



Empowering Women in Rural Qena Through Linkage Between Education and Work

Egypt Network for Integrated Development

Case Study 009

EMPOWERING WOMEN IN RURAL QENA THROUGH LINKAGE BETWEEN EDUCATION AND WORK

Many adolescent girls in rural Upper Egypt are never enrolled in school or are forced to leave school early for many reasons such as poverty and social traditions. In spite of the successful efforts of Egyptian government in increasing enrolment rates, there are still gender gap and rural/urban gaps. According to the **Survey of Young People in Egypt (2011)** 6.9% of young people aged 10-29 have never been to school. While this percentage may seem small, it constitutes 2.1 million Egyptian young people aged 10-29, and every year thousands of young people, especially girls, still fail to enter school. The percentage of females aged 10 to 29 who have never attended school (11.0%) is four times more than that of males (3.0%) in the same age group. School attendance is closely tied to residence, region, and wealth. Rural young people tend to have significantly higher rates of never- attendance and a larger gender gap. Rural Upper Egypt in particular has high rates of never- attendance and a large gender gap. While fewer than two females (4.1%) never attended for every male who never attended (2.5%) in the urban governorates, more than five females (22.1%) for every male (4%) have never attended school in rural Upper Egypt. Gender gaps are larger among lower wealth quintiles. While only 1.0% of the females from the highest wealth quintile and 0.5% of the wealthiest males never attended school, more than a fourth (27.