"

e Probe to gather more detailed information by asking:

“What was it about you that made the situation successful?”

“What was it about others that made the situation successful?”

“What was it about the environment that made the situation successful?”

e Help community members to analyze their successes by facilitating group discussions

## TITLE

### Community Analysis of Success

Encouraging people to discover the local reasons for success can help them understand how to create successful community development initiatives in the future. However, it is important to analyze the nature and root of these successes in some depth.

ï

## OBJECTIVES

- ☉ To encourage citizens to think critically about the factors contributing to past successes
- ☉ To highlight the connections between the strengths and assets that exist in the community and successful community initiatives.

ï

## METHODOLOGY

- ☉ After conducting many appreciative interviews, bring community members together to do a collective analysis of their past successes. For example, they might talk about how they recovered from a recent draught or how they came together to build a community center.
- ☉ As people discuss stories of past success, encourage deeper analysis by using simple probing questions.
- ☉ Continue to probe the “whys” of the story – discovering the people, policies, environment, assets and connections that led to these successes.
- ☉ For example, a conversation between a citizen from Boghada, Ismailia and a facilitator

could sound like this:

Facilitator: Why do you think you were able to organize to build the soccer field?

Boghada Citizen: Because we had some vacant land and very active leadership. And also because our youth were passionate about soccer.

Facilitator: Why?

Boghada Citizen: Because this part of Egypt is famous for its soccer!

Facilitator: What was it about the leaders in your community that made it successful?

Boghada Citizen: The leaders are dedicated and they listened to the community's ideas. They wanted to involve many people in the process.

Facilitator: Why?

Boghada Citizen: They had confidence in us. They knew us really well. They knew that many of us had special skills to contribute to improve the project. And they also saw that we had connections to people who would be willing to help.

Facilitator: Any other reason?

Boghada Citizen: They realized that we all had to feel as if it was our project. They made us feel proud to be part of this community.

## TITLE

## Positive Deviance<sup>1</sup>

In every community there are stories of success. Somehow certain people find ways to succeed despite facing difficult situations that others have not been able to overcome. This success could be better health, higher crop production or a more successful business venture. The strategies used by these people are likely appropriate and acceptable to others in their community. Identifying and learning from this “positive deviance” can help shape community development.

ï

## OBJECTIVES

- e To identify people, families or groups that are achieving above average results
  
- e To understand the strategies they have used to overcome challenges
  
- e To use those ideas to plan wider community development

ï

## METHODOLOGY

- e Start talking to people! Ask questions about what is “normal” or “average” in the community. Ask what challenges prevent most people from getting ahead.
  
- e Then ask if there are people doing better than

---

<sup>1</sup> Save the Children USA

“average”, even though they also face these challenges. Be persistent – there will always be people doing *something* very well.

- e Encourage people to identify the specific behaviours and skills that can explain the success. Especially highlight the skills and behaviors that other people could model.
- e As a group or community, use this information to start planning.



## TITLE

### Identifying Individual Skills: Hand, Heart, Head

This exercise helps people recognize the variety of strengths each person has. This is done by brainstorming and grouping skills in three categories – head (intellectual), hand (physical) and heart (emotional). Everyone possesses skills and qualities in each of these areas. By identifying each individual's particular strengths in these areas, he or she will be able to see how their skills complement other peoples' skills. There are many people who don't even realize all the skills they possess! By understanding their strengths people may feel more confident contributing to community development.

i

## OBJECTIVES

- e To identify the skills and capacities of individuals for community building
- e To strengthen the confidence of community members in their own skills and capacities
- e To encourage individuals to see potential connections between individual skills and the work of local associations, institutions, and businesses

*(For example, a connection between a person's carpentry skills, a local group's marketing skills, and tools or work space provided by an institution could result in a profitable micro-enterprise)*

- e To provide an opportunity for people with "hidden" skills and talents to be recognized

i

## METHODOLOGY

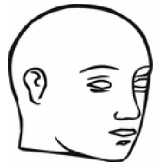
- ☉ Ask a group of individuals to think about the things they do well.
- ☉ Explain that these skills and capacities can fall into different categories, including intellectual (head), physical (hand), and emotional (heart).
- ☉ Give examples of each type:
  - Head: analysis, organization, writing
  - Hand: cooking, farming, dancing
  - Heart: compassion, humor, teamwork
- ☉ Ask people to brainstorm about their own skills and capacities in these areas. Have people share their lists and continue to build them. Group members who know one another can add to each others lists.
- ☉ List the skills on separate charts for each category



- Carpentry
- Farming
- Cooking
- Mechanics
- Sewing
- Weaving
- Animal husbandry
- House construction



- Compassion
- Care of elderly
- Sense of humour
- Conflict resolution
- Willingness to collaborate
- Cooperative spirit



- Analysis
- Mathematics
- Organization
- Business and trading
- Management
- Literacy
- Problem solving
- Money management

## TITLE

### Mapping Community Groups or Associations

Identifying assets usually begins with an inventory of voluntary community groups as these are groups of citizens already mobilized around some form of community activity. These groups are sometimes called "associations" to differentiate them from institutions which are organizations whose members are employees.

Associations are ways in which people organize around a particular task. Perhaps they volunteer at the local mosque, or the local school. Perhaps they work on road maintenance or run an informal savings group, or organize local festivals.

Groups can often stretch beyond their original purposes to become full contributors to the development process. From our case studies examples of this are a group of local youth volunteers (as in Boghada and al-Darb al-Ahmar) and a Collaborative Community Action team (as in al-Montaza).

i

## OBJECTIVES

- e To discover the informal and voluntary groups or associations active in a community
- e To understand the various relationships between these associations
- e To identify opportunities for collaboration among associations

## METHODOLOGY

- ☉ Invite interested community members to a meeting. Include women, men, youth and elders. Make the group as representative as possible
- ☉ Ask them to list personal connections to associations. Describe the role of these associations and list who are the leaders.
- ☉ Expand the list to other associations. Ask each of the group members to identify other associations that he or she knows about. If known, list the leaders and name the person among your group who is best connected to the leader.
- ☉ Talk about opportunities for collaboration among associations.

## TITLE

## Capacity Inventories

Once individuals have a better understanding of their own skills, the community may want to do a larger capacity inventory. Going a step deeper than the “Head, Heart, Hand” exercise, capacity inventories help people to understand how their assets can be combined with other people’s assets for community development.

•

## OBJECTIVES

- e To create a broad inventory of all the individual skills and talents in a community
- e To encourage community members to see potential connections between the assets of various individuals
- e To inspire ideas for community development and a citizen’s active role in the process
- e To spark organizing and mobilizing

•

## METHODOLOGY

- e Use skills gathered during “Appreciative Interviewing” and “Head, Heart, Hand” activity as a place to start
- e Organize the assets by categories. These could include:
  - General skills and abilities
  - Civic skills
  - Entrepreneurial skills and experience
  - Cultural and artistic skills

- e Indicate the levels of 'interest', 'experience' and 'ability' of individuals in each skill area.
- e Continue to expand the inventory to include everyone in the community with community members interviewing each other.
- e A big chart placed in a central area such as a community center is a good place to record skills and talents. It will also make it possible for people to continue adding new names to the list.

## Linking Assets to Opportunities

### Institutional Mapping and the Leaky Bucket

Identifying opportunities for economic development usually creates a buzz of excitement in the community.

A starting point is to take a close look at the local economy and understand how it functions. A “leaky bucket” exercise carried out with the community is a popular education tool to show that the local economy has inflows of income as well as outflows. When the community sees this in visual form, they start to see how to increase inflows of income, and how to “plug the leaks”. They see the importance of producing commodities and services locally so that they can keep money circulating within the community and therefore contribute to local economic growth. Many of the cases here illustrate how communities were able to generate income by taking advantage of such opportunities: the Bedouin Support Program, the Beni Soliman case and the Bani Ghani case. The “leaky bucket” is a tool that communities themselves can use to identify such opportunities.

A local community may be able to make use of its connections with outside institutions. In fact, both local and outside institutions are important community assets. An institutional mapping exercise can show that institutions have much to offer, including access to information about opportunities in the policy or market environment. The Community Collaborative Action initiative in EI Salam is a good example of this appreciation for the value of solid links with outside institutions.



## TITLE

## Linking, Mobilizing & Organizing

Data collection is not community building. A process to identify (map) a community's skills, capacities and assets is only valuable if it leads to working relationships among local people and local associations. As the mapping project takes place, typically people start to organize themselves. They begin to see what can be done by combining their various skills and assets and this leads to social organizing. The weaving of this tapestry of individual and associational assets, interests and abilities is the true art of community building.

## OBJECTIVES

i

- e To create a network of informal groups and associations for community building
- e To identify common interests, to create and encourage strong relationships within the community
- e To move a step beyond asset mapping ... getting to *Action!*

## METHODOLOGY

i

- e Once communities have come together in the process of asset mapping and new ideas have emerged, gather a group of citizens who represent the interested associations. These will be key players in the community development process.
- e Working from their ideas, do the easy thing first! It is best to encourage early action around an achievable goal. Early success will build positive momentum and future participation.

- e Keep your plan focused. People have other work to do and only have so much energy!

## TITLE

## Mapping Institutions

Local institutions are often overlooked as sources of assets that community groups can draw upon to support community development activities. Making a list of local institutions can often result in the discovery of potential assets the community had never previously considered in support of community development efforts.

ï

## OBJECTIVES

- e To discover the full range of institutions
  
- e To identify what assets these institutions could offer for community building
  
- e To understand the links between local institutions and local associations

ï

## METHODOLOGY

- e Ask the community to identify local institutions including:
  - Government institutions such as agricultural extension offices, health clinics, schools, and libraries
  - NGOs
  - Mosques and churches
  - Private sector institutions such as cooperatives, banks, and private businesses

e For each institution list its potential assets including:

- Services and expertise
- Space and facilities
- Materials and equipment
- Purchasing power
- Employment practices and personnel
- Links to institutions outside the community

## Institutional Mapping Chart

Institution	Services on offer	Facilities	Materials	Expertise	Purchasing Power	Links
Local Government						
NGO 1						
NGO 2						
Local Business 1						
Local Business 2						

## TITLE

### Leaky Bucket

The “Leaky Bucket” is a useful tool for understanding how a local economy works. By imagining the community’s economy as a bucket with money flowing in and leaking out, people can understand the importance of retaining money within the community. They can start to identify how to increase the flow of income into the community and how to prevent the flow of money out of the community which happens when goods and services are purchased outside.

## OBJECTIVES

i

- e To identify money for goods and services flowing in and flowing out of their economy
- e To identify opportunities for income generation in the community
- e To understand the local economy and its relationship to the larger economy

i

## METHODOLOGY

- e Bring together a broadly representative community group (each person will have a personal experience of the local economy)
- e Brainstorm
  - Goods and services that are bought and sold within the community and outside the community
  - Money that flows in and out of the community
  - How money circulates within the community through the sale of goods and services

- e Draw the bucket indicating inflows, outflows and circulation
- 
- e Identify opportunities to increase inflows and circulation within the community. For example, initiating a community-based tourism initiative might bring more money into the community from visiting tourists through entrance fees, food and accommodation. These are inflows – money coming into the community from outside.
  - e Identify opportunities to plug leaks. For example, improving agriculture production in the community might decrease the need to spend money on food outside the community. Money spent on food that is produced and sold outside of the community is a “leak” in the local economy.
  - e Keep the picture of the bucket in the community and encourage the community to add to it or update it as they plug leaks and increase inflows.

---

As you can see in the following diagram of a leaky bucket for a rural community, Daily Wages, Handicrafts, Livestock and Dairy Sales, Agricultural Sales and Government Staff Salaries have been identified as INFLOWS. The size of the arrows represents the amount of money flowing into the community from each source. Agricultural Sales is generating the most income. Daily Wages is generating the least.

There are holes at the bottom of the bucket showing how money is leaving the community. Transportation Costs, Educational Expenses, Chemical Fertilizers, Household Consumables and Social Festivities have been identified as LEAKS. The community is losing a lot of money to Chemical Fertilizers and Household Consumables.

Using the leaky bucket as a tool can help people visualize the local economy and imagine ways to 1) increase INFLOWS and 2) Decrease LEAKS.

While creating the Leaky Bucket diagram, the community may notice certain opportunities for economic development. For example, in this case, the community may decide to start a composting program to make and distribute their own organic fertilizers. This would keep money in the community that is spent on chemical fertilizers produced outside the community. Another opportunity to plug a leak is to have a small scale retail operation that sells household consumables (for example, a local market). There are also opportunities to increase inflows, such as adding value to the products they produce. If, for example, the community is currently selling whole grains like wheat, they may be able to add value to the product by milling it and selling it as flour. If they can make more money selling flour than selling whole grains, they have added value and will bring more money into the community.



# Leaky Bucket



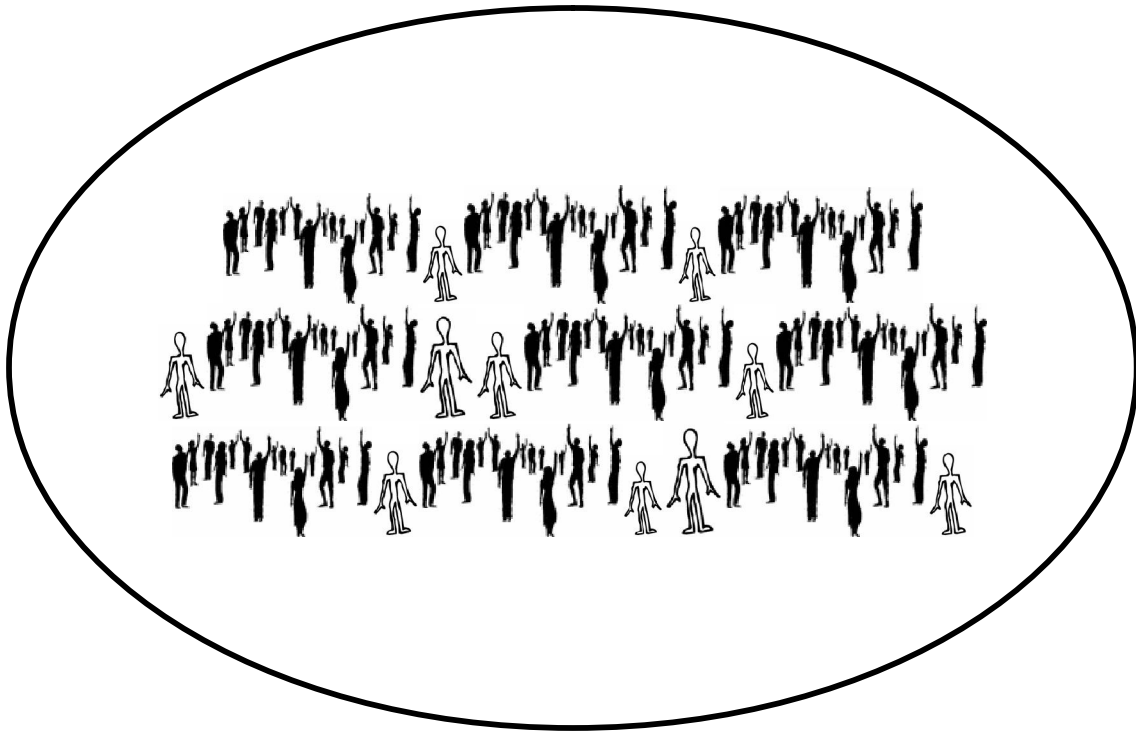
## The Role of the Intermediary

What is an intermediary organization? These cases illustrate several examples. In some cases the local CDA acts as the intermediary between the community and outside agencies. This was found in Boghada; El Salam; the Living University CDAs of Tella, Zorha and Estal; and Beni Soliman after the withdrawal of ICA. In other cases, the intermediary organization may be a local NGO such as CDS in the case of the CCA initiative El Salam, Gudran in the case of El Max, EVC in the case of Boghada, and CEOSS in the case of Beni Ghani. There are also cases here of international NGOs playing the role of intermediary, such as ICA in the case of Beni Soliman, and Save the Children in the case of the Living University. However both ICA and Save the Children saw themselves as temporarily playing this role while the local CDA built capacity. Finally, we have examples of particular individuals acting as intermediaries working through government institutions as in the case of Baharia, or in their capacity as private sector consultants such as the case of Mohammed Amin in Fan Sina.

Despite these differences, how the intermediary interacts with the local community is key to the success of a self sustaining, community-driven process. From the cases outlined, it is clear that the most helpful intermediaries are those who have confidence in and respect for community capacity and competence, and those who have made the shift from focusing on problems to focusing on opportunities. They see community members as partners, not as clients or recipients. Gudran is a good example of an organization that has made this shift, as is EVC and CDS in their approach to working with communities. Fat'het Kheir and the consultant who saw the opportunities for the Bedouin Support Group are also obvious examples of intermediaries with these characteristics.

Several guidelines relating to an effective role for NGOs emerge from these cases:

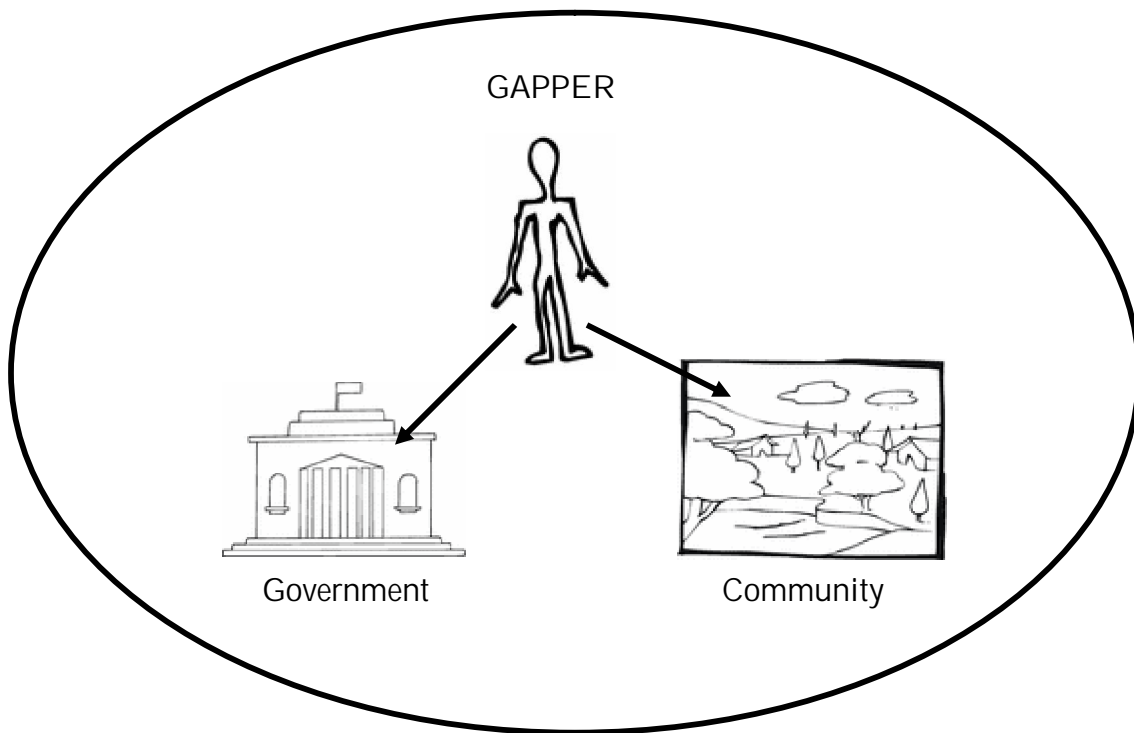
- Build effective relationships with community members
- Foster broad-based community leadership
- Identify and involve “gappers”
- Help communities to build assets and identify opportunities
- “Lead by stepping back”
- Track the process as it unfolds



### Fostering Broad-Based Leadership

Leadership is an activity rather than a position of authority. Consider, for example, the work of Gihane, Mrs. Karima and Om Mahmoud in the Fat'het Kheir case, or of Maurice, Amgad and the initial families who took part in the improved composting scheme in Beni Ghani. In each of these cases, they were leaders because they decided to take action and their enthusiasm encouraged others to join in. They were well connected in their communities, and so enjoyed a sense of belonging and responsibility for the future of the community.

Community development depends on effective leadership. Communities that are active are those where leadership is found in many people, who all pull together: the broader the leadership base, the stronger the community. In all the cases, we see examples of different kinds of skills and assets being mobilized through different types of leaders. One of the positive benefits of conducting appreciative interviewing, community analysis, and individual skills mapping is that this process makes it very clear that many people really are leaders!



### Identifying "Gappers"

There is one type of leader that is particularly important to recognize. This is a "gapper". A "gapper" is someone who may work in an institution such as a government office, but who also lives in the community and as an active citizen, takes part in community initiatives. These people have a unique opportunity to help connect their communities with important institutional assets. We saw examples of these gappers in the case of CDS' Community Collaborative Action work in which individuals wearing both hats were brought together.

## Helping Communities to Build Assets and Identify Opportunities

In all the cases, community assets were built and strengthened. Sometimes this asset building was in the form of building particular capacities, such as the peer-to-peer learning about running a CDA that took place in the Living University. Financial assets were built in the case of FK; existing cultural assets were transformed into marketable skills in the case of the Bedouin Support Group, and youth literacy skills were developed to give young people alternatives to fishing for a livelihood in EI Max. Physical assets of all kinds were built such as a soccer field, improved composting facilities, and rehabilitated homes.

Social assets were built among community residents who had not worked together before. An example of this is the case of Al Darb Al-Ahmar. Others joined together for a common purpose as in the case of the women who participated in Fat'het Kheir's savings and credit program. In both situations people are building the kind of social connectedness that seems to be the hallmark of successful communities.

Building assets requires attention to the business and policy environment. In a liberalized economy, communities need access to information. Perhaps the most important service an NGO can provide is the link to information about opportunity as for example, the preferences of European consumers in the Bedouin Support Program. This in turn requires NGOs to be familiar with government policy, so that they can help communities access assets to which they may be entitled. NGOs need to know about the business environment, so that business initiative at the local level can be linked to realistic assessments of the market.

## Helping Communities Link Assets to External Opportunities

Another aspect of building social linkages is the linkages that were built between the communities themselves and outside agencies. These linkages are essential if communities are going to effectively communicate and access the information and resources which they need to sustain the development process. CCA in El Salaam, the Baharia case, Al Darb al-Ahmar, and Beni Soliman all provide examples of efforts to facilitate these links.

Special mention should be made of volunteerism. In the cases of Gudran, Fat'het Kheir, and EVC, volunteers from the Egyptian middle class played active citizenship roles, sharing their time and their skills in the communities in which they worked. They were assets in themselves, but also in the connections they were able to mobilize for the benefit of the community where they worked. Volunteers not only share their skills and create linkages, they also become a constituency of support for the interests of more disadvantaged communities. This in turn should contribute to raising public awareness and influencing government policy so that a more favorable environment for community driven development can be created.

Access to marketing opportunities is critical for sustained economic development. The Fan Sina case illustrates the link made between Bedouins and the export market. Helping communities navigate their way through private sector networks, while ensuring they retain control, is an important and challenging role for the intermediary. NGOs that traditionally have been oriented towards providing services often have limited experience in this regard. Yet this is fundamental to community development.

## Leading by Stepping Back

If broad-based leadership and the capacity to organize have been identified, and if “gappers” exist to help access information and resources, then the intermediary organization can take on facilitating and linking roles, rather than leading the community activity.

## Tracking the Process as it Unfolds

Community development is a process, not a project with a distinct beginning and end. When NGOs feel responsible for the results and outcomes of community development initiatives, they tend to move in and control the process. That is why the role of the NGO must be clearly understood and realistic expectations need to be set. Creative solutions to monitoring and evaluation need to be found to ensure that the NGO and the community are learning, rather than controlling, while at the same time remaining accountable for its activities. For monitoring, we recommend “tracking the process as it unfolds”. Record observations about what happens and review progress on a regular basis, while remaining open to the unexpected. This form of “action research” helps communities and NGOs to recognize that community development evolves in unexpected ways. Flexibility is needed if the overall goals of a community-driven development initiative are to be sustained.

For evaluation, appreciative interviewing can be a useful tool for an open discussion and analysis of what has worked in the partnership and how to strengthen, replicate and expand that. Monitoring and evaluation that only focuses on the outcomes of planned activities may be missing important developments and unintended consequences.

# EXTENDED CASE STUDIES





Title: Success Breeds Success  
Community: Boghada  
Theme: Community Driven Development  
Wisdom: One hand cannot applaud

## Background

Genuine community development is when communities drive their own development rather than depend on outside agencies to make development happen. In this case we learn about the community of Boghada and how a youth center was able to mobilize community energy towards the construction of a soccer field. As an endogenous community initiative, there is much to learn here about leadership, the mobilization of community assets, and the way this attracted attention and “investment” by outside agencies, including the Egyptian Volunteer Center (EVC).

The community is Boghada, a village of 5,000 inhabitants located approximately 40 km from the city of Ismailia, which is about 100 km northeast of Cairo. Sources of livelihood are varied yet modest. There is some employment at nearby factories or government offices. Others rely on small scale agriculture and employment in carpentry, plumbing and other trades. Some local youth have university level education, due to proximity of the University of Ismailia. However, the older generations have only a basic level of education and, according to the latest survey by the General Authority for Illiteracy Eradication, the illiteracy rate is still 7%.

Boghada, like many villages in Ismailia, faced great hardships during the 1967 Israeli attack on Ismailia when many families were forced to migrate to escape the conditions of war. With the advent of the peace treaty, many of these families returned to their homeland and started anew by settling on new lands and redefining borders. For those who were underprivileged even before the war, such events made it all the more difficult. Coupled with an absence of basic services such as a health unit and pharmacy, it is not surprising to find people struggling to achieve a minimum living standard.

The institutions present in the community are a nursery, an elementary school, a primary school, the Community Development Association, and the Youth Center. Youth centers are NGOs initially established by the Ministry of Youth to serve young people mainly through sport activities. Typical activities include lectures on social and religious issues, and hosting sports and library facilities. Many youth centers undertake a greater role through liaising with public authorities to extend certain services.

Fortunately, the Youth Center in Boghada is remarkably active and undertakes a role far beyond that undertaken by other youth centers. It is evidently the focal point of collective community action in the village. In addition to the initiative described below, the Boghada Youth Center, working together with the community, has succeeded in establishing a nursery and an elementary school, and in facilitating the provision of services to the community. These services include issuing ID cards, organizing a children’s vaccination campaign, and bringing a physician to the village on specified days. The Youth Center itself was initiated through endogenous efforts. At first, two clay rooms were built to host meetings, after-

which someone donated a small piece of land. Later, the Government endorsed the effort by constructing a proper building. It is worthy of note that the Head of the Board of Directors of the Youth Association holds the same elected status in the Community Development Association (CDA). Hence, flexibility is practiced in linking community activities to the Youth Center or CDA depending on the suitability of the activity to each institution's mandate.

### The Story

It started with a vacant six feddan piece of land that was causing some conflicts among community members who each wanted to allocate the land for personal purposes. The Youth Center – or “ray of light”, as described by one of the villagers – provided a forum for discussion among active community members who cared about the wellbeing of Boghada. After a series of discussions, these leaders decided that the land would be utilized for the common benefit of the entire village. What that ‘common benefit’ would be remained open for discussion.

The youth lobbied to turn three feddans of the vacant land into a soccer field. The Youth Center, as mandated by the Ministry of Youth, had a space for playing sports. But the space was tiled, causing knee problems for the youth who played on it. The Ismailia's well-known fanaticism for soccer was another reason for the youth's request. The youth so much desired a proper playing field to emulate national soccer champions originating in Ismailia, that they were determined to use the land for that purpose. The remaining piece of the six feddan land was to be used to establish a health unit, a religious institute, a veterinary unit, and a children's playground.

“The land was uneven and filled with stinky water because it was located at the end of a sewage line,” explained one of the village youth as he pointed to a board with photographs taken by the team to document the process of reclaiming the three feddan piece of land. The youth, supported by Saad (appointed by the Ministry to be the Manager of the Youth Center) and Mohsen (the elected head of the Youth Center's Board), contacted the head of the City Council to borrow a bulldozer that could be used for leveling the ground. Once the ground had been partially leveled, the youth played in the field for almost two years before an idea for improvement sparked.

The field was made of sand, which made it easy for unwanted weeds to grow that scratched and cut the youth's legs as they played. Growing grass to cover the field would solve the problem. A youth camp was organized to clear the area of the weeds and prepare it for planting. However, to cover the entire area with grass by spreading a lawn mat would cost £E 42,000. One of the older farmers then came up with the idea of buying a much smaller piece of lawn mat and picking out grass seedlings one by one. The seedlings were planted on various spots so they would grow and join together over time to cover the entire area. Indeed, a mat worth only £E 4000 was purchased and the idea was successful. The youth did not play in the field while the grass was growing. In order to irrigate the grass, a plumber designed a system based on water pipes with openings at 12 meter intervals. The youth dug the land to create space for a well, and a water pump was borrowed from one of the villagers.

The field was still rather uneven, making it difficult to play on. It was then decided to improve previous leveling efforts. Sand was used to fill the pits and the sandy patches were replanted with grass. Small boulders left over from restoration efforts in nearby Tal El Kebeer were donated by the city council to place around the field as a sort of sidewalk. Trees were then planted as a wind break. At one point, the Governor of Ismailia was passing by and stopped to observe what was going on. He commended the effort, and since then he too has taken a personal interest in the Boghada initiative.

In celebration, and out of pride in their effort, the youth and other village members organized an event on the national Easter holiday in 2003. They invited the entire village and nearby villagers to join in the celebration. Their successful effort won an honorary prize from the Ministry of Youth in a competition with youth centers of five other governorates. Now the field is available for Boghada's youth to play on. The field is also made available as a recreational facility for nearby villages. Moreover, once a week the nursery children are invited to bring out their toys and play in the field.

### Comments on Asset-Mobilization, Asset Building, and Community Initiative

The group of people responsible for creating and implementing the soccer field idea knew that they had to do it themselves, and realized they *could* do it themselves, relying on already available skills, money, ideas and efforts.

What Community Assets were Mobilized?

#### *Individual and Social Assets*

Everyone in support of this initiative had something to contribute, whether it is a skill, a quality or personal ability. A local plumber designed the irrigation system, an experienced farmer suggested the grass seedling idea, the youth generated enthusiasm, their parents provided moral support, and Saad and Mohsen provided leadership and contacts with local authorities.

"Because we are young and the idea is big," was the response of one of the youth when asked why the initiative was a success. Each took pride in his or her contribution, no matter how small, which fuelled energy and enthusiasm over this three-year initiative. One of the boys unloaded the trees from the cart, some participated in clearing the weeds, and others took part in planting the grass. Even the youth's commitment not to play in the field while the grass was growing was considered a strength.

Another important quality was leadership. While the youth came up with the idea, Saad and Mohsen led the initiative in their dual capacities as youth center authorities and long-time active community members. Several years of hard work in the community granted the partners credibility which facilitated the mobilization and organization of collective efforts.

Taking part in the work with their own hands was another aspect of their leadership that rendered them credible and trustworthy.

Saad's and Mohsen's skills in making contacts and building relationships generated a fruitful relationship with the local city council. Apart from borrowing a bulldozer and obtaining used boulders for the sidewalk, Saad and Mohsen succeeded in inspiring the head of the city council to take a personal interest in Boghada's initiative, which was a strong motivating factor. A story is told that when the older villagers asked to meet the head of the city council at the start of the initiative, he asked, "Who is actually going to do the work?" When told that it was the youth, he asked the youth to come and meet him.

A great sense of pride and tenacity was felt among the community members. "When I see this video it feels like being in Toshka," exclaimed one of the older village members as he watched the video filmed by the team to document the process. Toshka is considered Egypt's greatest investment in desert land reclamation. Aside from the building of the soccer field, this pride was also a result of previous successful community initiatives. In recent years, Boghada witnessed the building of an elementary school, the establishment of a nursery, the organization of a vaccination campaign, and leveling of the main road, among other joint self-initiatives. Joint action yields pride which motivates further action, as well as the trust that enables further action to be sustained. The remaining three feddans of the land are now undergoing registration procedures to establish a health unit, a veterinary unit, a religious institute and a children's playground. This ripple effect would not have occurred in the absence of joint action and trust.

Cooperation between multiple generations of community members was driven by the belief that youth and older people complement each other. "Youth have energy and enthusiasm, but if that is not backed by experience of the older generations, the activity is bound to fail. We succeeded in connecting the new mentality with the old," argued Mohsen. Across generations, a strong moral commitment, inspired by faith, seemed to underlie this collaborative spirit.

### *Organizational Capacities*

The Youth Center effectively mobilized community spirit and energy. The long years of positive contributions to the village earned the youth club the trust of the community and a sound reputation with government. The leadership role of Saad and Mohsen was imperative for bridging the gap between the government and Boghada, and for instigating government interest in the community.

### *Natural Assets*

The village also made use of available natural assets, the most obvious of which is the land. Interestingly, nearby Bedouins provided access to another natural asset. The Bedouin community's main livelihood source is herding. It is not surprising then to find that the first set of trees planted to surround the field were eaten by the Bedouins' sheep. Then an idea came up to make use of the grazing. The Bedouins were asked to let their sheep graze in the field, as a form of natural mowing, and also organic fertilizer. Unfortunately, this assistance

was only temporary, both because of the continual change in nomadic Bedouin groups and repeated conflict with residing Bedouins.

### *Financial Assets*

Youth centers have limited budgets, which compelled the Boghada Youth Center to collect money from village members. People donated because there have been previous demonstrable benefits from the Youth Center. There are also strong community ties created and strengthened through both kinship ties and previous joint activity. Hence in this particular case, the financial assets were accessed through social assets.

In order to further generate financial assets, the team came up with the idea of planting seedlings of casuarina trees on one side of the field. These trees are expected to grow in three-five years, allowing their timber to be sold to generate money to cover maintenance of the field.

### *Physical Assets*

There were two types of physical assets in this case. Some included equipment utilized for specific purposes. Examples include the bulldozer borrowed from the city council and the water pump borrowed from one of the villagers. Again, these physical assets would not have been acquired if it were not for social linkages.

Local infrastructure, including channels to irrigate water which enabled the creation of an irrigation system for the field, was the other kind of physical asset. However, this infrastructure was not always supportive. An incident occurred when the largest water channel in the village broke and flooded the street on which the field is located. The head of the city council was contacted and agreed to send over a piece of equipment used for pumping out the water. Turning a problem into an opportunity, the excess water was pumped from the street and was kept on reserve to irrigate the field.

### Accessing the Support of Outside Institutions

On the policy level, the team, and particularly Saad and Mohsen had to go through cumbersome procedures to register the land. The law stipulates that any vacant land belongs to the government. If it is anyone's intention to use this land, it must be registered with the respective Ministry. For instance, the land allocated for the soccer field was registered with the Ministry of Youth. Papers to register the rest of the land planned for a health unit, veterinary unit, children's playground, and religious institute have been filed with the Ministries of Health, Agriculture, and Social Affairs respectively. After filing for registration, investigators are sent to ensure that the land has no established buildings, that it is not conducive for agriculture, and has no ownership conflicts outstanding. Once registered, the State may then provide funds to support the establishment of such public services. As Mohsen commented,

“This is an example of how private efforts are supplemented by public ones. As you know, rural communities are largely neglected. They do not benefit from the services available in the urban areas. Whenever you (a rural citizen) ask for anything from the State their first response is ‘where is the land to host the establishment?’ When the State finds that efforts have been initiated, it always helps.”

Mohsen had spoken from experience, because the State had indeed previously supported actions initiated by the community. The elementary school initially consisted of two clay built classrooms, which the State later rebuilt. The current Youth Center began with a ½ feddan land donation by one of the village members, which was supplemented by £E 250,000 from the State to establish the building and facilities. The nursery also started with a donation of a home by one of the villagers, and food donations by a group of villagers to provide meals to the children. The State, represented by the Ministry of Social Affairs, then adopted the nursery and hired eight girls from the village to work there.

What is quite evident from this case is that opportunities exist through government channels that can be tapped. Yet persistence is needed in convincing government officials to apply such policies.

### Asset Building

In looking at the Boghada case, we can recount numerous examples of asset building, especially when it comes to individual assets. “I learned that an idea can be realized at minimum expense with group work,” was among many similar statements expressed by youth when asked if they learned anything from participating in this initiative. Another youth member stated, “People here got used to the idea that with our own efforts, we can do everything.” This sense of empowerment reflects a kind of authentic power, a power from within that is accumulated through the experiences of previous success. Through this empowerment, social assets were strengthened.

The role of EVC was not in bringing an alternative mode of thinking to Boghada, for volunteerism was already there. Yet the value of becoming conscious that this is a viable approach to community development cannot be ignored. “We used to volunteer as a kind of charity. We learned it from our grandfathers. The EVC now organizes it.” This realization surely added to both individual and social assets.

Community assets are in a constant state of conversion. For example, the land (a natural asset) and the money (financial asset) were transformed into a soccer field which is a public asset. Trees planted around the field will generate income through the sale of timber.

### The Role of the Intermediary

Thus far we have been looking at the Boghada soccer field in isolation from other events and actors, as if looking at a snapshot in time. In reality, the history of the community shaped the way the soccer field initiative came about, just as the soccer field initiative will shape future activities. At this point in time, the soccer field is the culmination of joint action

and is a symbol of community pride, confidence and joy. However, the soccer field is not an end in itself, but the beginning of planned activities to come.

Towards the completion of the soccer field initiative, the Boghada Youth Center was selected among 50 youth centers to participate in a project for developing model volunteer clubs proposed by the Center for Development Services (CDS) and endorsed by the Ministry of Youth. CDS is a development organization established in 1990 and based in Cairo. The idea of this project is to propel youth centers to promote the concept of volunteering and better avail themselves of opportunities to host volunteers.

This project represents a natural evolution of CDS' work with youth. In 2001, CDS proposed the idea of the Egyptian Volunteer Center (EVC) – to create a mechanism for connecting volunteers with volunteering opportunities. It begins by encouraging volunteering among youth by using simple strategies to draw on youth in youth centers, like persuading them of the advantages of volunteering and giving them training that enable them to become capable of handling a job. When they become volunteers, their names are included in a database. A matchmaking process makes it possible for volunteers to invest their time in activities of interest to them and for non-profit organizations to benefit from volunteer work in specific needed areas. The Youth Association for Population and Development (YAPD) was selected by CDS to host EVC. This association was selected because of its mission for mobilizing youth for development, its network of relationships across Egypt, and because YAPD is itself made up of youth.

EVC's role in Ismailia started with a training workshop conducted for Saad and six volunteers from the Youth Center on Participatory Rapid Appraisal (PRA). The PRA was then implemented by the Youth Center volunteers, with some guidance from CDS and YAPD staff. The PRA explored the role of the youth center and other NGOs, the concept of volunteerism, women's participation in youth center activities, and problems and opportunities conducive to volunteer efforts. As a result of the PRA, some activities were planned. These included the organization of literacy classes, building a wall to surround the youth center and the field, improving irrigation water supply, and setting up high powered lights for the main streets.

Interestingly, EVC's intervention came after the inauguration of the soccer field and midway through the leveling of the main road. Hence, the true catalyst for the soccer field initiative was the youth center team consisting of Mohsen, Saad, the youth volunteer groups, and the various other local citizens who contributed their time, money, or equipment. Yet the timing was convenient in that the field initiative had freshly added to Boghada's repository of endogenous activities. In a sense it paved the way for EVC to share its strategy and find not only a receptive team, but a team filled with enthusiasm and geared for action. And instead of taking the driver's role, as with other youth centers, EVC in this case took the backseat and let the team conduct, analyze, and plan with minimal guidance.

As a national organization, EVC's strategy is to capitalize on available assets (volunteer time and skill), organize it, and help in planning and implementing development efforts. "If each young person volunteers ½ an hour per week, and we have 30 million youth, then that comes to 780 million hours per year," explained one of the EVC staff, alluding to the potentially immense impact of volunteerism in Egypt as a whole. Meanwhile the concept of

volunteerism is deeply imbedded in Boghada's culture as illustrated through the current soccer field initiative as well as decades of previous initiatives. What a formalized sense of volunteering will add is still to be found discovered. Nevertheless, there is certainly a confluence of communal values (stemming naturally and informally at the community level) with a strategy to formalize and systemize such values by the government and EVC. It is likely that it was this convergence of thinking that kick-started a positive relationship between the Boghada Youth Center and EVC. The challenge will be for EVC to 'step back' and continue to respond to, rather than drive, initiatives in Boghada and other communities.

Had the experience of the Boghada team been one of failure and despair, or if the common culture of the place had been one of individualism rather than collectivism and trust, it is doubtful that EVC would have had such a smooth start in Boghada. The smooth start is expected to contribute to the future activities planned, in a way that builds on previous enthusiasm, unleashes even more youth energy, and channels it in the right direction.

### Concluding Remarks

The Boghada case represents the clearest example of community driven development in this collection of case studies. Effective community mobilization of assets, particularly its social and organizational skills, gave community members a sense of pride and accomplishment, which fuelled further initiatives. As outside agencies are now attracted to Boghada – seeing a community that knows how to succeed – the challenge will be to continue to let Boghada drive its development on its own terms.



Title: A Creative Community-Based Composting Initiative  
Community: Bani Ghani  
Theme: Recognizing & Mobilizing Assets  
Wisdom: Only the tent pitched by your own hands will stand

## Background

This case is about a thirty-year long partnership between the Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services (CEOSS) and a village in Minia, one of the governorates of Upper Egypt. The village is Bani Ghani, a rural community of 20,000 people holding 2,700 feddans of agricultural land. It suffers from poverty, illiteracy, and lack of basic services as is the case with most villages in Upper Egypt. The illiteracy rate is 60% among women and 50% among men. According to the 2003 UNDP Human Development Report, Upper Egypt has the lowest indices for life expectancy, education, and income as compared to other regions in Egypt.

Administratively, Bani Ghani is a satellite village with eight smaller districts that branch from it. Its population is approximately half Coptic Christian and half Muslim. This demographic mix justified CEOSS' entry in 1966 through the provision of basic social services including literacy classes and small income-generating projects for women. Work had been interrupted due to demands on CEOSS to work in other communities with more pressing needs. However a formal letter from a group of community leaders was sent requesting CEOSS's cooperation. One of the leaders was Maurice Fahim, who at the time was volunteering to teach bible lessons at the church.

CEOSS resumed its activities in Bani Ghani in the early 1990s. In 1994, multidisciplinary committees of Muslim and Christian community members were formed to tackle agriculture, health, education, environment, and youth issues. In order to facilitate the management of various activities, the community was advised to establish an NGO, and so the Bani Ghani Betterment Organization was created in 1997. This case will focus on the period since the NGO was established with reference to the composting initiative for which Bani Ghani has become famous.

## The Story

Through a capacity building and agricultural development project funded by CEOSS and Egyptian Swiss Development Fund (ESDF), the Bani Ghani NGO received extensive technical assistance. NGO had no premises when it was first established, and meetings were hosted at different people's homes. Through being associated with CEOSS, the NGO gained credibility and after five years of operation was able to raise £E 30,000 from well-off village people motivated by religious philanthropy. German Technical Assistance (GTZ) and the Ministry of Planning contributed £E 110,000 and established a building to host the NGO. The NGO grew over the years and now has income generating activities such as an upholstery workshop and externally funded projects supported by the Centre for Development and Population Activities (CEDPA). The NGO has recently embarked on a new project funded by the Swiss Fund aimed at marketing and exporting organic farm

produce. It has also developed a lab for seed hybridization and production of biofertilizer through CEOSS support.

Since 1997, CEOSS has been implementing a series of projects aimed at solving environmental and agricultural problems. The Bani Ghani NGO had facilitated the implementation of one of these projects, and a Participatory Rapid Appraisal (PRA) was conducted to understand the priority problems facing the village. A list of 25 problems was identified, which was narrowed down to five critical problems after CEOSS suggested focusing on those that were amenable to solution through currently available resources. The difficulty of cleaning the animal barn was repeatedly mentioned by the women. Meanwhile, the men complained of the costliness and ineffectiveness of using only chemical fertilizer in agriculture. They also mentioned that using cattle manure as a fertilizer created a cycle of unwanted weeds, as seeds of weeds consumed by cattle would be scattered through cattle droppings. The assistance of external consultants coupled with the innovative ideas of the local men and women resulted in a solution that tackled both problems.

Inspired by some of the other women in the village who had already taken this step, the women participating in the focus group suggested paving the ground of the barn so that it would be easier to collect animal dung. A consultant then suggested a pit at one end of the barn floor with a bucket that would collect dung and urine. The floor would be slightly tilted with a narrow trough so that waste would be collected and poured into the bucket. A metal chain dropping from the ceiling would pull the bucket out of the pit through a pulley mechanism. The waste collected would be used in a composting process to be handled by the men.

This model had slight flaws. The pulley mechanism was not easy to operate and made the bucket unstable. And the women still had to carry the heavy bucket outside the barn. A local mechanic created another pulley that functioned better, and a farmer suggested a small cart that would carry the bucket outside the barn.

To complement this process, the men started a composting model made up of various layers of natural materials supplemented with thin layers of chemical fertilizers. Through the assistance of a composting expert from Senegal, the farmers learned the benefits of adding urine to the dung, and that is why the waste collection mechanism designed in the barns allowed for urine collection as well. The farmers also replaced their conventional composting system of digging a pit in the ground (which resulted in puddles of filthy water at the sides) with a brick-built system. Because composting occurs at high temperatures, unwanted weed seeds were eliminated from the mixture. The outcome is high quality fertilizer.

This integrated system of animal waste collection and composting is now practiced by fifty families in Bani Ghani. However, at a cost of £E 90 to install the pulley in the barn, and £E 100 to build the brick fence for composting, many families could not initially afford it. CEOSS contributed 75% in cash towards the cost of creating both systems for 30 families. The families contributed the rest. In a small town like Bani Ghani, the local leaders are able to determine eligibility for such subsidies based on local indicators.

## Comments on Asset-Mobilization, Asset Building, and Community Initiative

CEOSS and the Bani Ghani NGO engaged with the community in this initiative as “problem solvers”. Yet what started out as a problem-based, quasi citizen-driven initiative turned out to have several features of an asset-based approach.

“We don’t need consultants anymore. We have mastered the process and feel like it is our own,” explained a farmer who now composts regularly. Such enthusiasm can be attributed to seeing the tangible benefits of using organic fertilizer. The women are also very pleased with their upgraded barns. The new system saved them tremendous time in cleaning, produced purer milk, and also earned them a more respectable status among other women in the village. The women now boast about who has the cleanest barn, and other women try to emulate them.

Such ‘perks’ for both the men and the women evidently make them want to sustain the systems on their own. Other villagers who did not benefit from CEOSS funding are seeking ways to have similar waste collection and composting systems set up. While the initiative’s stimulus came from an external organization, the citizens have now bought into the initiative. Those who do not have the system want to create it, and those who have it want to maintain it.

What Community Assets were Mobilized?

### *Individual Assets*

This technically innovative waste collection and composting model called for several local skills and talents. As mentioned above, the local mechanic was asked to suggest an alternative to the old pulley. The local iron maker was also asked to design a cart to transport the bucket outside the barn. ‘Am Maurice’s persistence in re-inviting CEOSS to Bani Ghani should also be commended.

Lotfi Kamal is a member of the General Assembly of the local CDA and is known for assisting the farmers in applying the composting process through using his education in agriculture. He is also actively involved in experimentation and measuring the impact of using natural fertilizer versus chemical fertilizer.

### *Social Assets*

The social assets apparent in this case developed over the course of the initiative. Both the composting and the waste collection processes were discussed in groups which stimulated sharing of ideas and encouraged group members to try out the processes themselves.

What is interesting about the waste collection and composting initiative is that it builds on the traditional roles of women and men in society, which are deeply etched in rural culture. Both ideas were congruent with what men and women traditionally do, which explains the community’s high receptiveness to them. As simple as they may be, the waste collection and composting processes heightened the sense of family as men and women could conduct complementary activities that enhance family wellbeing.

### *Organizational Capacities*

Individuals within the Bani Ghani NGO possessed certain qualities that added to the initiative's success. Amgad, who is responsible for the agricultural development committee at the NGO, has a degree in agriculture. He has an understanding of the scientific nature of composting including the ingredients used and the reaction that takes place. His scientific knowledge coupled with the indigenous knowledge of the farmers ensured a sound process. Moreover, Amgad is the one responsible for the organic seed hybridization lab. Through some tests, the NGO found that the seed formula produced by the lab, when used with organic fertilizer, results in much healthier agricultural produce in terms of yield and quality than that produced with organic fertilizer alone. This creates great potential for improved agriculture, the main livelihood source for Bani Ghani.

The NGO's primary strength is in the diversity of activities it manages through different committees, which include agriculture, environment, education, health, and income generation. The NGO also prides itself in catering to diverse segments of society such as children, women, youth, and the disabled.

### *Natural Assets*

The most obvious of the natural assets are the cattle manure and urine which are the primary ingredients to the composting process.

### What Project and Other External Institutional Assets were Mobilized?

CEOSS's institutional assets were critical. CEOSS is the largest local development body in Egypt, hence its ability to mobilize the community and resources is considerable. CEOSS made it possible to hire an external consultant to advise on the technical aspects of composting, and provided financial assistance to those families willing to try this new technology.

It is only natural that Bani Ghani has a smooth relationship with MOSA and other Government entities. It is associated with CEOSS, which is after all, the largest local development organization in terms of staff, outreach, and resources operating in Egypt. Having a religious outlook also somewhat facilitates its mission because people are more willing to cooperate with a religious based institution either out of trust or fear of being discriminatory.

### The Role of the Intermediary

It is quite difficult to draw a line separating the NGO from CEOSS, which has both positive and negative consequences. The positive implication is that the partnership between the NGO and CEOSS is so well founded that both seem to be one entity. The negative implication is that the NGO heavily relies on CEOSS for funding and direction. This was reinforced by the fact that the NGO is known to be the "CEOSS NGO" within the community. One of the NGO's members explained that whenever anything good happens

in the village, the people refer to it as “CEOSSian”. 90% of external funding to the NGO is provided by CEOSS. The rest comes from Social Fund for Development, Swiss Fund, and fee-based services delivered by the NGO.

CEOSS had earned credibility and trust from the community. ‘Am Maurice mentioned that, for example, if two alternatives of fertilizer were provided to the community, one from CEOSS, and another from another organization, people will blindly take what is provided by CEOSS. This can be attributed to CEOSS’s long years in the community, and its gradual approach to intervention.

As described by Eng. Samir Lotfy, Community Development Coordinator for North Minia, CEOSS undertakes three phases. First, it offers its services by promoting a set of activities that can benefit the community. Usually, these are non-controversial and non-threatening services that are needed by the community and are provided for little or no cost contribution by the beneficiaries. These could include literacy classes or provision of agricultural inputs. The second phase occurs after capacity building has been provided to a local NGO, and is marked by the ability of the board to make decisions and set strategic direction. The third phase is what CEOSS and the NGO aspire to achieve, which is wide-based community decision-making over development-related issues.

CEOSS’ role has therefore initially been a service-provider, but secondarily a link between the NGO and the outside world. The NGO may start out as the implementation arm of CEOSS, but gradually is supposed to become an independent entity. For this to happen, it needs to earn a similar level of trust from the community and credibility from outside agencies.

### The Influence of Policy

The agricultural policy in Egypt encourages sustainable agriculture and even forbids the use of artificial inputs beyond a certain level. Extension officers appointed by the Ministry of Agriculture and Land Reclamation (MOALR) are distributed at the district level and should follow a monthly plan set by the Ministry. However, there is a gap between policy and application. Due to limited resources, extension outreach is limited and the farmers find it difficult to relate to the officers. According to Eng. Samir, MOALR contacted CEOSS and asked, “How did you get the farmers to apply the composting process whereas the Ministry officers have tried several times and failed?” Eng. Samir attributes the Ministry’s shortcoming to inadequately trained extension officers. In order to complement the Ministry’s efforts, CEOSS recently signed protocols with MOALR for training of officers and supplementing of extension activities in two parts of Minia.

### Concluding Remarks

This case presents very tangible examples of both asset-based development and asset building. The waste collection and composting processes have both economic and social features. For the women, the upgraded barns saved them time and also improved their daughters’ school attendance, for previously some mothers made their daughters stay at

home to clean the barn. Now women spend 15 minutes each morning and afternoon cleaning, compared to 3 hours before. The cows produce purer milk due to their cleaner living and feeding environment. There are fewer mosquitoes because there is better drainage. As mentioned earlier, the women with clean barns now enjoy a certain social standing among their neighbours. Moreover, through participating in the focus groups, the women became more outspoken. As one of the NGO members commented, "Before, the women used to hide behind their veils. Now they speak comfortably in the presence of men."

Economic gains were clear for the men. Fertilizer made from solid waste used to cost the men £E 200 per ton, and was of poor quality. The organic fertilizer now produced through composting is worth £E 400 per ton and yields much improved agriculture. The initial investment of £E 100 for building the composting site yielded a return in improved income because produce was of higher quality, and reduced expenditure on chemical inputs. When organic fertilizer is combined with the biofertilizer, the results are even better. This results in the accumulation of financial assets for the family. The social implications for the men come from the gratification of making something themselves instead of buying it. The farmers explained how they test the fertilizer by taking a sample close to the ear and rubbing it between the thumb and index finger. If a crackling sound is heard, then the fertilizer is not yet ready. For the traditional farmer such subtle wisdom is of great value.

Ripple effects were felt when a nearby village learned from Bani Ghani and copied the composting system. Another example is of a village in Beni Souef who, through a CEOSS-organized visit, replicated the composting process with 40 families. However, it can be argued that the composting system was deemed more valuable than the waste collection system as apparently more farmers copied the composting process. The reason the waste collection system did not fare well beyond the 30 families assisted by CEOSS could be a perceptual one. With conventional waste collection, the women used to add sand to the manure so that it would dry up and be easier to collect. The sand has the effect of increasing the volume of manure. Without the sand, farmers tend to believe that the amount of manure is less and hence prefer the conventional system. Another reason could be a gender issue, related to the different roles of men and women: Is the value added from fertilizer considered more important than time savings in cleaning the barn?

The significance of this case nonetheless demonstrates that the solutions to problems are often closer than you think. With new ideas for their use, local resources can take on a value they did not have before. Linking local resources to new ideas may take some organization – by local farmers, local organizations, and external institutions. However, where there is trust and credibility in these organizations and institutions, the process of linking to opportunities is much smoother.

Title: Moving Beyond Conventional Charity Work  
Community: El Hadaba El Wosta (Fat'het Kheir)  
Theme: Volunteerism & Active Citizenship  
Wisdom: Never doubt that a small, group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has (Margaret Mead)

## Background

This case study describes the evolution of a youth-led initiative in Cairo which started as an informal activity of a few volunteers who had just graduated from university, and over time was transformed into an NGO. Fat'het Kheir (FK), meaning 'the gateway to wellbeing' has now become recognized for its spirit and innovation within the Egyptian development arena.

FK operates in El Hadaba El Wosta area on the Moqattam plateau in Cairo. Around half a million people, many of whom lost their homes in the 1992 earthquake, live in residential blocks built by the government. The area's population is heterogeneous, with most families coming from slum areas and other poor urban and rural areas. Many of the men work as casual laborers, requiring them to be away from home for stretches of time. There is therefore a high percentage of women-headed households – whether temporarily (due to separation) or permanently (due to illness or death). FK supports this community mainly through an interest-free microfinance program and other activities such as an embroidery and crochet workshop, a cooperative kitchen, and an arts program for children.

The NGO prides itself on its core values. FK consists entirely of volunteers. These volunteers believe in a holistic approach to development that sees poverty as a multidimensional concept. Volunteers further commit to establishing personal connections with community members rather than dealing with them in an aloof manner as clients or recipients. FK relies entirely on Egyptian funds through individual donations and in-kind contributions from the private sector.

## The Story

In 1998, Ehaab Abdou, FK's primary founder, got to know the area and its inhabitants through some volunteer work with another local NGO. The NGO was engaged in conventional charity work and almsgiving during feasts. Abdou witnessed great commotion among the residents scurrying to collect a kilogram of meat and £E 5 from this NGO during the Great Bairam. This led him to question the efficacy and sustainability of this charity activity. Through various conversations with the local citizens he came to realize that a lack of capital and cash liquidity posed an obstacle to the initiation of any micro-business which may help with breaking out of the cycle of poverty. Gihane, a community member who was employed as an administrative assistant at this NGO, was particularly interested in coming up with an alternative model.

With three other friends, all fresh university graduates, they decided to pool together a small fund from their individual incomes to form capital from which they could start dispersing small loans. "We didn't expect the money back. We thought if it wasn't repaid then it would

be our donation, but we didn't tell that to the people," said Marwa Sharaf El Din, one of the four initial volunteers. Abdou came up with the idea; he had become familiar with microfinance programs through some work he had done with the Near East Foundation. Through some research into international microfinance models [such as the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, Freedom from Hunger, and the Foundation for International Community Assistance (FINCA) village banking model] a simple loan scheme was established. The loan scheme evolved through trial and error. In the beginning, loans were given individually and the amount depended on the kind of micro-business, ranging from £E 250 to £E 500. Later borrowers were to form small peer groups through which they guarantee one another as a group. The loan size increases by £E 100 as participants graduate into subsequent cycles, of which there are eight in total. Being a community resident, Gihane's input was critical during this design period.

The first loan participant was Mrs. Karima, a relatively better educated and financially well off woman who wanted to start a children's nursery. The idea was viable because, given the predominance of women-headed households, women had trouble making arrangements for their children during work. Mrs. Karima hosted the weekly meetings between the volunteers and the women applying for loans. Holding these meetings at her home encouraged more women to participate in the loan scheme. Seven women were soon benefiting from the program, with mentorship provided by the four volunteers.

The loan participants would pay back the loans in weekly interest free installments. But one of the women, a widow with six children, continually suffered from family catastrophes and sometimes borrowed money to repay her loan or asked the volunteers for charity. One of the volunteers encouraged the woman to save by asking her to pay an additional pound with her weekly installments; this would constitute her savings and would be kept safely by the volunteers for her future use. This formed the start of the saving component of the scheme.

Other initiatives started to sprout. A cooperative kitchen project, where women prepared meals made from organically grown ingredients, a crochet and tricot workshop, and a supplementary rabbit growing project were established. These initiatives catered to the women who weren't interested in being entrepreneurs but who were willing to work for a wage and learn new skills. The FK volunteers used their business skills to identify activities that were likely to be profitable.

In addition to the financial donations from family and friends, the volunteers also collected used clothing. Initially they were planning to give the clothes away but then came up with the idea of selling the clothes and using some of the proceeds for development activities. A few of the women became involved in mending the clothes and the volunteers assisted in selling them. Half the returns went to the women who repaired the clothes while the other half was pooled in an emergency fund. This fund came into being as the volunteers recognized that some of the repayment problems experienced by borrowers stemmed from financial demands caused by unforeseen events – such as a family illness or the need to pay for tutoring for a child. Loan repayment rates, which had dipped to 65% with expanding numbers of volunteers and recipients, soon returned to 99%.

But with expansion and growth came certain unwanted attention. Leaders of a nearby charity-based NGO felt intimidated by the volunteers' presence and the community's faith in



them. So they reported the volunteers' informal activities to State Security. "That NGO really did us a favor," said Marwa. "After investigation, the State Security advised us to register with the Ministry of Social Affairs." It took FK two years to register because of complications with a contentious law which was being modified at the time. For about six months they operated under the auspices of the Rotary Club. FK was officially registered in July 2001 and continues to work with families in the impoverished Moqattam area. Currently there are 84 loan recipients, 500 participants in various activities, and 104 on-call volunteers.

### Comments of Asset-Mobilization, Asset-Building, and Community Initiative

A cursory look at this initiative might lead one to describe it as a group of young, educated and well-off friends who used their spare time to do something for charity. Yet a closer look at the picture reveals that their approach invited community participation. They actively sought out community input into all decisions made about the program.

#### Which Assets were Mobilized?

From the start, three community members actively contributed to formulating the key elements of the microfinance program: Mrs. Karima hosted the initial meetings at her home, Om Mahmoud acted as the link between the volunteers and the community, and Gihane was actively involved in designing the loan program. Since the registration of FK as an NGO, Gihane has also been serving as the Secretary of the Board. From the inception of the microfinance initiative these three women have voluntarily engaged in numerous activities.

Gihane, Mrs. Karima, and Om Mahmoud's credibility within the community formed a gateway for FK to run the microfinance program. Om Mahmoud is a typical community leader who is always called upon in times of crisis. Her influential presence was felt during the weekly FK meeting. "Please don't take me the wrong way, but when one of the women here suffers and needs to talk with someone, she will still have some difficulty relating to someone [with a different social background]. We understand and can relate to one another."

While the volunteers brought innovative ideas and a style of management learned at school and work, the local community provided their business experience. The volunteers were surprised to find that they were dealing with such experts. They recounted that during discussions on the savings issue, community members argued that it was not fair to keep their savings considering the opportunity cost of gaining interest on a bank deposit. Another woman described using the loan to "purchase low cost merchandise with quick turnover to shorten the cash cycle".

#### What Project and External Institutional Assets were Mobilized?

##### *Individual Assets*

The particular skills and character of the initial four volunteers certainly enabled the initiative to get off the ground. Humility, eagerness to learn, and determination to make a difference were critical qualities to becoming accepted by the community and pushing the initiative

forward. What distinguished this group from others within their social class was the focus on strategic and sustainable development as a personal mission rather than sporadically supporting charities. Moreover the volunteers' educational background and work experience formed a rich asset base. Collectively they brought skills ranging from marketing in multinational corporations to software development to international development.

### *Organizational Capacities*

FK's responsiveness and flexibility in adapting their activities to newly recognized circumstances or interests is one factor contributing to their success. The idea of the savings component and the emergency fund are examples. To elaborate on the story of the savings component, once it became part of the system, people forgot about it. This was the case for a few months until some of the recipients began experiencing financial difficulties and were advised to use their savings to make their payments. The word spread, and shortly everyone demanded their savings back which the FK volunteers felt would be detrimental to the idea of having savings. After several meetings, a compromise was reached by agreeing that savings could be redeemed after graduating from the fourth loan cycle. The community accepted this because of the quality of the personal relationships between FK and community members. In the words of one of the loan recipients, "When my ill husband was dying I called one of the volunteers at midnight. She immediately came to comfort me and went to the hospital to check on my husband. She was there during the toughest times."

### *Social Assets*

"If I can rank all the resources which we drew on in FK, I would put connections as the top one," attested one of the volunteers as she referred to the myriad social connections they enjoyed as a group of upper-class youth. It was through social connections that they operated under the umbrella of the Rotary Club before registration. It was also through connections that they could access thousands of pounds in donations.

### *Financial Assets*

Social connections, especially the external ones accessed by the volunteers, were mainly used to leverage financial assets. As one of the volunteers described, "One of the local youth here had to quit school to make money because her mother had become ill. It was such a pity to watch a bright young girl have to forsake her education. I sent out an email message to acquaintances and friends to describe her situation. The money I collected through donations has still not run out to this day!" This is typical of FK fundraising, an approach friendly to the NGO law, which puts no restrictions on voluntary donations as opposed to organized fundraising campaigns in public spaces.

### *Other insights*

Apart from the numerous assets deployed by FK, there were other indications of using an asset-based approach albeit unannounced and unconscious. To illustrate, when the volunteers felt that loans directed toward petty trade might have reached a saturation level they thought about identifying other skills possessed by local women so that they could direct loans towards new activities. Because a large percentage of the citizens are from rural

areas, they found that the women were talented in raising rabbits at home. It was also convenient for the women who wanted to earn income while staying at home. With this thinking, the rabbit loan program was created, in which an in-kind loan of a cage, three rabbits, and rabbit feed was made available. The women already had the capacity to carry out a rabbit raising program, FK merely helped come up with a strategy and format for the existing skills to be put to use for income generation.

### Asset Building

One can recount numerous examples of asset building in this case. For a newly established community with few or no social ties, the participating women were pleased with the friendships developed through the loan group mechanism. One woman expressed, "We are like family. When one member of my group is not prepared to pay the installment, I support her because I know she would do the same for me."

On the part of the volunteers, especially those dedicating a lot of their time, many qualities were gained, among them are patience and perseverance. Despite their admitted naivety, the volunteers explained that perhaps this same naivety was their drive for success. Experience can lead one to realize that a path is too difficult to take or that a problem is unlikely to be solved. In a sense, the volunteers' inexperience meant they didn't grasp the magnitude of problems they encountered, and hence they did not give up until something worked.

Moreover, the volunteers recounted that several of them have left their work in the business sector and sought careers in community development. According to some of the volunteers, working in development was seen as "serving this generation's national cause, a generation devoid of a sense of purpose, unlike others of the 1950s and 1960s." Such strong sentiments are refreshing yet worrying at the same time. For youth who identify so much with FK, extricating themselves from the community will not be an easy task. A gradual phase-out of the volunteers and additional engagement of the community in managing FK is inevitable if sustainability is to be achieved. Currently FK is faced with questions from being at this important junction, and while there are signs of the community's eagerness to take over, it is difficult to imagine how the community will do without the volunteers' contacts and fundraising ability.

### The Role of the Intermediary

Despite the frustrations of dealing with MOSA, Gihane admits that because of the friendly relationships established with local ministry staff, FK was able to enjoy certain concessions. For example, when FK was first registered some of the board members appointed by founders were recent members of the general assembly, while the law stipulates a minimum time duration that needs to be met before a general assembly member can become a board member. MOSA discovered this mistake after three general assembly meetings. Rather than dissolving the NGO, which normally might have been expected from MOSA, staff advised the youth to solve the issue by calling for an extraordinary general assembly meeting where new nominations would be made. Gihane cited other examples of MOSA staff's support. FK is always informed of important seminars sponsored by MOSA. Moreover FK was

advised that, as an NGO, they are eligible to pay half price for electricity. Connecting FK with a tricoteuse teacher was another contribution of MOSA staff.

“The paperwork requirements are cumbersome. Yet the filing system forced by MOSA was actually beneficial. It helped us organize ourselves. We always ask MOSA what to do,” reported Gihane. While MOSA can be at best perceived by NGOs as the ‘benevolent dictator’, and at worst as ‘the enemy to NGO activity’, comparing FK’s experience with that of other fledgling NGOs, it seems that more positive results were achieved through a friendly relationship than if FK had taken an adversarial approach.

From its early days as a small group of friends to its current structure as a registered NGO, FK has acted as an intermediary between the community and the outside world. In some cases, such as its “Meals on Wheels” program (for providing prepared meals to disadvantaged people), FK has a charity orientation. In other cases, such as the microfinance program, the orientation is clearly that of building self-reliance.

FK volunteers report that the most important factor that distinguishes them from the community members they work with is their access to other professionals in government and business. This view is shared by the community members, as in the words of Om Mahmoud, “if these volunteers were to leave, it would be a catastrophe. We would never be able to access the funds which they can access.”

Some of these volunteers are motivated by the fact that they are “giving” something to people they describe as “beneficiaries”. Other volunteers are clearly motivated by the closeness of the relationships they develop with community members, of “helping people to help themselves” and “seeing people take control of their lives”.

These volunteers see their role not just in initiating or bringing new activities to the community but in helping community members deal with the outside world. This usually involves some form of problem solving. When a beneficiary receives a loan for inventory to sell in a kiosk a volunteer will accompany that person to the wholesaler and help negotiate prices. If that loan recipient begins having trouble making her loan payment the volunteer will, together with the woman, try to determine if the problem is business related or due to some other factor. If, for example, the problem is low sales the volunteer may help the borrower with marketing ideas or help them identify new products to carry. FK has recently developed a health clinic, the idea for which was spurred by a meeting between the volunteers and a business owner who has a medical background. This doctor, a resident of Moqattam, offered to pay the rent for the apartment that would host the clinic, link the volunteer youth to volunteer doctors who would provide the clinic service, and provide equipment and medical supplies. The idea was discussed mainly among the volunteers, who were divided in opinion. Some saw this as a charity, which was not FK’s ideology. Others supported it and saw that the clinic would relieve the emergency fund, which was perceived as being more charity oriented. A poll was held and it was concluded that the clinic would be established. Another issue FK is trying to tackle is advocating with government over the rental agreement for the housing project. Both of these issues have emerged as important factors affecting the lives and livelihoods of community members.

As FK evolves it has tended to become less associational and more institutional in nature. It now has several programs and many volunteers to manage. Recently for example, Vodafone and SEKEM, as part of their Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives have offered to let four of their middle management employees volunteer for five paid working hours per week each with FK for a period of six months. This evolution is forcing some volunteers who find themselves with less direct contact with beneficiaries to re-examine their motivations for joining the organization.

It is also forcing the volunteers as a collective team to look for ways to gradually transfer ownership of the organization from volunteers to community members. In some ways this is already happening. A backlog of prospective borrowers waiting for volunteers to mentor their groups has forced some of the more experienced groups of borrowers to carry on their meetings without a volunteer mentor. Recently a community member (a daughter of a loan fund recipient) asked if she could become a volunteer. While this is something many volunteers would like to encourage they wonder how community members will access outside resources and deal with government officials without the social connections. One suggestion made at a recent meeting of volunteers is to try to recruit the educated sons and daughters of community members to work with experienced volunteers as they raise donations or lobby outside agencies.

Currently there are seven board members including one community member, and 33 general assembly members including the seven board members. The FK volunteers are eager to see more community representation in the board and general assembly. They are encouraging the community to become members of the general assembly so they can have more voting power to elect the board, and ultimately take over Fat'het Kheir. There are also six administrative full-time staff from the community who, although employed, have been influenced by the spirit of volunteerism. For instance, Moshira, the administrative assistant, volunteers extra hours and is always offering suggestions and ideas. Somaya, one of the staff working in the women's sewing/tricot shop suggested FK branding, investigated silkscreen, suggested new marketing opportunities, and offered ideas for packaging.

Several long-standing volunteers reported that they see signs of eagerness to take charge in the attitudes of the community's youth. One volunteer reported that a group of young boys recently approached her with their ideas for improving the art classes that she was running. They suggested getting tables and chairs for the room. They also wondered about t-shirts with a local logo and offered to help fundraise. To solve the problem of a long waiting list of children wanting to take the class, they suggested splitting the class into two groups that would meet once every two weeks rather than once per week. Another initiative taken by FK to involve community youth in management was initiated when community members were counting on the FK to organize the annual one-day trip to the beach. A group of six young men and a woman from the community, together with two FK volunteers, organized the day trip for 150 community members. Now this group of community volunteers participates in the weekly meetings and help out in short term activities. They experience a new sort of social productivity and belongingness while working together with FK volunteers. These kinds of initiatives would seem to indicate that some people in the community are expressing a desire to be "members" of FK rather than its "beneficiaries." For those volunteers oriented toward building the self-reliance of the community and moving away from a dependence on FK as an intermediary, this is a positive sign.

### Concluding Remarks

Working together, El Hadaba El Wosta and Fat'het Kheir have moved beyond conventional charity work. By encouraging volunteerism and supporting social networks, they are working to end the cycle of poverty in their community.

Title: Building Community Capacity  
Community: Al-Darb al-Ahmar  
Theme: Asset Building  
Wisdom: Rain does not fall on one roof alone

## Background

In 1989, it was announced that His Highness the Aga Khan, through the Aga Khan Trust for Culture, would present a gift to the city of Cairo by sponsoring a project to transform the Darassa Hills into a park. The venture was named al-Azhar Park due to its proximity to al-Azhar Street, one of Cairo's main traffic arteries, and the historic mosque and university of al-Azhar. It was envisioned that the Darassa Hills, an area of about 35 feddans on the eastern edge of Cairo's historic city center, would be turned into a large park with recreational and administrative facilities housed in buildings inspired by Islamic architecture.

From this starting point, the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC) began negotiations with the Egyptian authorities and other partners on the logistics of implementing the project. Two architectural firms, one Egyptian and the other U.S.-based, were hired to design the Park. Meanwhile, the AKTC would take on uncovering and restoring a section of Cairo's historic city wall that would form the Park's western perimeter.

Due to its shape, the Park's eastern and western borders are much longer than its boundaries facing north and south. To the east, south and north, the Park borders a highway, a cemetery and a municipal parking garage respectively. To the west, however, along the length of the border formed by the old city wall, the Park meets the eastern reaches of the old neighborhood of al-Darb al-Ahmar, an area with more than 900 years of continued urban development. Residential and commercial structures on the edges of al-Darb al-Ahmar are, in fact, separated from the Park only by the wall; in some cases, houses have been built on top of the wall itself and are just a couple of meters from the Park's grounds. The neighborhood, once part of Cairo's commercial and social hub, had over time become marginalized and distressed. It is home to around 87,000 inhabitants, most of them low-income families, and has all the outward appearances of a slum. What distinguishes al-Darb al-Ahmar from other slum areas, however, is its wealth of Islamic monuments and abundance of workshops, many of which specialize in traditional crafts.

The developers of the Park recognized that their project called for simultaneous rehabilitation efforts in al-Darb al-Ahmar, particularly in the sections lying nearest to the Park. The rationale behind this was that the Park could not be created in isolation from the neighboring community, whether in terms of the community's members or the area's physical fabric. The idea was to pursue different types of intervention in order to create synergy between the Park and the community of al-Darb al-Ahmar. In this way, community members would feel included and would not be hostile to the Park's developers and external visitors.

In the mid-1990s, a number of field research exercises took place in al-Darb al-Ahmar to lay the groundwork for the community development initiative. The Center for Development

Services (CDS) was asked to become involved at this point in order to take part in the community needs assessment process. In November 1996, a participatory appraisal exercise began and was conducted mainly by local volunteers. Other research conducted by AKTC included physical and architectural surveys of the area's residential and commercial buildings and numerous monuments. The findings of these studies were used in the formulation of a comprehensive plan for the rehabilitation and revitalization of al-Darb al-Ahmar.

A number of donors were approached to fund this project, which was named "*al-Darb al-Ahmar Integrated Project – An Action Plan for the Economic Revitalization and Environmental Upgrading of al-Darb al-Ahmar.*" Several agencies expressed interest and the project was eventually financed by a main donor, the Egyptian-Swiss Development Fund (ESDF), while other donors supported specific sub-components of the project. In the meantime, AKTC established a local subsidiary, Aga Khan Cultural Services-Egypt (AKCS-E) and agreed with CDS to form a partnership to implement the project, due to CDS' experience in the field of social development.

### The Story

The al-Darb al-Ahmar Integrated Project (DAP) was a large-scale, ambitious undertaking, to address specific areas of intervention. As its name denotes, it espoused an integrated approach to community development. The project began in April 2000. At first, the project conducted some of its activities using the local Youth Center as its base. After a few months, a local space was rented to serve as the project's field headquarters. This consisted of the ground floor of an apartment building, in addition to a open area in the back, which was paved, shaded and set up to accommodate community gatherings and other activities.

A group of local volunteer youth was recruited at the project's outset in order to foster participation by members of the local community and strengthen the project's prospects for continuity. This group became known as the "Friends of al-Darb al-Ahmar" (DAF), and had about 10-15 members of mixed gender, aged 18-30 years. Most of these people remained involved throughout the project. Members of the group were trained in various skills relating to community development including community outreach, research methods, networking, project design, project implementation and report writing. They were considered volunteers and were given a monthly allowance to cover transport and other work-related expenses. Most importantly, the DAF were all residents of al-Darb al-Ahmar and were directly involved in the day-to-day running of all of the project's social programs. The youth were selected due to their high level of commitment to serve their community and because of their availability to be involved with the project on a full-time basis.

The DAP divided its activities into five major project "components." Each component was concerned with a specific area of intervention, and operated through a number of sub-components, or programs. To lend an impression of the project's scope, its components will be introduced briefly:

- § Component A, "Employment and Job Creation," focused on improving the community's economic situation. It aimed to provide community members with opportunities for employment and to acquire practical skills through job placements



and apprenticeships at local workshops. There was also a program that enabled the training and employment of local labour in the restoration of local monuments (conducted by AKCS-E) and another program to extend Bank-Guaranteed Lending (BGL) to local businesses.

- § Component B, “Community Services,” aimed to improve the level of basic social services available to the local community. Under this component, there was a micro-credit program targeting local individuals (especially women), businesses (groceries and electronics stores) and workshops (welders, mechanics and metal-working crafts). There was a Family Health Center, created to provide medical services and promote awareness on public health issues, and a Community Arts Program, which provided a forum for local children, youth and adults to express themselves through various art forms (singing, theatre, plastic arts).
- § Component C, “Environmental Upgrading,” was concerned with the physical environment of the neighborhood. Its programs included redesigning the Tablita market – a local traditional vegetable market – through actively incorporating market vendors’ viewpoints into the design process. Another program provided credit to encourage the rehabilitation of local housing by a team of AKCS-E architects and builders. Beneficiaries of this program were mainly tenants of rent-controlled housing who have life-long leases to their dwellings and thus displayed an active interest in their physical upgrading. There were also initiatives to develop a partnership with a private solid-waste management company operating in al-Darb al-Ahmar and to conduct clean-ups in areas where excessive amounts of garbage had gathered.
- § Component D, “Community Management,” aimed to empower the local community to address its needs through the creation of a private Community Development Corporation (CDC), which would undertake investment in projects identified by, and benefiting, the local community.
- § Component E, “Institutional Capacity Building and Documentation,” worked on providing training and funding to local community-based organizations (CBOs) to support them in their services to the local community.

The DAP was to take place over three years, meaning that it was originally planned not to operate its activities beyond the end of 2002. A mechanism to ensure the continuity of these activities therefore had to be devised. It was envisioned that the majority of its programs would eventually be handed over to two NGOs founded by members of the local community with support from the project in the form of capacity training programs and small grants. These NGOs were: “al-Darb al-Ahmar Business Association,” which was to take over most of the programs run under Component A as well as the micro-credit program; and the “Community Services Association,” which was to run most of the activities of Components B and C of the project. The establishment of these NGOs was, in fact, an output of the project and took place under Components A and B respectively.

However, due to the project’s size and other factors, its duration was extended another year. Also, during the course of its implementation, a number of targets in different sub-components were amended in response to realities encountered in the field and some of the programs – such as the CDC and BGL – were not fully realized, mainly due to practical

difficulties encountered in their implementation. Towards the end of 2003, AKCS-E and CDS decided not to renew their partnership should the project secure additional funding and be extended another phase. This was mainly due to differences in the institutional culture and vision of each organization. For example, AKCS-E appeared to be resisting a hand-over of the project's activities to the two local NGOs mentioned above and favored maintaining more direct control over the project. AKCS-E also preferred sub-contracting the DAF as project employees rather than transferring them to the two NGOs as staff members as envisioned by CDS.

Since AKCS-E was the major partner in the DAP, CDS withdrew from the project at the end of 2003 and the project is currently operated by AKCS-E, which has approached several donors for funding to extend the project. As to "phase one," the targets set out for each of the project's components have largely been met in terms of the planned outputs of the various activities. Insofar as it has achieved the majority of these targets, stimulated a degree of change (both physical and social) within the community and managed to undertake an integrated approach to community development, the DAP can be termed a success.

#### Comments on Asset-Mobilization, Asset Building, and Community Initiative

In many ways, the al-Darb al-Ahmar project was bound by the traditional elements of a community development effort that was funded by an established, external donor, i.e. deadlines, targets and other specifications. The DAP was thus conceived and implemented through the "development project" mentality. This, however, did not render the project wholly inflexible, nor did it preclude the use of numerous community assets in many of the project's sub-components as will be shown below, although it inevitably placed constraints (direct or indirect) on endogenous action. Nevertheless, there are a few examples of community self-mobilization that took place through the DAP.

The needs assessment study conducted in 1996-1997 and other research on al-Darb al-Ahmar had yielded a plethora of problems from which the area suffered. The research had also revealed, however, a number of advantages and opportunities available within the community. As noted in the introduction to the final report on the findings of the PRA:

*The positive aspects of the area are many: easy pedestrian and transit access, a lively residential fabric, an active (if struggling) mix of commercial and small manufacturing activities, cohesion and a sense of place among the inhabitants, and an extraordinary collection of late medieval buildings. These assets are presently depressed by urban decay and deteriorating buildings, absentee landlords, entangled property rights, poor infrastructure, environmental pollution unemployment, crime, and a lack of economic opportunity.*

*Unresponsive public institutions and unrealized potential in community organizations have unwittingly contributed to the present situation because they lack purpose and have no coordinated program of action. As a result, the inhabitants feel powerless and disoriented in the face of mounting and seemingly insoluble problems. There is no doubt that these conditions will continue to worsen if left untreated, causing the area to deteriorate further and bringing about social and economic decline, as well as outright demolition of the physical fabric.*

It is interesting to note that while the prescribed remedy for the community's plight is exogenous intervention, the enumeration of specific community assets is used partly to justify this intervention. It would be fair to say that the project's designers attempted to see "both halves of the glass." This is the mindset with which the DAP was designed and implemented. The community's assets played a key role in attracting external interest and funding to support community development initiatives. And, to varying degrees, these assets were put to use in the project's activities.

### What Community Assets were Mobilized?

In any development project that capitalizes on community assets, there is an opportunity to bolster the assets thus employed. In the case of the DAP, several types of assets were strengthened and generated, varying from the individual and social to the physical.

#### *Organizational Capacities*

Once external assets were leveraged, the DAP mobilized community assets and encouraged community participation in many of its activities. The DAF are an example of direct community involvement in the project, as they acted as a sort of "entry point" to the community and helped to bridge the gap between project staff and members of the local community. There were also examples of active community involvement in several of the project's sub-components.

Another good example of this type of organizational capacity on the part of the local community was in the Arts and Culture program. Despite the fact that this sub-component failed to receive funding from any of the project's donors and was supported by very small grants from CDS and AKCS-E, this was perhaps the program that elicited the most enthusiastic response from its participants. The program began by providing painting and choral activities to local children, youth and adults, and expanded to include theatre and poetry writing workshops, paper recycling, calligraphy and other handicrafts. Almost all of the program's participants were residents of al-Darb al-Ahmar, as were a number of the activity trainers. Regular public performances and exhibitions of the artists' work were held and advertised locally. In these shows, the production relied on local talents and creativity; for example, song lyrics and scripts were written and developed by local writers and addressed pertinent issues such as unemployment, poverty and family problems.

The program's participants were highly active and dedicated; when they faced obstacles due to limited financial resources, community members overcame them by donating many of the props and producing sets for the shows. This program is thus a good example of an initiative that was, to a large extent, community-driven. It also functioned primarily through the community's assets: it utilized *individual assets* (the talents and skills of its participants), *physical assets* (the props and materials contributed by community members), and *social assets* (to mobilize the contributions

and support of the local community who attended the performances, and parents who encouraged their children's participation in the program).

There are other examples of DAP programs that mobilized local organizational capacity. One of these is an initiative that was begun by three local CBOs in April 2003. The initiative sprung from an environmental study organized by the DAP in which the three CBOs participated. Based on the findings of this study, the three CBOs decided to work jointly to reduce poverty, illiteracy and disease. Each of the CBOs had a unique asset: one of them had a large and active clinic, another was experienced in conducting literacy classes and the third was good at mobilizing partners for environmental-awareness campaigns. The idea was therefore to use each CBO's specialty to complement the activities of the others. The initiative was funded through Component E of the DAP but it was initiated by local CBOs, and utilized the physical assets of each CBO and the individual assets of their members. In an environment where purely endogenous projects are rare, facilitating these types of civil society initiatives is perhaps a first step towards more active involvement by community members.

What Project and Other External Institutional Assets were Mobilized?

#### *Institutional Assets*

Throughout the planning and implementation of the project, AKTC (and AKCS-E) as the major partner and, to a lesser extent, CDS dealt with a large number of government agencies. These varied from large institutions such as the Governorate of Cairo, the Supreme Council of Antiquities and the Ministry of Awqaf, to local government agencies, including the District Authority, the Local Council and the branch office of the Ministry of Social Affairs.

The interaction with these agencies was mostly positive and they were supportive of the project's activities. The red-tape typical of any large bureaucracy frequently posed hurdles. In some cases this threatened to slow momentum down. However, this was not unexpected and project staff developed mechanisms for coping with this problem. For instance, the Project Manager from CDS recounted that dealing with the Ministry of Social Affairs (which had jurisdiction over much of the activities in Component E) was difficult at first. "They were very suspicious because they didn't understand what we were doing and why. For external agencies to deal with CBOs is a very sensitive issue," he said. Over time, however, project staff members were able to cultivate a relationship based on trust, through inviting administrators at the Ministry's local office to attend meetings and workshops with local CBOs and through providing technical support to this office as well. In the case of the Housing Rehabilitation Program, which could not meet all of the District's complex requirements for issuing housing restoration permits, some of its activities had to be conducted with informal approval by the Governor of Cairo.

#### *Natural Assets*

To go back to the project's beginnings, it should be remembered that it was the availability of one very significant natural asset – the land that could be converted

into a park – that eventually led to an interest being taken in al-Darb al-Ahmar and created a “snowball effect” in terms of the scope of activities undertaken in the neighborhood. The land of the Darassa Hills, coupled with other physical assets such as its strategic location and available infrastructure (the proximity of main roads, electric, water and sewage networks), provided the seeds of the entire project. To this should be added other individual and social assets such as the Aga Khan’s interest in the project, the grant money he provided for the Park through AKTC, and the positive relationship between AKTC and the Egyptian authorities that enabled the project’s initiation.

Did these assets belong to the community? It can be argued that even the land, which is public property and therefore owned and controlled by the state, was not a community asset. In this sense, the land’s size and strategic location might have worked against any endogenous attempt by the community to reuse it. At the same time, however, there is no doubt that the Park’s proximity to al-Darb al-Ahmar and the area’s other assets mentioned above played a pivotal role in leveraging external assets for community development initiatives.

## Asset Building

### *Individual Assets*

In the case of individual assets, many of the project’s sub-components aimed to foster a skill, talent or characteristic. This applies to the apprenticeship program, the arts program and the capacity building program to train local NGO staff. It is also clear in the case of the DAF, many of whose abilities and skills were transformed by their work with the project.

### *Social Assets*

Social assets were enhanced in many ways referred to above, such as through promoting networking amongst local NGOs and between NGOs and local government.

### *Physical Assets*

Physical assets were also built: upon its completion, the Park will benefit the community in many ways, including serving as a recreational area and attracting external visitors and tourists who may generate local revenue; also, the restoration of the historic city wall and other monuments and the rehabilitation of residential housing has helped in preserving physical assets.

## Mobilizing and Building Assets Simultaneously

A program that attempted to build community assets was the Housing Rehabilitation Program. This was a program whereby local residents whose houses were structurally damaged could apply to have a team of AKCS-E architects and builders rehabilitate the structures. If accepted by the program, the costs of rehabilitation would be shared between the residents and the DAP. A credit scheme was also extended to a majority of the program’s participants, whereby they could repay their share of the

costs over a number of years. Although it is clear that this program was not citizen-driven, it did encourage citizen participation in terms of sharing the costs of the rehabilitation process and it made use of local assets in the form of social capital (relying on residents to convince their neighbors, for example), physical assets (the buildings and surrounding infrastructure were the basis of the rehabilitation scheme) and financial assets (the portion of the costs contributed by the residents).

### Asset Depletion?

Amidst all this asset building, is there a risk for depleting some of the community's assets? To date, the answer appears to be no. If anything, there have been assets that were underutilized. For example, many of the project's activities targeted specific geographic locations, usually those that were near the Park. There is scope to expand these activities and involve more members of the community. Also, many community members who have already participated in the project's activities can contribute more in terms of time, skills, and ideas. What is needed is to light the spark that will set this process in motion.

From the cases discussed above, it becomes clear that there are many elements of ABCD to be found in the DAP, but that the asset-based approach is not necessarily linear. In the al-Darb al-Ahmar case, the existence of certain community assets *without community action* leveraged external assets to fund community development programs. This, in turn, led to the utilization of other assets and to community participation in the development effort. Whether this will result in a sustainable community development remains to be seen.

### The Role of the Intermediary

As described above, the impetus provided by AKTC was fundamental to beginning the project. CDS then joined the DAP to design and implement the project's social components. The partnership dynamic between these two organizations turned out to have both positive and negative aspects. On the positive side, each partner contributed expertise without which the project could not have achieved its goal of an integrated approach to the revitalization of al-Darb al-Ahmar. Conversely, it was differences in the vision, management style and culture of each organization that drove a rift in the partnership. Whether and how this could have been remedied is not within the scope of this study. Suffice it to note that great effort must be exerted, both before and during the implementation of any partnership scheme of this type, to ensure that there is agreement on the basic approach in place. Otherwise, there is a risk of becoming counterproductive.

These problems aside, CDS and AKCS-E played a very active role in managing the project's various programs and attempting to encourage the local community's participation. Moreover, the project would probably not have taken place were it not for the funding provided by ESDF and other donors. In that sense, the DAP's use of community assets, and community participation were in the vein of "traditional" community development methodology.

## Concluding Remarks

It is quite obvious that the DAP is not a typical example of the citizen-driven approach to development, where citizens are the main instigators and drivers of the process. Nevertheless, this did not preclude active participation by community members, to varying degrees, in many of the project's activities. The project also succeeded to a certain extent in mobilizing and building community assets. This is perhaps because the project's scope and integrated approach allowed room for experimentation with different approaches to the development process.

From the examples discussed above, what is perhaps most clear is that existing community assets are mobilized most effectively when the initiative is largely community-driven, such as in the case of the joint project undertaken by three CBOs or the community arts program. In both cases, the community developed ownership of the process, and the use of community assets was prevalent.

It can also be argued that community assets tend to be utilized to a greater degree when the community is "forced" to rely on its own resources due to lack of external funding, as was the case with the community arts program. This does not necessarily mean that all community-driven and asset-based initiatives should rely on minimal external resources; it merely suggests that there tends to be a somewhat inverse relationship between external funding and the asset-based approach, especially in communities with little or no history of community mobilization. The lack of external resources in this case serves as a kind of incentive for the mobilization of local assets behind an initiative in which the community is genuinely interested.

Title: The Transformative Power of Art  
Community: Fishing Village, El Max  
Theme: Asset Building  
Wisdom: You may be deceived if you trust too much, but you will live in torment if you don't trust enough.

## Background

Meaning 'walls' in Arabic, the NGO 'Gudran' was sparked by the desire of two young artists to see how art could play a role in community development. Sameh El Halawany and Aliaa El Gereidy were passionate about linking art and development to highlight a community's beauty and individuality and to provide a vehicle for both personal and community transformation. This is the story of their work in a fishing village of about 9000 residents in El Max.

Situated in Alexandria, El Max comprises five sub-districts including a fishing village squeezed between petrochemical industrial sites, oil storage tanks and military establishments. It is located alongside the banks of an agricultural drainage canal that the residents refer to as the 'trench'. Modest three-storey homes were built by community members on the slope of the riverbanks with the entrance from the road at the top of the house, and the lowest level opening out onto the canal itself where fishing boats are moored. Most houses are in need of restoration.

Fishing is the village's main livelihood source, and provides 35% of Alexandria's total fishing industry, according to Sameh, one of the founders of Gudran. Nevertheless, the government attempted to resettle the fishermen to an inland area in 2000, an act defied by the fishermen. While they do not have title to this land, the fishermen have rights of use through contracts with the General Authority for Fisheries and Water Resources (GAFWR). Their home for centuries, this place represents their life and wellbeing, even though their claim to it remains tenuous.

Fishing is also threatened as a source of livelihood. The canal is now illegally used for dumping industrial waste, which has significantly depleted fish stock in the canal and driven fishermen further out to sea for fishing. This pollution has significant health implications as well.

The village suffers from lack of access to social services. There is only one health clinic, one pharmacy, and one bakery serving the entire El Max area of which the fishermen's village is only 1 sub-district. High narcotics use was also cited as a threat to the village.

The fishermen that own boats make an average of £E1000 in the winters and approximately 50% more in the summers from selling fish. Those working as daily labor on boats can earn £E300-400 in the winters and up to £E800 in the summers. About 60% of boat owners' income goes towards maintenance and repair of fishing nets and boats, which represents capital of about £E30000. The contribution towards maintenance is significant. Fisherman used to be eligible for subsidies on boat engines; now that those subsidies have been



removed, fishermen resort to installing old car engines in their boats. These are not suited for sea conditions and require frequent repair. Boat owners have to pay for licenses and are taxed according to the size of their engines.

### The Story

In the mid 1990s, Sameh El Halawany and Aliaa El Gereidy, a young married couple, started considering the benefit of the expressive arts for communities. As artists, they saw the opportunity for art to transcend the mere creation of aesthetic pieces and become a powerful means for community development. Toward this goal, they started teaching art to children and assisting various NGOs with setting up and operating art centers. Then in 1998, the couple partnered with the Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Service (CEOSS) in the beautification of a district in old Cairo through unleashing the talents of local residents. Similar work ensued for 2 years in Minia, this time with El Warsha, an art troupe creating musical and theatrical performances with development messages.

By 2000, Aliaa and Sameh had spent some time painting in El Max fishermen's village. Through an art studio they rented, they got to know the village and its community members and started teaching drawing classes for children. Over many discussions with the fishermen, they managed to convince them of the potential value of housing restoration for the community. "They used to throw stones at us. This community is particularly closed and is very suspicious of outsiders," explained a Gudran volunteer. Through time and co-existence, the village began to trust Gudran, and through funding from the Ford Foundation and later from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) Self Help Initiatives Fund, 20 houses were renovated and 60 have had small repairs done. The renovation work maintained the existing architecture and made use of local materials. Both volunteer and paid architects from Alexandria were consulted in the process.

Gudran was registered as an NGO with the Ministry of Social Affairs (MOSA) in April of 2003 with a board of seven directors. Gudran provides an outlet for the many of the people of the village through art classes, choir, literacy classes for both children and adults, story telling, a library, a film club, and a sewing and embroidery workshop for women. In addition, Gudran arranged with doctors at the clinic to provide health awareness sessions on a weekly basis. Another activity is the 'kitchen' where visitors are invited to experience the local food of the village.

Gudran also organizes annual art camps inviting artists from around the world to spend time in the village for inspiration and creation of art. In September 2004, artists from France, Africa and Egypt spent three weeks in the village. In this camp, Gudran expects the village members to assist the artists in creating their own art pieces. Through the camp, the village can develop a sense of pride by offering assistance to others.

Through such activities, Gudran aspires to change the public image of the village as 'rubbish' and 'insignificant' and create a 'front of defenders' who care for the village's wellbeing. Gudran believes that if they can attract enough attention to the village, the government may forego any further plans to resettle the fishermen. Upcoming plans, pending sufficient funding, include running a credit scheme for the fishermen to upgrade their boat engines.

## Comments on Asset-Mobilization, Asset-Building, and Community Initiative

Gudran was originally opposed to interference from the outside. As one of the community residents described, "We were very skeptical of these young artists and felt ashamed of letting them help us with restoring our homes. We kept refusing their assistance until the houses practically fell down." As described by Gudran, this village had bad experiences with researchers and surveyors who came to extract information without giving anything back to the community.

Gradually, however, through patience and co-existence, the community started to accept Gudran. Aliaa built trust by forming relationships with girls who had spare time. Women were convinced through their daughters that Gudran wanted to help the community. Finally the men also came around. Demonstrating the community's growing willingness to be involved and take charge of the initiative, Gudran now has 10 volunteers from outside the community and 12 staff and volunteers from the village itself.

Gudran's strategy was not problem-based. The founders of Gudran began to know about the village's problems with time, and only after they had decided to form their own project in this community. Their presence in El Max was not a deliberate choice based on the problems facing the village. The initiative can be described as asset-based, since it was through appreciation of the uniqueness of the village that Gudran came into being.

What Community Assets were Mobilized?

### *Individual Assets*

The volunteers and staff from the village possess unique individual assets. The volunteer responsible for the library is known for his ambition and desire to learn. Samah, who handles the literacy classes, was innovative in adapting the General Authority for Literacy and Adult Education (GALAE) adult literacy curriculum to include everyday skills. She also managed to combine the men's and women's literacy classes. Another staff member is also interested in becoming trained in health awareness so that she can deliver the sessions herself.

### *Social Assets*

The community is closely knit and introverted, with limited interaction with the outside world. As a result, norms of reciprocity and interdependence are common. For example, if a fisherman's boat or nets are damaged or lost at sea, everyone contributes money for repair or replacement. Their solidarity was demonstrated powerfully when they banded together to refuse to leave their village at the order of the government, and when they formed a fishermen's NGO in 1997 to protect their right of occupancy. Unfortunately, without the necessary experience to manage it, the NGO did not last long.

### *Physical Assets*

The fishermen's homes, with their unique architecture and their self-painted boats, were fundamental physical assets. It was the unique set-up of the homes along the canal and the overall charm of the village which captivated Sameh and Aliaa from the start. The physical restoration of these homes shaped Gudran's momentum. The physical features of the village are used by Gudran to attract positive attention to the community and to enhance its public image. It is interesting to note that while these are the community's assets, they were not mobilized by the community itself, rather by the external NGO.

### *Natural Assets*

The most obvious example of natural assets belonging to the community is the fish stock, albeit at risk of depletion. This natural asset represents the core asset for the livelihood of the community and its endangerment creates the rationale for Gudran's existence.

What Project and External Institutional Assets were Mobilized?

### *Individual Assets*

If it wasn't for Sameh and Aliaa's persistence and leadership throughout the Gudran initiative, it would not have continued. They both provided the impetus for the idea of 'art for development' and it was through Aliaa's plan of accessing the community through girls and women that trust grew. The skills and personal qualities of the other volunteers are also commendable. Each volunteer is skillful in teaching and is motivated by the idea of 'giving'. As expressed by one of the volunteers, "I was privileged to get educated in art, and I would like to give part of that education to the people here. I am not trying to change them, only expand their horizons, because they may not be able to depend on fishing in the future."

### *Social Assets*

The community's growing trust towards Gudran is an important social asset. Other social assets include their connections with art professors at the Faculty of Fine Arts, one of whom volunteers to teach on a weekly basis. Another example of strong social assets is exemplified in Gudran's connection with the consultant to the Governor, who has become a sort of champion for Gudran within the Governorate office. Having believed in the importance of the initiative, this official was very careful about nearby infrastructure renovations that were being made so that no harm would come to the village. Some previous renovations had resulted in the displacement of villages, or tearing down of vital means of access, such as bridges. He also decided to remove a rail line that ran through the village that was a safety hazard. Gudran is planning to cooperate with the same person in order to achieve the ambitious goal of transferring the fishermen's land rights from usage to ownership.

### *Financial Assets*

The funds provided by Ford Foundation and the CIDA Self-Help Initiatives Fund were critical for kick-starting Gudran's activities in restoration work. Both Ford and CIDA

disbursed funds to Gudran before it became registered as an NGO, which is considered an exception in funding agency operations.

### *Physical Assets*

Gudran managed to purchase the home of someone who had left the village and uses it as premises for hosting their activities. The volunteers preferred to avoid renting so that they “can leave something behind for the village that is hassle-free,” said Sameh.

### *Institutional Assets*

The institutional assets on which this community can draw appear weak. The GAFWR is meant to protect the fishermen’s right of occupancy through their contracts for right of use to the land, however GAFWR’s position is unclear with regards to the resettlement plan. GAFWR is said to have a credit scheme though the volunteers mentioned that no one benefits from it because the credit fund is not available.

A few of the homes in the fishermen’s village are not connected to the water supply, which is quite polluted. The fishermen collectively signed a petition requesting that the government connect all homes to a decent water supply. The request was refused, however, since the fishermen could not collect the fees required by the government.

Gudran only recently registered as a formal institution because State Security in Egypt is strict about informal organization and activity. Being a registered organization has its own benefits such as more legitimacy in raising funds, and the possibility of influencing opinion.

### Asset Building

There are quite a few examples of asset building in the Gudran case. Children and adults are acquiring new skills in art, literacy, and preventive healthcare. Social assets are also being built since children have space to interact and the first joint literacy class was held among men and women. The physical restoration of homes is another example of asset building. So is the heightened sense of energy in the village and residents’ gradual openness to outsiders.

### The Role of the Intermediary

As Sameh observed, “Art helps people discover themselves, not discover art. You need to catch the energy so that other activities may follow.” For a particularly closed community, Gudran’s intermediary role is significant. Though the potential impacts of Gudran’s work in EI Max are many, their main priority is to attract enough positive attention to the village that the government will abandon the idea of resettlement. Taking on this project, Gudran recognized both the immediacy of the problems EI Max was facing and the potential that existed within the community to tackle these problems.

Gudran’s strategy is very different to the approach of conventional NGOs. Perhaps this is due to having a background in the arts, rather than in development or civil society, which

brings a fresh perspective. Although a large part of Gudran's activity is advocacy aimed at changing government policy, Gudran does not confront government directly. Rather it hopes that through indirect channels, such as generating interest in the village and changing its public image, that government will change its stance. This approach is, therefore, dependant on the skills, achievements and successes that exist within the EI Max community.

Gudran is careful not to create dependency. For this reason the volunteers are switching their strategy in the upcoming art camp so that the village residents assist the artists and not vice versa. Gudran also welcomes local volunteers to join and handle activities, and there are several examples of this happening. However, the volunteers believe that the Gudran NGO is not the end goal of their work in EI Max. This is why they strive to involve diverse groups of local people in Gudran's activities, hoping that the positive momentum begun by the art projects will continue on its own for years to come. On eventually withdrawing from the community, the volunteers stressed that that is their dream. The volunteers are interested in solving the most pressing problem of resettlement, however, according to Sameh, "Once we feel that conditions are on the rise, we will leave the community."

Can Gudran play a role to help this community access the assets to which it has entitlement under government policy? Increasing the public profile of this community may be one way in which the situation of this fishing community can be reviewed.

### Concluding Remarks

Gudran's strategy was not problem-based. In fact, it was through the appreciation of the uniqueness of the village that Gudran came into being. Their presence in EI Max was in the spirit of genuine partnership, a mutual exchange of artistic talent. What is particularly interesting is that out of an asset-based art project, the community has been able to continue to fight a very serious problem – resettlement. By recognizing their assets, community members, with Gudran's help, have been able to create a strategy for dealing with their problems.

One important challenge facing Gudran is how it will extricate its volunteers from the community so that the initiative becomes fully locally owned and managed. The founders were persistent in gaining community acceptance and support, and have become well-known for their efforts, yet there are prospects for the community taking over. There are several community members who started out as volunteers and are now handling specific activities in Gudran. Gudran is also seeking ways to expand its general assembly so that it includes community residents.

Gudran is a showcase for alternative thinking and fresh ideas. To the civil society world, art may seem like an odd approach to community development – especially when compared to other more conventional methods such as income generation, micro-finance and family planning. Although the initiative is still too young to assess its widespread impact, there are indications that art can invigorate a society to pursue its dreams and manage its development. As they say, "art helps people discover themselves, not discover art". Such

“self-discovery” contributes to the confidence a community needs to assert itself for its own survival, or for the younger generation to explore alternatives.

Title: Fan Sina  
Community: St. Catherine's  
Theme: Responsiveness-Accountability  
Wisdom: Every woman can cook, but not every woman has 'breath'

## Background

This case study recounts the story of a development initiative which started out as a component of a bilateral aid program and turned into a unique model for sustainability in Egypt. The initiative was at first referred to as the "Craft and Income Generation Project of the Bedouin Support Program", a sub-item of a multi-million Euro program between the European Union (EU) and the Government of Egypt for setting up nature protectorates in South Sinai. One of these protectorates was the St. Catherine's Protectorate in South Sinai spanning 4300 km<sup>2</sup>, including Mt. Sinai where the prophet Moses was said to have wandered. One of 24 protectorates in Egypt and five in South Sinai, the St. Catherine's Protectorate was financially and technically supported by the EU since inception in 1996 until the end of 2002, and is now managed by the Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency. The Protectorate currently runs three programs: 1) the Bedouin Support Program offering a health service, veterinary support, vocational training, and other activities aimed at enhancing Bedouin well-being, 2) the Conservation Program that involves conservation monitoring of fauna and flora, protection of landscapes, preservation of archaeological and cultural sites, and 3) the Public Awareness Program to encourage eco-tourism and environmental conservation.

The Protectorate prides itself on adopting a participatory management approach which engages the local Bedouin community and integrates conservation work within the cultural framework. Out of a staff of 80, 56 are Bedouins including 25<sup>2</sup> environment guards who were appointed by the communities and endorsed by tribal leaders (sheikhs) to promote conservation. This is in line with the tribal law ('urf) which entrusts Bedouins with a stewardship role with respect to sustainable resource management.

## The Story

The Craft and Income Generating Project (CIP) was initiated in 1997 based on an assessment of women's craft potential in the area. Dr. Iman Bastawisi, an anthropologist, was commissioned to conduct this assessment and to establish an income generating activity for the women. It was found that their main craft-making skills constituted embroidery, beading and wool weaving. Traditional skills were passed from generation to generation, but little attention was given to quality. The women relied on their male relatives working as tour guides to sell the crafts to tourists going on trekking tours in the mountains. A combination of poor quality, dependence on the fluctuating tourism market and overpricing resulted in very poor sales.

---

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.stkparks.gov.eg/stk-z-website-frames.htm>

Preserving traditional handcrafts was a priority of the project. In consultation with the Bedouin women, a British artist weaver was brought on board. The two consultants worked on identifying and documenting available talent, raw materials and crafts. Through their guidance, the Bedouin women produced crafts, but only a few were sold through a display at the Protectorate visitor center. When the consultants' tasks were completed, Yousria, a Ranger at the Protectorate, continued encouraging the women to create traditional crafts.

Meanwhile, a Bedouin woman by the name of Seleima was working as a secretary at the Protectorate and assisting the consultants and Yousria with their everyday work. Seleima is the first Bedouin woman to gain a secondary school certificate in St. Catherine's, a status which required her to live with her relatives in Nuweiba', a coastal city 70 km away. Seleima was asked to help in marking the women's crafts. At that time, about 40 women were benefiting from training provided by the Protectorate and what little income was generated through sale of the crafts.

According to Seleima it was very difficult to market the crafts within South Sinai. Poor quality was a constraint. Women were also producing crafts such as sugar sacks traditionally given to their men before spending days in the mountains. Such products were sold as souvenirs, but carried no functional value and so were difficult to market to people from the area. John Gringer, Program Manager at the time, sensed that what was meant to be an income generating activity became too hinged on preservation, and that the days for EU support were coming to an end. Another consultant, Mohamed Amin, was commissioned in April of 2000 to conduct another assessment, and develop the CIP into a sustainable venture once EU funds were withdrawn.

Amin took a different approach to his assignment. He wanted to be able to sustain traditional skills while producing crafts that were marketable. "I learned the difference between preservation, where you maintain a dead object in a museum, and conservation, where you maintain a living object and create space for it to continue living," explained Amin. Together with Seleima, and through financial support of the EU, variations of conventional materials were gradually introduced, and colors increased from 7 to 80. On-the-job training was provided in setting up a craft-making operation. Four Bedouin women and one man were selected to run the operation, including Seleima who was chosen to lead it. Salaries for the staff of five were provided by the EU.

Working principles were agreed upon in a series of discussions with the team. The operation would be based on three pillars: 1) a social aspect that would target marginalized women with no alternative income source and would lobby for more services for the Bedouins, 2) a cultural conservation aspect that would promote traditional skills and invite younger Bedouin generations to conserve the tradition, and 3) an economic aspect that would maintain fair trade principles while encouraging women to create marketable products. The name 'Fan Sina' was chosen for the operation. It literally means 'the arts of Sinai'.

Seleima visits various Bedouin settlements around St. Catherine's in order to identify talent. The women interested in participating are provided with material and asked to show off their skill. Those who are identified as having potential and passion about the crafts are coached on improving the quality of their products and becoming suppliers to Fan Sina. Once orders are fulfilled, the women are paid a fair wage, regardless of whether the items are



later sold or not. Incentives are also added for women providing superior quality. Especially talented women are asked to coach younger women so that traditional skills can be conserved.

When the operation was up and running two options were discussed for its sustainability. The option of registering it as an NGO was excluded because of a collective desire to stay away from Ministry of Social Affairs' surveillance. In July 2002, it was decided to register Fan Sina as a limited liability company with 15 partners, all women, of which four would be managing partners. The women were selected by Amin and Seleima to represent the different tribes of St. Catherine's. Premises were established and a branch of the company was also established in Nuweiba'. Capital of £E 15,000 was provided by the EU. Special clauses were stipulated in each partner's contract indicating that profits would be reimbursed in the company, that shares would be transferable but could not be sold, and that the company could not be sold. Today, Fan Sina provides an average monthly income of between £E 60 and £E 150 to 350 Bedouin women. Some women make as much as £E 600 per month. Last year, the company generated sales of £E 200,000, up from £E 57,000 in 2001. Expenses included £E 80,000 in wages to Bedouin craft makers, with the surplus reinvested in the purchase of raw material.

#### Comments on Asset Mobilization, Asset Building and Community Initiative

What started out as a conventional sub-activity of a large project has turned into a private company, owned and operated by Bedouin women. "This is probably the only Egyptian development initiative where public funds were transferred into private ones," noted Amin. So, while the initiative was initially created by a donor's agenda, it ended as a model for local ownership.

Indeed the former income generating project had a paternalistic outlook. Consultant after consultant was hired to create an income generating activity, and each consultant had their own perception of what the activity would be. Luckily, John Gringer was open to and valued participation. This allowed Seleima's take-charge personality to shine through. It was really through Seleima and the other four Bedouins that the 'project' was transformed into 'Fan Sina'. The Bedouin team took on a participatory and culturally-sensitive approach. "I ask women to produce (crafts) that are reasonable within their capacity. I advise women on how to manage their time so that they don't disregard their home duties," proclaimed Seleima. Sayeda, the storeroom keeper, mentioned, "I learned to be patient because we deal with 350 women on a personal basis. It's not only the crafts that link us. It is also each woman's life, home, and problems."

There were also indications of having an asset-based mentality. Seleima described how in handmade crafts, each woman has her personal touch, and that it is essential to maintain that. "It's like cooking. Every woman can cook, but not every woman has 'breath'," said Seleima, referring to an Egyptian proverb in which 'breath' means a kind of aura which makes tastier food.

The success of this case lies in its transformation from an ordinary development project into a promising locally owned initiative. Such transformation warrants the examination of assets which were critical to the process.

What Community Assets were Mobilized?

### *Individual Assets*

In essence, individual assets were the basis of this initiative. The idea was to capitalize on Bedouin women's indigenous craft making skills in order to generate income. Without their skills, the project would not have been justified.

Seleima's leadership is undoubtedly a key factor in this case. For a Bedouin woman to obtain a secondary school certificate is unusual in itself, and this gave her the confidence to learn how to use a computer system to manage stock. Her vehemence and dignity are refreshing.

Seleima's role was significant in both phases. She represented the community's voice and acted as the liaison between the craft women and the consultants. The consultants provided the technical expertise, and Seleima (and later on the Fan Sina staff) added the knowledge of local culture.

Yet Seleima's sole leadership is also potentially worrying for it seems like at present no one would be ready to take her place if needed.

### *Cultural Assets*

The individual craft making skills mentioned above are in fact the product of a long standing Bedouin cultural heritage. According to Seleima, "every woman has her own unique stitch. You can tell who made each piece." These crafts not only represent the women who made them, but also reflect designs and motifs that are particular of certain tribes in St. Catherine's. The crafts are distinctly Bedouin.

### *Social Assets*

Bedouin communities in general enjoy strong social ties and a well-instituted system of norms and laws. In the case of Fan Sina, and because Seleima is herself Bedouin, it was relatively easy to establish contacts with different settlements and encourage women to participate. What made this networking more successful is the deep understanding of Bedouin culture, especially when it comes to gender issues, which Seleima and the other staff members honor. The women make additional income within the vicinities of their homes, and not at the expense of their home duties. This is an example of tailoring development initiatives to fit traditional roles of a society, a truly culturally-sensitive approach.

But it is not only the social capital of a Bedouin society that facilitated Seleima's job. It was also her and the team's reputation and credibility. For example, Om Youssif, one of the staff members handling quality control and maintenance of the premises, is an elderly woman who is well respected within the community.

### *Physical Assets*

The premises for Fan Sina were made available through an environment guard working at the Protectorate. He owned a piece of land on which he built two small rooms, one for storage and another to house a few sewing machines. After building the rooms, the location was rented to Fan Sina.

What Project and External Institutional Assets were Mobilized?

### *Individual Assets*

Individuals with a commitment to the social and economic future of the Bedouin were key to its success. John Gringer's personal asset was his eagerness to sustain the operation. According to Amin, Gringer understood that patience is a virtue and that development is a long term process. The activity has been supported since 1997 and it only started to stand on its feet in 2003.

The EU's role was enacted through the consultants hired. As mentioned earlier, two of the consultants initially hired had an anthropological background and focused on the preservation aspect of craft-making. The latest consultant combined conservation with marketing so products could be marketable while sustaining traditional handcraft skills.

### *Financial Assets*

The external funds of the EU kick started Fan Sina. It is doubtful that the initiative would have taken place had it not been for this type of funding. The mountains of South Sinai are an isolated area, and sources of livelihood in this Bedouin society have been limited to herding, tour guiding, and home gardens, with few opportunities for diversification.

Seleima enjoys connections with some high ranking officials. She recounted the story of a monk from the nearby monastery who recognized the income generating potential of this work for local women. He began negotiating with several of the women supplying Fan Sina, who then agreed to produce large quantities for export to a retailer in Greece. Seleima explained that because too much was asked of the women, poor quality was produced, which adversely affected Fan Sina's name.

### The Role of the Intermediary

The agency playing the role of intermediary between the Bedouin community and external entities shifted from the EU to the currently existing Fan Sina. The nature of this role also shifted and evolved. One of the critical factors of success in this initiative was that "development" was respected as a long term process. It takes an enlightened intermediary to realize that nothing is a 'quick fix' in development and to allow a project to evolve organically without stifling external control.

In order to avoid the perceived bureaucratic supervision of the Ministry of Social Affairs, Fan Sina decided to register as a limited liability company, as recommended by Amin. Yet Fan Sina is a non-profit company and since non-profit companies are not really represented in either the NGO or corporate laws, Fan Sina had to maneuver around the system to create a model that would best suit its interests. This is why partners' shares cannot be sold, and profit is not distributable to the partners. The founding clauses were put in place with the assistance of a legal accountant residing in a nearby town in South Sinai.

As a limited liability company, Fan Sina is required to pay taxes. But so as not to burden a non-profit operation in its infancy years, a certain degree of legitimate maneuverability was also needed within the Egyptian tax system.

Fan Sina staff has gradually taken over the roles previously held by consultants, as more women are enjoying an increase in income through crafts. Since Fan Sina became a registered company, high ranking officials who happened to pass by St. Catherine's began to know of their success and offered support. The Minister of Industry arranged for a two-week training for Fan Sina and the women craft makers on fashion design. The Italian Corporation also assisted them through training on fashion design, an activity which resulted in a joint fashion show in Sharm El Sheikh. The Governor has endorsed an application to register a piece of land that Fan Sina needs for expansion.

Yet Fan Sina's impressive connections do not mean that they are now completely independent. In fact, the company relies solely on Mohamed Amin for marketing in Cairo. Amin now runs a craft sales outlet for which he sources crafts from all over Egypt, including Fan Sina. Amin stated, "Fan Sina is still unable to handle marketing on its own." Seleima also makes regular trips to Cairo where she purchases raw material. Amin sees his role as "providing advice to the women and protecting them from the sharks" ('sharks' referring to exploitative retailers and other outlets).

Motivation factors vary for the Fan Sina team. Two of the staff mentioned that this is a convenient job requiring little or no interaction with men, which respects Bedouin culture. Apparently the staff is also paid handsome salaries by the standard of South Sinai. For Seleima, Fan Sina offered the opportunity to unleash her talent and energy and also serve her community.

Fan Sina has great dreams for the future. Seleima dreams of an integrated art center which showcases and develops South Sinai authentic crafts. Seleima also dreams of setting up an NGO that would serve the Bedouin community through addressing real needs such as health services and digging water wells. The founding members have been identified and paperwork is being processed for registration, a process that the Prime Minister has agreed to personally support, having seen the success of Fan Sina for himself.

Seleima has been repeatedly mentioned above; it would not be unfair to say that Seleima is the real intermediary between the community and the outside world. This is by virtue of her outreach role in identifying new women craft makers to participate in Fan Sina. Yet although Seleima enjoys a fairly prominent status within Fan Sina and the community at large, she is thinking of the question of sustainability as she stated, "the goal is that Fan Sina functions without me or Amin. No one should be indispensable."

Fan Sina is now witnessing a change in long-standing norms in Bedouin society. While women are gaining recognition for their income earning capacity, this has proven to be a double edged sword. Now, when Seleima visits the craft makers to deliver their payments, the men are there to take the money from their wives. In some instances, the men negotiate with Seleima for higher payments. According to Amin, such explicit behavior on the part of the men is a sign of desperation. It was taboo for a man to acknowledge in public that his wife is a money earner, if not the only money earner in the household.

### Concluding Remarks

Fan Sina is a good example of “thinking outside the box” providing a hybrid model of a non-profit setup and a for-profit style of management. Yet, the novelty of a non-profit company in Egypt, let alone St. Catherine’s, is creating challenges for Fan Sina. When asked why she wanted to set up an NGO, Seleima explained, “no one will give money to support a company. This is why that monk thought it was alright to work with the craft women, because he thinks we are a big business.”

The Fan Sina case reinforces an old lesson: local champions are at the heart of successful development initiatives. Seleima was the local champion in this case, and it is hard to envision the creation of the company without her. This is not only because of her active involvement, but also because her leadership and talent in crafts justified the EU’s decision to contribute the start-up capital.

Evidently Seleima enjoyed a certain degree of empowerment before joining the Protectorate or Fan Sina. She was the first woman to obtain a secondary school certificate in St. Catherine’s. Now Seleima is even more recognized. For a conservative, male-dominated society, however, such empowerment may place Seleima in uncomfortable social standing.

It is also important to note that the craft-producing initiative was indirectly supported by complementary initiatives that were being undertaken simultaneously by the Protectorate. These included a health service, veterinary support, vocational training, conservation program and public awareness programs all aimed at enhancing the well-being of the Bedouin people and their environment. The Protectorate’s participatory management approach engages the local Bedouin community and integrates all its projects within the cultural framework of the community.

The Fan Sina staff explained that personal relationships are the base for dealing with the 350 craft women. Interaction with them is based on trust, listening, and counseling. This human dimension was recognized by the Fan Sina staff, though they had no background in development theory or practice. This suggests that much of what we over-sophisticate and intellectualize about in this field is really common sense.

This case illustrates outsiders ‘investing’ in communities because they recognize the existing assets and the capacity of the local community to organize to mobilize these assets. It shows that success breeds success.

Title: Linking Community and Government for Development  
Community: Baharia  
Theme: Creating a Space for Community Leadership  
Wisdom: Leadership is action, not position

## Background

This case study describes and analyzes the factors leading to the success of a primary healthcare project in Baharia Oasis. This project had several stakeholders, including the Egyptian Social Fund for Development (SFD) which disbursed £E 3 million of European Union (EU) funds according to an agreement signed with the EU in 1998 for financial and technical assistance. The Ministry of Health and Population (MOHP) implemented the project.

The official title of the project is “Upgrading Primary Healthcare Services in Giza”. Almost identical projects were previously implemented in six governorates. The Giza project had a total budget of £E 10 million, seven of which was allocated to Al Ayat district of Giza, and the remaining three to Baharia Oasis.

Administratively, Baharia is part of Giza Governorate, although it is 370 km away from Giza (South of Metropolitan Cairo). Its population of 30,200 engages mainly in the agriculture of date palms, apricots, and olives. The total land area is 12,793 feddans, of which 12,150 are cultivated and divided among 2,771 land holders. Nestled in the Western desert, desert safari tourism is a source of livelihood for many residents. A small number of people are employed in various public services and district offices.

Being remote administratively and geographically, Baharia suffers from lack of public services and little attention from international organizations. Its health indicators are particularly low, with high incidences of diabetes, malnutrition, and gastro-intestinal disease resulting from poor water supply. Before the project, female genital mutilation (FGM) stood at an astounding 99%.

## The Story

Primary healthcare was an important component of SFD’s mandate. And since MOHP provides 95% of health services in Egypt, it was natural for SFD to partner with the Ministry in order to achieve widespread impact both in Baharia and in the other governorates. Using previous PHC projects that were implemented through EU funds in partnership with MOHP as a reference, SFD incorporated the Giza project in its annual program submitted to the EU for approval. A protocol of cooperation was hence signed at the end of 1999 1) to develop the skills of district health teams through capacity building, 2) to refurbish a number of health units, 3) to refurbish the district hospital, and 4) to develop a database of all families and their medical histories within each health unit’s service area.

The project started with the appointment of a project manager – Dr. Magda El Sherbini, who at the time was the Undersecretary of MOHP. Dr. Magda initially considered the Giza project to be a small project. But it was this perception that motivated Dr. Magda to turn this minor project into a major success story.

Committees made up of local political leaders, and stakeholders from the education, health, and social affairs sectors were formed at the village, district, and governorate levels. The committees met monthly to discuss local problems (that may or may not have been health related) and resolve them. Since the start of the project, the stakeholders were familiarized with a multidisciplinary approach that encouraged the resolution of social, educational, and economic issues in order to tackle health problems from the core. The committees relied on information brought to them through the health educators.

The health educators were the cornerstones of the PHC project. They were all women from Baharia who attended an initial training at the start of the project, and were filtered down to 25, followed by an additional 25 who joined later on. The role of these educators was essentially one of linking the communities with the project, so they were primarily responsible for awareness campaigns, conducting surveys, collecting information for the database, and assisting in various other activities.

The activities noted in the project agreement were fulfilled, and more. Six health units were renovated, extensive training was provided to the medical team in each of those health units plus the health educators, and a database and filing system was set up for all families within each unit's outreach. In order to develop this database, each house was numbered and a survey was conducted. An assessment of the hospital concluded that the building was not suitable for renovation, and that a replacement building was needed. Although the agreement had stipulated that no new infrastructure would be created, Dr. Magda negotiated with SFD and used the £E 1 million allotted for hospital renovation to build a new hospital. In addition she was able to convince the Minister of Health to incorporate the new hospital under MOHP's investment plan. Accordingly, an additional £E 1.2 million were leveraged from the Ministry for a new building. Another example of going beyond the project scope was bringing a weekly caravan of volunteer doctors from Cairo.

Through some consulting work that Dr. Magda was carrying out for the World Health Organization (WHO), she became familiar with a three stage approach for health teams to engage in the planning and solution of priority health problems. A planning workshop enables the team to analyze a problem based on data available, develop a one year activity plan that would tackle this problem, and agree on indicators for measurement. Following implementation, an evaluation workshop is held to judge the change in indicators and determine the level of effectiveness. Dr. Magda had introduced this approach to the project in Baharia, which was adopted by teams in each of the six health units. One of the teams worked on female genital mutilation (FGM). Their plan tackled the multiple dimensions of the problem and engaged religious leaders in the solution. Talks were held in schools (through coordination with the Education Administration), youth clubs, and homes. Doctors who performed the operation, and midwives who assisted were also addressed, and made aware of the legal consequences. The team took advantage of public performances such as plays to raise the issue and organized adult literacy classes, because illiteracy was found to be associated with higher incidences of FGM. After one year of such activities (which were also

adopted by the other health units) FGM was dramatically reduced. Not only is this a significant improvement, but being able to discuss the topic in public among both men and women was a great step forward in Baharia.

The project officially ended in March 2004. As with many development projects, sustainability became a concern. Luckily for the health educators, another health project funded by USAID and focused on child and maternal health came along. This project was able to make use of their skills and experience. However, the caravans stopped with the end of the project. Also, since one of the health educators' roles was to maintain the filing system, with many of them now gone, this system is no longer used regularly in some health units. Yet, this is not to discredit the fact that many achievements were indeed realized in this project.

### Comments on Asset-Mobilization, Asset Building, and Community Initiative

Is this asset-based or citizen-driven? At first glance, we can safely conclude that the community did not use internal assets first to lever external ones. Nor did the residents of Baharia set the design for this project. However, a closer examination reveals elements of asset-mobilization, asset building, and community participation in decision-making.

What Community Assets were Mobilized?

#### *Individual Assets*

The individual assets of the health educators were indeed exceptional. These were all relatively well educated women, who earned a monthly stipend of £E 150 from the project. At first people looked down on them because it was unorthodox for women to work, let alone go on home-to-home visits. But later on, as the community realized the value of the educators' work, people sought them and asked, "Why don't you come visit us more often?" When asked why they continued in the project despite initial inconvenience, most replied that Dr. Magda made them feel passionate about their work. One important trait common in the educators is their humility, which was cited as an important factor by the community members. "When I was skeptical of vaccinations, the educator would actually get vaccinated herself to reassure me," stated one woman.

#### *Social Assets*

As a small constellation of villages, there are strong *social assets* in Baharia. The educators, being part of this culture, availed of their knowledge of people in their village to conduct their work. For example, the very few families that did not practice FGM were approached to assist in the awareness campaign as positive models.



## What Project and Other External Institutional Assets were Mobilized?

### *Individual Assets*

Since the start of the project, Dr. Magda was set on implementing a multi-sectoral approach – soliciting the input and support of various Government officials in the project. It was the first time in Baharia that different Government offices had collaborated on a joint initiative. These are a credit to Dr. Magda's vision and managerial skills. In fact all three Government officials interviewed attributed the success of their teamwork to Dr. Magda's leadership.

Several youth clubs and NGOs hosted awareness sessions on FGM and other topics. Three local Government officials – Mr. Rushdi, Deputy Head of the Local Administration of the Oases and Bawiti City, Mr. Abdel Wanis, Manager of the Ministry of Social Affairs (MOSA) in Baharia, and Mr. Ashry, Head of the Education Administration – were particularly active in the project. Mr. Ashry, for example, facilitated access to boys and girls at schools in order to raise a discussion on FGM. Mr. Rushdi was an active and responsive member in one of the village committees and facilitated access to water and a waste collection service in his professional capacity in the Local Administration. Mr. Abdel Wanis agreed to provide financial support to widows and people with disabilities, as customary by MOSA, when the educators report such cases. The fact that these three officials were more active than others who were invited to take action also alludes to their individual assets. Mr. Rushdi referred to the stakeholders' "faith in the project and its case" as one of the factors behind the officials' motivation. There is a fine line between the individual and the institution which leads us to say that some combination of character and institution is necessary for things to happen.

### *Institutional Assets*

Dr. Magda was backed by the institutional assets of MOHP, the implementing agency of this project, and these in turn (in terms of physical infrastructure and technical capacity), were further strengthened by the project

### *Financial Assets*

Financial assets were approved by the Minister and channeled through the ministry to the project. The additional £E 1.2 million made it possible to build a new hospital to replace the old dilapidated building.

## What was the Extent of Community-Driven Development?

Unlike the other nine cases, the Baharia PHC project is one which is largely defined by national health strategy, hence its design could not allow for citizen input. The policy on health stipulates that each district must have a hospital, and there should be at least one health unit per 5000 persons. And since the project's purpose was to upgrade current health services, it was only logical that it would work on renovating of health establishments as one of its components. Moreover, this project was almost an exact replication of projects done in other governorates.

There is no doubt that citizens benefited from the improved health care services and increased awareness about a variety of health issues. According to Zeinab, one of the health educators, "at first a woman could wait on her child's high fever for several days before thinking of seeking help. Now, she knows that she has to go to the health unit immediately if her child's temperature rises." The educators generally agreed that there are now more visits to the health units, the rate of vaccinations is higher, and the rate of infection from FGM has dropped.

Yet, this does not speak to any change in community participation in decision-making. Where this has occurred is through the health educators, as they voice the people's concerns to the village committees. One example is of a salty water source in one of the villages, which caused many health problems. The reason was that the well was only 200 m deep. When the educators raised the issue with the committee, it called for an investigation of the quality of water, and urged the popular district councils to advocate for digging of new wells. It took a year and a half, but the committee succeeded in incorporating the digging of 2 water wells at depths of 1000 m, plus developing a water purification unit, in the investment plan of the New Valley Development Authority.

### The Role of the Intermediary

There were a number of intermediaries in this case operating at different levels. As previously mentioned, the educators were the link between the community and the project. The project itself was the link between decentralized health services in Baharia, and central MOHP. SFD was the intermediary between the EU and the project as disburser of funds.

One of the roles of the health educators was to provide health information and awareness, but another was to voice the people's concerns to the committees set up by the project, who in turn took action. The various individual assets, in terms of skills and attitude, and the social assets of the tight community enabled the educators to be effective intermediaries. As one of the educators commented, "the most important skill is knowing how to approach the people, making them feel that we are equal and using the language that they know."

The 'project' itself was the link between health services at the district level and the national policy on primary healthcare as set by MOHP. The project was essentially about upgrading *current* health services provided by MOHP. Yet, thanks to the leadership of Dr. Magda, a new hospital is being built and health caravans were initiated, although sustainability of the caravans was not achieved. A new approach to health care delivery and responsiveness was introduced, with its multi-disciplinary character reflecting the multifaceted nature of health problems and a built-in mechanism for listening to people's concerns. The project took on the additional role of linking the people to the relevant government officials both at MOHP and in other administrations. In Dr. Magda's words, "at first we didn't know what participation meant. We thought it was enough for the people to contribute a piece of land for a health unit to be built by the Ministry. But after I witnessed the Thailand experience I learned that primary healthcare must be accessible, affordable, and participatory. Thailand is a successful model for mobilizing the community to act as equal partners with other health and health relevant sectors to improve quality of life."

The project's role was also critical in bridging the gap between policy and practice. National health policies, according to Dr. Magda, encourage the strengthening of district health systems. However, in practice, it can be difficult to operationalize primary healthcare principles.

The role of the SFD was more like a contractor in this project. But in doing so it linked the EU to MOHP by channeling EU funds to MOHP as implementer. The project reported to SFD through monthly and quarterly reports. But SFD was also accountable to the EU since, according to an agreement signed in 1998, the EU is to provide technical assistance to SFD and monitor their EU funded projects. This is carried out by a specialized unit established by the EU, named the Program Coordination Unit.

### The Influence of Policy

The influence of policy was great in this case, since this project is in essence about supplementing and improving MOHP's national health services, and executing the mandate of the Social Fund for Development, a quasi governmental institution. Hence this project can be described as one which enables effective carrying out of policies pertaining to primary healthcare at the level of service provision.

The annual national budget allocates a certain amount for health services, which is managed by MOHP. MOHP in turn implements an annual investment plan for new health establishments. Dr. Magda succeeded in convincing the Minister to incorporate the new Baharia hospital within this investment plan. Dr. Magda discussed that "most Government officials will take action when concise and accurate information is presented. When information is available, decisions can be made. Provision of information is the role of the Undersecretary." This is why the health educators' role in maintaining accurate records was so important.

The mechanism by which the health educators and committees could influence government action is as follows: When the educators brought a community need to the attention of the committee, the committee in turn informed members of the popular council so that they could lobby for action. When a formal request is made, the respective administrations can take action. For example, the Local Administration of the Oases and Bawiti City has an annual budget of over £E 6 million on potable water, sanitation, roads, electricity, and other infrastructure needs. However, in order to use this money for specific purposes, members of the local council must first raise the issue. Health educators have become an important vehicle for initiating this process.

### Concluding Remarks

This is yet another example of a project that started out conventionally, with no input from the citizens in its design. The nature of the project, as one which augments existing health services, lends itself to a strict mandate with little room for citizen participation. Yet despite this, a mechanism was created for voicing people's needs and acting upon them.

The key to this success was the involvement of women as health educators. Given the position of women in these communities, the fact that their skills and capacities were recognized and strengthened enhanced their status in the community and their employability by other health programs. The educators gained so many skills that most of them were hired by a USAID health project that started after the PHC project ended.

Title: Peer-to-Peer Learning through the Living University  
Community: Tella, Zohra, Estal (Living University)  
Theme: Creating Space for Leadership  
Wisdom: A candle loses nothing by lighting another

## Background

The idea of a “Living University” was developed by Save the Children USA and implemented by their Egypt Field Office in order to promote peer-to-peer learning between local Community Development Associations (CDA). The concept was inspired by the “Positive Deviance” approach, which was originally developed in the Philippines to draw attention to the determinants of good health and nutrition: mothers of exceptionally healthy children were asked to share the reasons for these successes and then to teach others. Similarly, Living University is based on the idea that we can learn from those CDAs that have been exceptionally successful. The main activities of Living University thus center on supporting successful CDAs to provide capacity building training to others.

The forerunner to Living University was another Save the Children project called “Build,” which began in 1997, and provided a capacity building training program to a number of CDAs in Minya governorate. Three successful CDAs were selected from “Build” to become Living University “Trainer” CDAs. These CDAs possessed the following qualities: committed leadership; a sense of mission; successful management of community development projects; and knowledgeable and dedicated personnel capable of training members of other CDAs. Each of the three Living University CDAs in turn trained two other Learner CDAs, also in Minya. At the end of the Living University program, each Learner submitted a project proposal to be considered by Save the Children for funding. Two of the Learner CDAs were selected by Save the Children to provide further training to other CDAs through the Living University model as a second phase of the project. Since then, the training has continued in this cascading fashion. Save the Children believes that the Living University is a means of generating “effective, affordable, acceptable and sustainable<sup>3</sup>” community development ideas and solutions because it is administered among peers.

The following section will examine in more detail the experiences of three CDAs in Minya that participated in the “first phase” of the Living University project.

## The Story

### Tella Community Development Association

Tella CDA was established in 1969 to serve the local community in the village of Tella. The CDA was inactive until 1990, mainly due to the weakness and apathy of its founders and board members up to that point. In 1990, a number of enthusiastic and determined youth

---

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

joined the CDA. Their interest in it was sparked when they saw a local sewage removal truck painted with the CDA's logo. After asking around, they discovered that the CDA existed mainly "on paper" and that the few activities it did have were fully affiliated with the local council. These youth saw an opportunity to bring about social change. They joined the CDA and were soon after elected to the board.

The first priority was to secure premises for the CDA's headquarters, which took place through the donation of a plot of land by the government. New premises were funded by a combination of community donations and grants from external donors. The CDA then began to provide a number of highly visible services, namely a women's sewing workshop and a health clinic, which garnered popular support. The new board members described themselves as "rebels" or "troublemakers", a reference to their dogged persistence in starting new activities to serve their community, securing funding and fostering relationships with various external agencies.

In 1996, Tella CDA began working with Save the Children, and was among the CDAs selected to participate in "Build," where it was enrolled in an institutional capacity building program and learned such skills as how to write a project proposal. After the completion of this program, Tella submitted a number of proposals to Save the Children and was granted £E 38, 000 for four initiatives. These were: a children's nursery; providing clean drinking water to a number of houses; a micro-finance program; and a literacy program.

In 1999, Tella was one of three CDAs in Minya selected as Trainers in the first phase of the Living University. A number of its members underwent a 6-month training course administered by Save the Children where they acquired knowledge and skills enabling them to transfer their knowledge to other CDAs. Tella then implemented the capacity building program with two other CDAs in Minya. At the end of the training program each of these two CDAs began implementation of a project based on a proposal submitted to Save the Children. One of the CDAs established a nursery and the other secured funding to provide agricultural loans to farmers. Unfortunately, however, the two projects were not equally successful; Tella's Living University trainers attribute the failure of one of the CDAs they trained to the weakness of its board members and their lack of genuine commitment to community development.

Since 1996, Tella CDA has steadily expanded the scope of work in its own community and expanded its circle of partners. The CDA is currently engaged in and/or providing over 30 activities and services. They include: raising environmental awareness in agricultural practices (through composting); vocational training for young graduates; improving standards of teaching at local schools; a women's club; veterinary services; and an apiary. All these are in addition to its long-standing activities, such as the nursery, clinic, and micro-finance program. In its expanded community partnership work, the CDA has obtained funding from the Arab League, CEOSS and various other agencies, as well as Save the Children. Tella CDA has also taken part in the training, supervision and monitoring of several Save the Children projects implemented by other CDAs. These include the "Child Survivor" project (CS 14) and the "Communication for Healthy Living" project (CHL). In recognition of its work, Tella CDA was awarded a CEOSS prize for excellence in social work (£E 30, 000) which was matched by the Governor of Minya.

## Zohra Community Development Association

Zohra CDA is another of the associations that were selected to administer training in the first phase of the Living University. The CDA's initial activities, which had begun in the 1970s, consisted of a small kilim (rug) factory, a nursery/daycare center, literacy classes, a micro-credit program and services, such as providing water connections to a number of local houses. Zohra first began working with Save the Children in April 1997, after it was recommended to Save the Children by the local office of the Ministry of Social Affairs. Save the Children's intervention began with the provision of capacity building training on effective communication, leadership, proposal writing, presentation skills and negotiation skills. Save the Children then provided the CDA with grants to upgrade its nursery and provide residential running water to some parts of the village.

Based on its performance, Zohra was selected to take part in the Living University. Five of the association's members were selected as trainers, and were assigned two CDAs (Beni Hassan al-Ashraf and al-Iman wa al-'Ilm in Saft al-Laban). They provided training on effective communication; community needs assessment; problem analysis and problem solving; proposal writing and establishing relationships with donor organizations; and financial and administrative systems (some of the training was done through on-the-job training and workshops). At the end of the training period, each of the two CDAs submitted a project proposal, the first to improve its nursery and the second to establish residential running water connections. These projects received funding from Save the Children and were monitored by Zohra CDA.

Zohra then trained two other CDAs in Minya, Baihu and Estal, on proposal writing and other capacity building elements mentioned above. This was part of an Save the Children project aimed at reducing child mortality (Child Survivor, CS-14 project). The CDAs were trained on the technical and medical aspects of this project by the Egyptian Red Crescent, while training on the capacity building and administrative aspects was given through the Living University approach.

Zohra CDA has recently implemented a number of other projects. One of the projects, funded through IDRC, works on connecting clean water to the poor, improving bathroom sanitation/sewage at a number of houses and increasing awareness of public health. Another project, with some similar components, is involved in water connections, sewage improvements and tree planting, and is funded by the Social Fund for Development in Minya. The CDA is also taking part in the CHL project initiated by Save the Children, in addition to continuing and expanding its long-standing activities such as the daycare center and kilim factory, which generate income that contributes to the association's operational costs.

## Estal Community Development Association

Estal CDA was founded in 1969, but until 1999, its activities were limited to a carpet and rug factory. Its board members were village elders whose ideas about community projects, funding opportunities and external networking were traditional and rigid, according to the

association's current board members. In 1997/98, an active group of local youth, spurred by the desire to replicate a successful development experience in a nearby community, decided to join the CDA and eventually managed to hold new elections, incorporating more youth and female representation onto its board of directors.

In 1999, Estal began working with Save the Children on a child nutrition project and received capacity building training by Zohra CDA. Estal's expertise is in health awareness and nutrition. The CDA has a large staff working on several projects in these fields, funded by different organizations, such as CARE International, the NGO Service Center and Save the Children. The CDA also has a number of other activities, including a children's club/daycare center; a computer-training center; an apiary; a clinic; and a carpet/rug factory. In the past, it has managed projects that provided micro-finance to wage workers and connected clean running water to this segment of the population.

As mentioned above, Estal CDA was at first a Living University Learner CDA. However, it eventually became a Living University "second-generation" Trainer and was approached by other CDAs in the governorates of Minya, Beni Suif and Qena to provide trainings, in particular in its areas of expertise. To date, Estal has trained 480 individuals in effective communication in nutrition, child nutrition, and other areas related to nutrition and public health. The association's board members and staff consider the Living University to be an important tool for the sustainability of development projects due to the impermanent nature of international development organizations, such as Save the Children and CARE.

To date, Estal CDA has forged strong relationships with a number of key government agencies, such as the local council and the Ministries of Agriculture, Health, Higher Education and Social Affairs. The association has also decided to engage in projects "on its own terms... we are not begging for money," in the words of one of its managing directors. In one case, because of its close working relationship with both Save the Children and CARE, Estal managed to convince the two organizations to work together on a water project in a community in which they were both involved. The association's board members attribute their success in a relatively short period of time to their high level of commitment, creativity, persistence and independent spirit.

#### Comments on Asset-Mobilization, Asset Building, and Community Initiative

The Living University, in the perception set forth by Save the Children, "is an important mechanism for asset-based community development that aims towards building community assets to ensure sustainability and self-sufficiency in the community."<sup>4</sup> In creating the Living University approach, Save the Children therefore consciously envisioned it as a means to both capitalize on existing community assets and create new ones.

Central to the Living University is the mobilization of existing skills and talents for the purpose of building those very same skills and assets in others. Such sharing of experience

---

<sup>4</sup> "The Living University – Replication and Program Expansion Approach;" brochure published by EFO, Save the Children, USA.



and expertise not only builds individual competencies, but in so doing, begins a process whereby institutional capacity building can be sustained over the longer term.

## What Community Assets were Mobilized?

### *Individual Assets*

The importance of individual assets was underscored by CDA members. Tella's board members, for example, believe that "human resource development is the main element" of successful community development and thus lauded the Living University for recognizing that "technical support is more important than financial support." This is because the fundamental premise of the Living University – that successful development will derive from within local communities with CDAs as the drivers of this process – necessitates that emphasis be placed on *individuals* as building blocks of the CDAs.

### *Organizational capacities*

All of the CDAs who became Living University trainers were noted for their dynamism, prominence within their communities and ability to leverage internal and external assets. In other words, they were able to organize. This is clear from the nature and number of their projects/activities, and well as from the fact that they have attracted a large number of new members and volunteers (in particular, Tella and Estal place much emphasis on the contributions of their many volunteers). In essence, it can be said that by successfully channeling the individual and social assets mentioned above, many of the Living University CDAs have also acquired, or made use of, extensive institutional assets.

The CDAs selected as Trainers in the Living University's first phase had already demonstrated their capacity to mobilize assets. For example, Tella CDA had mobilized the local community to fill in a local drainage canal that was the source of health and environmental problems. This "repository" of asset-based experience made it a good choice to train other CDAs. When questioned about the CDA's success in channeling community assets and expanding its activities, Tella's staff and board members cited a number of factors: the fact that there is a relatively large "reserve" of trained leadership within the ranks of the CDA's members; the CDA's transparent and accountable system of internal governance; its responsiveness to community needs and to meeting the requirements of all segments of the community (including people with disabilities); and, finally, its openness to new members and effective management of volunteers. In other words, Tella CDA's prominence, both within the community and in training other CDAs through the Living University, can be attributed in large part to these assets.

Furthermore, because the Living University delivered capacity building and other training programs to CDAs, it also strengthened and created new assets for those CDAs that "graduated" successfully from the program. For example, Estal CDA was enrolled in the Living University first as a Learner because, despite having motivated leadership and good individual assets, it had not yet acquired the strong organizational capacity that would enable it to act as a Living University trainer. After building a stronger foundation, in large part

thanks to Living University training programs, Estal moved on to becoming a Living University Trainer.

The Living University promoted relationships between different CDAs in order to encourage them to eventually seek and create such relationships independently. Social assets are thus an integral part of the Living University concept, for without it, interaction between CDAs could not take place. Knowledge of other development practitioners and of individuals or organizations with similar interests and expertise in relevant areas is essential to the workings of the Living University approach. If one doesn't know of an organization that may be helpful to his work, how can one make use of it?

What Project and Other External Institutional Assets were Mobilized?

### *Institutional Assets*

In almost all community development projects, there is a need for several parties to interact, in the form of the community, development practitioners, government agencies, and donor agencies. In this case, the need for social capital, as a lubricant to the interaction between these parties, becomes even more prominent.

In studying the cases above, it is clear that the three CDAs have, on the whole, cultivated a high degree of cooperation with key external institutions. Such relationships can open important doors, as they did when the local office of the Ministry of Social Affairs introduced Zohra CDA to Save the Children. Social assets are so important, in fact, that networking and building successful relationships is a standard component of the capacity building program administered through the Living University.

A positive working relationship with local government agencies can greatly enhance the impact of community development initiatives. The CDAs all appeared to have good relationships with relevant government agencies. In fact, all of them stated that they could not have accomplished much of what they have without the support – financial, administrative and technical – of such entities as the local council and local offices of the Ministries of Health, Agriculture and Education.

Only one CDA, Tella, cited difficulties with a government agency, the Ministry of Social Affairs (MOSA), which regulates the CDA's activities and funding opportunities. This is due to MOSA's reluctance to authorize external funding for one of Tella's projects. Tella's board members, while criticizing the bureaucratic hurdles posed by MOSA, stated that they were able to overcome this problem because they persevered in lodging complaints through legitimate channels. "We have no fear because we know we are right," they stated. On the whole, however, Tella CDA has a good working relationship with the local council and other government bodies with which its activities require it to interact. The same is true for Zohra and Estal CDAs.

### *Financial Assets*

These are not as prominent as individual and social assets in the Living University approach; they are, however, an important factor. One of the purposes of the Living University, as stated by Save the Children, is to “build the capacity of NGOs (or CDAs) to provide technical assistance to peer NGOs at a cost, thereby generating income to cover their operational costs.”<sup>5</sup> This has entailed that those CDAs seeking training must apply for external funding, to meet the high costs.

Any organization that sought training from the three CDAs mentioned above did so either through being directed by an external agency, or by applying for funding from an external agency. Tella CDA mentioned that plans to train a CDA in Beni Suif fell through due to the relatively high costs of travel, accommodation and training materials. Zohra CDA acknowledged that the Living University’s main pitfall is the high cost associated with training, which necessitate continued reliance on external funding.

This means that although the Living University may have been envisioned as a means for experienced CDAs to attract financial assets, it is actually in danger of transforming such CDAs into mouthpieces for donor organizations (who control the funds) to determine who will train whom and on what.

### The Role of the Intermediary

Save the Children played, and continues to play, a pivotal role in the Living University program. As the originator and founder of this methodology, the program itself would not have taken place were it not for Save the Children. Save the Children selected the CDAs that participated in the Living University as both Trainers and Learners, and established linkages between different CDAs. As is clear from the case studies above, Save the Children provided funding for projects based on proposals submitted by Living University graduates, which was offered as an incentive for completing the program. Furthermore, much of the monetary costs of training associated with the Living University have so far been undertaken by Save the Children.

Regarding the future of the Living University, Save the Children still acts as the project’s copyright owner and is in the process of planning its expansion and replication. And to go back to the project’s beginnings, all three of the CDAs interviewed for this case study acknowledged that Save the Children had provided invaluable technical and financial support that helped in transforming their outlooks and activities. One of Zohra CDA’s board members even went so far as to say that Save the Children had “created” their CDA, because without the support provided by Save the Children the association would not exist as it does today.

So to what extent is Save the Children’s proprietary role a hindrance to the Living University’s development as a sustainable grassroots learning mechanism? On the one hand, it is undeniable that the domino effect envisioned by Save the Children, with increasing

---

<sup>5</sup> “The Living University – Replication and Program Expansion Approach;” brochure published by EFO, Save the Children, USA.

numbers of CDAs training each other, has failed to materialize. This is in part due to the financial constraints previously noted, but also due to the fact that it is usually a difficult process to transfer a project initiated by an external agency into a fully community-driven endeavor. On the other hand, both Save the Children and the CDAs agree that over the long run, the Living University is an excellent basis for independent CDA development. As a staff member at Estal CDA stated, “we have to learn from each other, because the international agencies will not be here forever.” Most of the members of the three CDAs also believe that peer training is preferable to training from an external agency because it is less intimidating and because CDA members relate to each other better. And Save the Children has even sought to broaden Living University’s empowering approach by asking CDAs to supervise other CDAs in the implementation of some Save the Children projects.

The bottom line, however, is that the Living University’s potential as an inter-community learning vehicle has not been fully realized. Save the Children remains involved in the project, because there is still yet insufficient momentum for inter-community learning to happen independently. This does not necessarily preclude Save the Children’s eventual withdrawal from the project, but it does mean that more effort should be made to find ways of ensuring the Living University’s sustainability.

It is interesting to note that in some cases, the absence of government services provided an impetus for community action through the CDAs. Members of Estal CDA, for example, noted that part of the motivation for their work came from the need to “fill in the gap” in services that the government had failed to provide, such as health, clean running water and child welfare. While some would be tempted to make the argument that the weakness of some government services renders CDAs more viable, concern has to be raised about government “downloading” to CDAs. Programs like the Living University that support CDAs in their work should instead be seen as important for building capacity so that CDAs can work in partnership with government, or to carry out work that is not within government’s purview.

### Concluding Remarks

The Living University is an attempt to bridge traditional development methodology with more contemporary approaches, such as Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD). In its conceptualization, Living University has much in common with ABCD. It relies on and attempts to build community assets, and it espouses a citizen-based approach to sustainable community development. It has already been noted that the Living University has made ample use of a number of community assets, in particular institutional, individual and social assets. Yet, one of the most important aspects of the ABCD approach is that it is *citizen driven*. Although the Living University is implemented by citizens (through CDAs), citizens did not initiate it, and the majority of its activities continue to be guided by Save the Children, an external organization.

The Living University’s implementers also have to take note of potential asset depletion. This can occur when CDAs taking part in Living University become unmotivated. For example, some of the Tella CDA’s staff and board members expressed that they feel that Save the Children has become more focused on entrusting the CDA with project

supervision, whereas they are more interested in project implementation. In this case, a balance should be achieved between the different activities performed by CDAs.

Another potential source of asset depletion lies in the uncertainty regarding the Living University's future. Due to reasons discussed above, the Living University is at risk for becoming another project conceived of good intentions that were flouted by practical constraints, possibly causing both its creators and its beneficiaries to become more cynical of "new" approaches. This provides a good lesson for those wishing to study such models: if a project is not seen through to its ultimate goal, this might lead to more harm than good by raising, and then dashing, expectations.

This leads one to wonder: can ABCD be successfully initiated from outside the community? It is too soon to look to the Living University for answers to this question, since, in this respect, the project was only a qualified success. The focus now, on the part of both Save the Children and CDAs, should be to find effective methods of transferring more control over the Living University to CDAs.

Title: Bridging Gaps between Communities and Institutions  
Community: Al Montaza, Alexandria  
Theme: Relationship with External Institutions  
Wisdom: You cannot pick all your fruit from one tree

## Background

This case describes an experimental initiative that was conceived by the Center for Development Services and then adopted and implemented by El Salam Association, an NGO in Alexandria. The initiative, termed 'collaborative community action' (CCA), aimed to enable all relevant stakeholders in a given community to work towards commonly agreed upon goals through a sustainable format for collaboration.

This idea came about as a result of CDS' experience with different approaches to development over the years and through the realization that CDS' extensive work with Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) and capacity building of NGOs resulted in an unnecessary friction between NGOs and government. NGOs began to perceive government as incapable of participatory development and saw the NGO's role as one that compensates for government's inability or unwillingness to engage people in decisions about their own development. Furthermore, reflections on PRA suggested that it had become packaged as a research tool and did not typically result in action.

To address these concerns, the concept of CCA first emerged in early 2000 with an emphasis on collaboration between government, NGOs, the private sector and the community. CDS approached donor agencies with the idea and the Ford Foundation agreed to fully fund a CCA pilot project. The project covered studying and documenting the CCA process itself, as well as implementing a community development initiative if one emerged from this process. CDS approached El Salam Association to take on the CCA initiative because its work was well-regarded by government agencies and the communities that it serves. It was assumed that, with this existing support, it would likely be able to mobilize a variety of stakeholders. CDS had had previous experience dealing with El Salam Association and was thus familiar with its work and institutional culture. El Salam's mandate is 'community development'; they operate several nurseries, daycare centers and sewing workshops, in addition to taking part in various projects dealing with specific issues or problems (such as limiting child labor, raising environmental awareness and installing infrastructure in communities). Members of the association's Board of Directors were enthusiastic about initiating the CCA process and began to contact potential partners in al-Montaza District where its work is based. It was hoped that one of the main outcomes of the CCA would be a permanent mechanism for collective collaboration between the various stakeholders present in the community.

Al-Montaza is Alexandria's most populous district, home to approximately one million people who make up a quarter of the city's inhabitants. The district has urban as well as semi-urban areas. Income levels also vary, as indicated by the range in the quality of housing, some being dilapidated and characteristic of a squatter settlement. Farmland was once extensive in al-Montaza but, due to overpopulation, encroachment has occurred and unplanned communities have sprouted in formerly agricultural areas. Over the past few

years, however, measures have been taken to regulate these communities. Basic services and infrastructure – running water, electricity, primary schools, and health clinics - have been extended to most of them. Yet vestiges of these unplanned zones, such as informal settlements of vendors selling fresh produce and meats, still affect many parts of al-Montaza.

Through a series of meetings with stakeholders in the area of its operation, El Salam Association, with assistance from a CDS facilitator, was able to bring together a group of interested individuals representing the government, private and NGO sectors. This group began to meet on a regular basis – once every month or couple of months – and formed what became known as the CCA committee. Members of the committee did not join to work on a predetermined project; it was, rather, common interests and a readiness to commit resources that brought them together. Throughout the implementation of the CCA process, CDS' role was mainly to facilitate and document developments. The flow of discussions and events was in the hands of the CCA partners. The projects described in the next section resulted from discussions that took place in the committee's meetings.

### The Story

The meetings of the CCA committee took place in the afternoons or evenings at El Salam Association's office, after official working hours. Chairing these sessions would alternate between a member of El Salam Association and a facilitator from CDS. Even though a significant number of government ministries and agencies were represented in the committee, the representatives of these agencies did not attend in a strictly official capacity. This lent a semi-formal atmosphere to the meetings which was more conducive to open and frank discussion. At the committee's first meeting, a number of issues and possible areas of action were raised.

After lengthy discussions, the committee agreed on the acuteness of the problems that the unregulated and disorganized street markets in al-Montaza caused, among them obstructed traffic flow and non-hygienic handling of produce. It was decided that CCA would be used to address the problem, through designing and implementing an upgraded 'model' marketplace. The members of the committee decided to involve their respective organizations in the process by agreeing to commit various resources and provide services to the upgraded market. For example:

- The General Authority for the Eradication of Illiteracy and Adult Education (GALAE) intended to set up literacy classes for vendors inside the marketplace;
- The Ministry of Health planned to provide health insurance for the vendors and possibly assist in the creation of a first aid unit on the site;
- The Ministry of Agriculture planned to provide technical training and supervision on the hygienic and environmental aspects of transporting and storing produce;
- The Labor Ministry wanted to create new employment opportunities for young graduates through the market's activities;
- The Ministry of Education would facilitate permits for conducting awareness campaigns at schools; and
- The El Salam Association was to act as a liaison between the authorities and the market vendors and oversee management of the upgraded marketplace.

The next step of the process was to select one of the area's markets for this project. El Salam Association undertook the required fieldwork through a team of volunteer researchers affiliated with the association called 'Youth for Development' ("*Shabab El Tanmeya*"). This group, along with a number of CDS staff members, studied several local markets and gathered information on the types and magnitude of problems they faced. They also recorded suggestions from the vendors and customers for dealing with these issues. This information provided a clearer idea of the problems found in the markets, generated more specific suggestions for the upgraded market design and assisted in the selection of the market in which the project would be implemented. The committee eventually settled on al-Haramain market, which sells vegetables, fruit, meat and fish. It was selected because it was representative of the typical problems found in street markets and it was relatively small, making the initial project more manageable.

After deciding on the main elements of the market rehabilitation project which were based on each representative's suggested contribution, the CCA committee began to approach the relevant authorities for approval. In July 2002, the initiative was approved by the Governorate of Alexandria's Local Council, which passed it on to al-Montaza District authorities for final approval. Although the CCA committee included a District representative, the District Head was resistant to the project when it was first presented to him. It was understood that he favored another project that he wanted the committee to adopt. Meanwhile the market idea was presented to the Governor of Alexandria, who soon issued a formal letter allocating a plot of land as a new location for the marketplace. This was because its original location had not been approved by authorities and was slated for the construction of a school and other facilities. The District Head, for his part, leveled and paved the ground at the new location that had been allocated to the market by the Governor and authorized the extension of plumbing and electricity services to this location. These developments provided more security to the market vendors, and some of them began to move spontaneously to the new location.

However, final approval from the District Head was still needed for implementation of the upgraded market design, and he continued to object because of perceptions that the CCA's involvement would remove control over the market's management from District authorities. In fact, the District Head was adamant about keeping control over the market, as in his own words, "I don't want these vendors paying anything in contribution to the market because then they will think they own the place and sooner or later they will start making demands which they are not entitled to." The committee so much desired a large demonstrable project and they had put so much work into the market idea that they wouldn't compromise with the District Head. And because the committee had essentially tried to step over and around the District Head's authority throughout the process, he was not willing to support the project further. This presented an impasse for the model marketplace project.

When it became clear that the District Head's approval of the project as envisioned by the CCA committee was not forthcoming, the committee began thinking of another project that would be out of his jurisdiction. It was decided to begin an initiative relating to the water tanks that are installed on the top of many apartment buildings in the area. These tanks provide a reserve for use in cases where the water pressure is too weak to reach the upper floors. The committee agreed that the improper cleaning of these tanks causes a number of



health problems. Therefore, it was decided to begin an awareness campaign on the proper use and cleaning of these tanks, as well as to provide a service for cleaning and disinfecting the tanks at a reduced cost.

Again, the Youth for Development were enlisted to conduct fieldwork in order to determine the area of operation for this project. These would depend on the prevalence of water tanks and cleaning services available in different areas. Based on the information gathered, it was decided to implement the cleaning project in al-Mandara Qibli area in al-Montaza. El Salam Association also began a wide-ranging public awareness campaign on the proper usage of water resources and the importance of cleaning water tanks. The campaign was implemented by the Youth for Development in elementary, middle and high schools, as well as in local associations such as youth clubs and NGOs. El Salam also hired around ten workers and three supervisors to provide the water tank cleaning services. This team was trained in the proper methods of cleaning the tanks and in the use of disinfectant chemicals and was also provided with suitable uniforms and equipment. Its services were widely publicized in the area of operation.

The level of collective involvement by the CCA committee members in this project was significantly lower than in the case of the market rehabilitation plan. This was due largely to the fact that the scope of work on the water tank initiative was more limited than the model marketplace. Nevertheless, several committee members made contributions at various stages of the water tank project's implementation. The Undersecretary of the Ministry of Education greatly facilitated access to schools to conduct the awareness campaign; she provided a letter signed by her that overcame the resistance of uncooperative school officials. The Undersecretary of the Ministry of Health provided technical assistance in training the water tank cleaning team.

El Salam began implementation of this project in 2003 by initiating the awareness campaign then hiring and training members of the cleaning team. The tank cleaning services were delayed because the Ministry of Health in Cairo refused to grant permission to an NGO to disinfect water tanks. Legal regulations stipulated that only private companies could provide these services. Having reached another stalemate, this time the association decided to compromise and began to provide a modified version of the envisioned services. The tank-cleaning team now thoroughly cleans water tanks and purifies the water in the tanks in buildings that hire its services; they do not, however, chemically disinfect the tanks so as not to incur legal liability. In the two months since it has begun providing its services, the team has cleaned water tanks at 14 apartment buildings in the project area, and has been requested by four of these buildings to clean the water tanks on a monthly basis.

#### Comments on Asset Mobilization, Asset Building and Community Initiative

The community of al-Montaza district, if defined as the broadest base of citizens, was not the instigator of the model marketplace or the water tanks project. The committee formed to develop the initiative was made up of various institutional stakeholders, including a local community development association whose function is to represent community interests. There is reason to suggest, however, that some of the other institutional stakeholders may have seen themselves acting less as representatives of their institutions and more as

individual citizens of the community, which raises the important issue of the role in community development work for people who have more than one role in their communities. Successful development is often accomplished because these individuals are able to act both as citizens and in their professional capacity, helping to forge links and bridge information gaps.

What Project and External Institutional Assets were Mobilized?

#### *Financial Assets*

There is a reason for discussing financial assets first. Without the funding made available by the Ford Foundation, and channeled through CDS to the CCA, there would not have been an opportunity for other assets to surface. In addition to covering costs of facilitation and documentation of CCA, the funding assured that an initiative could be implemented once the committee came to agreement. In a sense, CCA as a funded project created a setting that allowed other assets to emerge.

#### *Social Assets*

In essence, CCA is about bridging the gap between government agencies (preferably at the upper levels), NGOs, the private sector and the community. Indeed it succeeded in creating relationships between the four to varying degrees, and in maintaining relationships between government agencies and El Salam Association. "The formal façade of government officials was dissolved. We developed a personal relationship with these people," expressed Hajj Mustafa, the Association's Chairman, as he spoke of the quality of the relationships established among committee members despite their diverse backgrounds.

Yet without motivation, the actors would not have come together, and these social assets would not have been formed. The motivation that spurred these social assets into action is multidimensional. One motivating factor was the semi-official relaxing environment created by CCA, which provided a creative outlet for the committee members. The idea also made common sense. CCA was described as the "natural progression of societies" by several of the committee members. Moreover, a sense of personal gain became clear to the members, especially to the NGO, which regarded CCA as an opportunity for capacity building.

Once the relationships were forged it was evidently trust that maintained them. "I attended the first joint meeting reluctantly, only as a courtesy to El Salam. If I didn't find a dedicated and serious group of people, I would not have continued to attend," stated Mr. Adel, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Labor. A high degree of trust and faith was held in El Salam Association. "El Salam is a very strong organization to start with. It has grassroots leadership, the capacity to give, and a good reputation," agreed the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Social Affairs. CDS originally selected El Salam to host CCA because of the trust established through their previous work together on a project to extend potable water to one of al-Montaza's districts.

### *Institutional Assets*

Both trust and common interest drove the actors to commit contributions to the water tanks project, and more so to al-Haramain market. In the Haramain project, as has been mentioned, the General Authority for the Eradication of Illiteracy and Adult Education intended to set up literacy classes for the vendors, the Ministry of Health was planning to set up a first aid unit in the market, the Ministry of Labor suggested to save some vending units for fresh graduates, and the Ministry of Agriculture intended to facilitate permits and oversee the use of pesticides. Even the Head of the District Authority, who was perceived to be obstructing the market initiative by the rest of the committee, set up a legitimate space for the market vendors. The water tanks project by nature does not allow much room for multi-actor contributions. Only El Salam, in managing the project, the Ministry of Health, facilitating the permit and overseeing the use of chemicals, and the Ministry of Education, which assisted in providing access to schools to conduct an awareness campaign, are significantly involved. The important point is that the willingness of the different actors to make contributions is in itself a strong social asset. Such willingness can be attributed to a number of factors like the space for action created by CCA and the desire to take credit for participating in a project that was deemed 'serious' by the committee members.

### *Individual Assets*

The individuals on the CCA committee contributed to the positive CCA experience. Each had a personal trait or skill that contributed to the decision-making process and subsequent planning of the initiative. According to the members, the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Social Affairs enjoyed a fair bit of flexibility and was always willing to exercise his authority to bypass bureaucratic Ministry regulations if necessary. The Department Manager from the Ministry of Agriculture was seen as a true grassroots leader who understood the needs and aspirations of the community in al-Montaza. This was due to his political activities and membership in a number of important elected bodies, such as the local council of the Governorate and the Local Infrastructure Council. Likewise, the Chairman of El Salam is a prominent figure in Alexandria's civil society; he has a long credible history in social development, is the chairman of the board of another local NGO and is also a member of the local council of the Governorate.

The CCA facilitator, Mr. Hisham El Roubi from CDS, possessed unique individual skills. Hisham was described by committee members and the Youth for Development group as having good communication skills that enabled him to speak to people of diverse backgrounds, whether government officials, youth, or local community members. Communication skills were critical in paving the way for the first joint committee meeting, especially since CCA is a fluid concept and makes no promises upfront.

The skills and qualities of the Youth for Development were critical. The youth described each other as "having immense energy", "being able to work in a team", "brimming with novel ideas", and "having persistence to get the job done well". These traits enabled the youth to serve as the communication channel between al-Montaza community and the CCA committee.

## Asset Building

In looking at CCA, there are several examples of asset building, the most notable of which being the building of social assets. Social capital generated through CCA has been carried over into another venture involving some of the CCA partners, but not directly related to the work of the CCA committee. About six months into the CCA, El Salam Association and El Horreya Association for Community and Environment Development submitted a proposal for an advocacy project to the NGO Service Center (a USAID funded program). It was accepted. The project is now implemented by a network of five NGOs and aims to create discussion on child labor leading to policy changes. While the original CCA committee no longer meets regularly to discuss the water tanks project, the members have become notably active in the child labor program. For the first time ever, the Ministry of Education conducted surveys to arrive at the true figures for school dropouts and also established a special department within the Ministry to address that issue. The Ministry of Social Affairs resurfaced social welfare laws that provide some financial security to orphans, a societal group prone to child labor. The participating NGOs organized and hosted various seminars, and developed a television information segment to shed light on the issue.

Individual assets were also built, particularly among the Youth for Development. "I used to be very shy and was reluctant to speak to anyone. Now I am audacious," stated one of the girls as she described how her involvement with the youth team changed her character. Others mentioned the acquisition of skills in research, report writing, and presentation.

However, there are also early signs of asset depletion in the social and individual assets. All the committee members expressed utter frustration in government bureaucracy (and corruption in some instances), which they attribute to the stalling of the market initiative. "The District Authority has a vested interest in maintaining control and management over markets. There are benefits exchanged between the vendors and District staff. Do you think that the electricity authority doesn't know that vendors put up high power lighting in Asafra (another informal market)?" said one community member. Through the discussions it became increasingly evident that unless a highly demonstrable project like the Haramain initiative takes off, the committee would despair and cease to exist. Both the committee and the youth team felt that the water tanks project is 'something', but it is not what they had aspired to because it lacks visibility when compared to the market idea and it is not a high priority of the community.

## The Role of the Intermediary

As previously mentioned, CDS conceived the CCA idea. CDS approached El Salam Association to adopt it and to become the 'central actor'. As the CDS facilitator, Mr. El Roubi introduced the idea to El Salam and participated in all bilateral meetings with individual committee members and in joint committee meetings. "At first the perception of who was in the lead was unclear, as facilitation of meetings alternated between CDS and the association. By hosting the meetings at El Salam's offices, the members' outlook of the association was that it enjoyed some central status. But as the association continued to prove its seriousness and competence, it became truly viewed and accepted as the central actor," stated Mr. El Roubi.

## Collaboration with Government

“A direct line of communication must be established with the topmost levels in government, such as the Prime Minister, to give direct orders to government agencies at the executive levels to facilitate policies. We learned that we cannot work solely through a bottom-up approach. We must pursue a top-down approach simultaneously. They (government officials) have to realize that if they can’t work with us, then at least they shouldn’t stand in our way.” These were the words of the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Labor, and Mrs. Hoda, the Manager of the tank cleaning project at El Salam Association, as they referred to the CCA process and its frustration with government bureaucracy.

Those sentiments are understandable. To watch the Haremein market idea come to a halt, even after obtaining a formal letter from the Governor allocating the plot of land for the market, is certainly frustrating. What is even more so is that despite having the Undersecretary from the Ministry of Health on the committee, the water tanks project is also not proceeding as planned due to the regulation that only private companies are permitted to undertake tank purification activities. It is natural that the committee members feel that only so much can be done before a dead end appears.

Yet it is unfair to throw all the blame on government, as if it is one monolithic enemy that is responsible for all shortcomings. The head of District Authority was framed as the scapegoat for the incompleteness of al-Haremein market in its integrated idealized picture. Yet no one seemed to stop and think that he in fact took the first steps in setting up a legitimate market offering security to the vendors. If he exhibited greed for power by not wholeheartedly supporting the committee in the integrated market concept and wanting to maintain market management control within the district authority, then the committee showed similar behavior. The committee so much desired a large demonstrable project, which they wouldn’t compromise, that they wouldn’t acknowledge that al-Haremein vendors are now better off than they were. Moreover, the committee seemed bent on stepping over the District Head from the start, as the idea was taken to the Governor’s office before it came “down” to the District for approval. Perhaps it would have been wiser to give more weight to the most influential body in the urban management of al-Montaza. True, the District Head was kept informed and consulted throughout the process, yet no concessions were made to respond to his concerns. For better or worse, he had the power to stall projects and to overrule the decision of other official and non-official bodies; every effort was needed to appease him. CCA was based on common and overlapping interests, so there was a strong component of *realpolitik* in the approach. Why not continue with the same pragmatic sense and ‘humor’ the head of the District Authority? A compromise would have been to forego the management issue, yet still set up the literacy classes, carry out the awareness campaign and follow through with the rest of the contributions. Even though the projects might have been compartmentalized and possibly detached, there would certainly be value added in the community.

The point is that all initiatives exist in politicized environments. In this case, a politicking technique was used to spark the interest of the actors from the start – through informing each individual of who else was on the committee. “Each one of us thought that since the Undersecretary of so-and-so will be present, then I have to be present as well,” mentioned

the Head of GALAE. CCA implicitly altered the power structure within the committee by empowering El Salam Association and other members, and disempowering those who were seen as saboteurs (Head of the District Authority). Politics were a significant part of the process from the start.

### Concluding Remarks

Perhaps one lesson from the CCA experience is that it may be easier to start with a series of small tasks (like getting a plot of land allocated for a new market or a water tank cleaning project) and then build up to larger more complicated initiatives (like the redesigned market). Although getting the new location for the market and the water tank project can both be seen as successes, the failure to achieve the redesigned Haremein market creates the perception that the CCA initiative did not live up to expectations.

Clearly the key catalyst in the CCA initiative was CDS, an external agent. And without the funding channeled through CDS the CCA would not have become a reality. The funds were the critical asset which, if absent, would not have summoned other assets to be catalyzed. Hence, when al-Haremein market did not proceed in the way aspired by the committee, their attention diverted to another initiative which, although less glamorous, was viable and would use the funds for the community. The remaining assets, while also critical, were of secondary importance in the sequence of events. In this example, it was an external asset (financial) that leveraged internal assets (social, institutional, individual, physical), and that is possibly one of the reasons why the Haremein market project hit a dead end. Perhaps a group of people is more tenacious when a decision is made from within, and internal assets are mobilized first.

Title: Rising from Modest Roots through Partnership  
Community: Beni Soliman  
Theme: Role of Outside Agency  
Wisdom: A little and a little, collected together, becomes a great deal  
The heap in the barn consists of single grains  
Drop and drop makes an inundation

## Background

This case tells the story of the evolution of a development program over 28 years. Like many development initiatives, especially those starting in the 1970s, an external development agency was the stimulus behind the activity. As development trends changed, so did the program, until it was transferred to the local NGO in the spirit of local ownership and sustainability.

The Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA), an international development organization, established its presence in Egypt in 1976. Beni Souef was one of Egypt's poorest governorates; hence it was one of the first to be targeted by ICA<sup>6</sup>. Endorsed by the Governorate administration, ICA chose to work in the eastern part of Beni Souef because it was highly isolated and was not benefiting from government development or infrastructure plans. The East Bank consists administratively of one mother village and five satellite villages. The agricultural land in the East Bank had always been of poorer quality than that in the West Bank, adversely affecting the bean, corn, and tomato crops on which people depend.

The approach undertaken by ICA relied on identifying community needs through discussions with local leaders, such as members of parliament, local councils, and informal heads of towns. In the six villages where community meetings were held, poor drinking water, insufficient primary healthcare, very low income, and outdated agricultural practices were cited as the priority concerns. Only three Community Development Associations (CDAs) existed at the time, but none were active.

## The Story

A small village of 7000, Beni Soliman was one of the six villages assisted through ICA. Mr. Badr, then a member of the local council, was one of the representative community leaders for this village. He remembers a tense relationship between ICA and the local community at the beginning. The local council members had very limited experience working with an international development organization and were skeptical of how money would be used in their community. Though the council originally rejected ICA's presence in Beni Soliman, the US Embassy and the local Governor convinced them to let ICA stay. In spite of this rocky beginning, their uneasy relationship gradually settled into one of increased trust.

---

<sup>6</sup> According the UNDP Human Development Report, Beni Souef remains one of Egypt's poorest areas. With a GDP per capita of £E 3300 and an illiteracy rate of 51% in 2001, it continues to be one of the poorest governorates.

The local leaders from Beni Soliman started working with ICA. After the priority needs were assessed, programs were designed addressing each of the areas. By the early eighties, ICA had well functioning programs in primary health care, micro-credit, and agricultural development. About six years after entering Beni Souef, ICA began to think of how to sustain such activities. A dormant CDA had existed in Beni Soliman since 1983. As it is almost impossible to operate something in Egypt without a legal structure, ICA encouraged Beni Soliman to reactivate this CDA.

In parallel to the capacity building of the CDA, ICA established a preschool with a local widowed volunteer, Hajja Na'ima. At first, the preschool was hosted at an old building owned by the Ministry of Education, the use of which was permitted by the Ministry. When the CDA was capable of running activities it took over the preschool as its first activity, partly because this is what CDAs conventionally do, and also because the CDA felt that preparation for primary school was essential. Salaries and other operational costs were paid for by ICA until 1994 when the preschool was incorporated within MOSA's plan and was allocated an annual fund of £E 5000. As for the premises, the lease arrangement continued until 1990, when 1200 m<sup>2</sup> of land was registered, and a building was built through the financial support of ICA. During this time, ICA's strategy shifted from one of direct assistance in implementation to capacity building to the CDA. Its aim was to prepare the CDA for ICA's eventual withdrawal.

In 1994, all programs were transferred to the Beni Soliman CDA for management. In addition to the nursery, there were two credit programs and a primary health awareness program transferred to the CDA. The CDA was particularly worried about its financial competence to handle the health program. In order to relieve their concern, ICA placed an amount of £E 24,000 in a bank deposit so that the income from interest could be used to cover costs. At that time the interest rate was 11.5%. However, this rate kept decreasing until reaching 8% in 1998. In order to cover the gap, the CDA thought of an enterprising idea. Another piece of land was registered and 15 slots for shops were created so that rent would be collected. In addition to creating 45 jobs in the village, £E 1500 in rent was collected per month in comparison to about £E 200 a month under the bank deposit scheme. The idea was so economically successful that another 15 shops were created in 2002, this time creating a monthly income of £E 3800 for the CDA.

Since 1994, ICA has been connecting the CDA with external funding opportunities. Over the last decade Beni Soliman CDA has vastly expanded and now has programs in education, women's rights, protection of the environment, job creation and income generation, health, youth, and capacity building. It is currently running programs with funding of over £E 800,000 from diverse sources including CIDA, NGOSC, AGFUND, GTZ, and Dutch Cooperation. An annual revenue of £E 80,000 is also generated from the CDA nursery, the women's club, the training center, credit schemes, and membership fees. There are now 49 staff members. Twenty-four women are handling various activities in the CDA.



According to the monitoring records of ICA in the period 1990-1996, per-family income in Beni Soliman nearly doubled, women's illiteracy was cut from 85% to 55% and mortality rates for children under five decreased by one third<sup>7</sup>.

### Comments on Asset-Mobilization, Asset Building, and Community Initiative

The progress which Beni Soliman CDA has made is impressive. From being virtually non-existent it grew into a strong and competent CDA with numerous programs. While it was ICA's idea that a CDA be established to carry on the programs, the CDA proved its competence in accessing funds and implementing development projects in its own right.

What Community Assets were Mobilized?

#### *Individual Assets*

The founders of Beni Soliman CDA were all from the village, as were the members of the general assembly. Mr. Badr, a key member of the CDA, was commended for being an avid speaker with credibility, charisma and a sound understanding of development. He also had a strong ability to utilize his connections to access resources to benefit the CDA and the community. Though quickly registering land and buildings for the use of the CDA was challenging, Mr. Badr convinced MOSA to incorporate some of the CDA's activities, such as the nursery and the women's club, within its plan. As a result of his negotiations, MOSA granted an annual fund of £E 15,000 to Beni Soliman CDA.

Hajja Na'ima was a volunteer teacher at the preschool who decided to devote her time and energy to something worthwhile in her community. She was the only village girl in the early 1950s to receive a college education. Her teaching skills were polished through ICA training on the Montessori nursery school curriculum.

#### *Organizational Capacities*

The organizational capacities of Beni Soliman CDA are at the heart of this case. Its ability to raise funds is exceptional. Members of the board met with the US Ambassador – an event that was viewed on national television – and obtained a grant of USD 60,000 from the Embassy. This is a tremendous accomplishment for a rural CDA.

Beni Soliman CDA's entrepreneurial approach, using interest from the ICA established fund to build rentable shops, is particularly commendable in an environment where most CDAs rely on only traditional fee-earning services such as nurseries, and women's embroidery and sewing centers.

Having political careers, the board members repeatedly mentioned the importance of their powerful connections in maneuvering around government bureaucracy when it came to paperwork and registration of land and buildings. According to Mr. Badr, "what supported

---

<sup>7</sup> Ibrahim, Saad Eddin, *An Assessment of Grassroots Participation in the Development of Egypt*, AUC Press, 1996

this CDA was our relationship with the executive agencies. We, as policy makers, always maintained a good relationship with the government functionaries. And even when I left the district council, I still maintained this relationship.” It was explained that the CDA’s strategy is using the policy makers to lobby the government functionaries. When the head of the district refused to provide a tractor for use by the CDA’s environmental project, that was the strategy followed until the district head succumbed. The board mentioned that this was something they learned from ICA trainings on advocacy and communication.

The CDA implemented a scholarship program for school girls in primary and secondary school. The program provided supplies, books, tuition, uniforms, and pocket money so that the girls would not become a financial burden on their parents and have to drop out of school. The CDA found that its own women’s sewing workshop could produce the uniforms at higher quality and lower cost than other shops. By using its own workshop to supply the uniforms, the community women earned a better income and effectively implemented one component of the project.

Other assets included the buildings which the CDA were able to register for its purposes and the equipment supplied by the district head as discussed above. The lands used to establish the nursery, the CDA building, and the shops are physical assets which the CDA was also able to access.

What Project and Other External Institutional Assets were Mobilized?

#### *Institutional Assets*

Beni Soliman CDA’s strengths as an organization helped it access assets of other institutions. For example, the Red Crescent and the Social Fund for Development were implementing a huge program in Upper Egypt consisting of an infrastructure component and a social component. Toward the end of both institutions’ role in direct implementation, they started looking for organizations that would carry on the activities. The Red Crescent found that Beni Soliman CDA was well suited to carry out the social component.

Mr. Badr described that dealing with MOSA can be as difficult or as smooth as the CDA wants it to be, and that good relationships, even on the personal level, can facilitate many issues. In fact, when the nursery was first established it was not licensed by MOSA, but it was kept operating until the licensing procedures were complete. Few CDAs have that kind of luxury, as MOSA can stop an activity or even liquidate a CDA if it indicates non-compliance with regulations. It was the strong influence of the Beni Soliman CDA board (comprised of local political leaders) and backed by ICA, which facilitated matters for the CDA.

The CDA also maintains a good relationship with surrounding NGOs and CDAs. Five new NGOs were established over the life of Beni Soliman CDA. The CDA members stressed that it would be detrimental for a board to close in on itself. That is why they offer guidance and support to other NGOs in their community. In line with this, Beni Soliman CDA is the lead implementer of an NGO Service Center project, engaging six other NGOs within the project network. Moreover, the CDA plans to establish a regional federation for Eastern

Beni Souef, which is a membership-based legal body for bringing together NGOs in a specific region.

### *Financial Assets*

Obviously, both the external and internal financial assets, whether through project proposals or income generating activity, were key to the CDA's sustainability. External funds from donors in 2003 amounted to £E 800,000, and internally generated funds came to £E 80,000 last year. Both the numerous trainings in project design and proposal writing, and the funds provided by ICA provided impetus to the CDA.

### The Role of the Intermediary

ICA clearly undertook a needs-based approach at the beginning, which was typical of development practice in the 1970s. However, as Beni Soliman CDA matured, ICA's role has evolved from service provider to capacity builder to linker since it began working with Beni Soliman. Extensive funding, training, and coaching in project implementation marked their early involvement. Later, as development paradigms shifted towards capacity building, ICA focused on enabling the CDA, (and especially its board) to take on relevant development projects rather than relying on conventional activities such as the nursery and the women's club. Since 1997, when ICA withdrew its funding, it has taken on the role of linker, in which ICA connects the CDA with external opportunities. For example, ICA introduced the Centre for Development and Population Activities (CEDPA) to the Beni Soliman CDA which led to funding for four projects worth £E 107,950.

ICA's role resembles that of a business incubator. ICA made an initial investment in the CDA, which later paid off not in money but in capacity of the CDA to grow and serve its community. Throughout the 20 years in which ICA was providing technical and financial assistance to the CDA, it was focused on gradually shrinking its role to reduce the dependency of Beni Soliman CDA.

Twenty-eight years after the initial misgivings expressed by local leaders, Beni Soliman CDA is grateful to ICA. After all it was due to ICA's presence that the CDA was founded. It was also due to ICA that the CDA has become accustomed to community development and all its terminology. The CDA boasts a 'governance structure' that supports women; there is one woman on the board and 45 female general assembly members (out of 104). Concepts such as 'governance' and 'gender' are barely spoken of in other CDAs which have not had the exposure of Beni Soliman. ICA also contributed to the CDA's ability to diversify its financial resources beyond conventional activities funded by MOSA and into long-term development projects.

Yet ICA is not the sole reason behind Beni Soliman CDA's success. In fact, Mr. Yassin stated that the same evolutionary capacity building approach was used with other CDA's in Beni Souef and few developed in the same way as Beni Soliman. ICA believes it depends on the readiness and motivation of the board to develop the CDA. "NGOs are like living organisms, like trees. We bring the seeds and fertilizer, but if the tree is not planted in good *soil* it will not grow. We have to identify potential." This analogy was used by the ICA team

to describe how Beni Soliman had good qualities to start with, including the credibility and reputation of its board members. It was these qualities which resemble the *soil*, or assets, using asset-based terminology.

### Asset Building

Undoubtedly, this is a case where the building of organizational capacity has been successful. While this may seem a very heavy investment on ICA's part, it has been interesting to see the ripple effects of this work in and around Beni Soliman. The emergence of six other NGOs in the village is an example of the building of institutional assets. The board and members of these NGOs must have presumably gained skills from establishing and running NGOs, hence individual assets were also developed. Although we didn't have a chance to speak to the other NGOs in the village, it would be natural to think that the success and growth of Beni Soliman served as a model for these emerging NGOs to emulate.

Policy change has also made a positive impact. The more lenient NGO law passed in 2002 places no restrictions on the number of NGOs within one geographic area, encouraging new organizations to emerge when the community deems it necessary.

### Concluding Remarks

Looking at the role of ICA, its purpose was essentially to build the 'capacity' of Beni Soliman. Beni Soliman has since gone from being a fledgling CDA to one which appears on national television and obtains funding from international donors, as well as being a model for other NGOs to emulate. The institutional assets of the CDA were built through ICA's assistance and the willingness and commitment of the board.

This case illustrates an especially long relationship between an international NGO and the CDA it helped to establish. Whether this length of time is necessary is an arguable point – it would be difficult to sustain such investments in the current climate.

Beni Soliman CDA must be commended for its tremendous growth, especially in financial resources. The CDA is also a role model for the kind of principles which should be embraced by any CDA, including opening up and cooperating with other NGOs. The CDA has proven its ability to be financially autonomous. Perhaps the next phase of the CDA's evolution will be proving the sustainability of the projects that it implements on the ground.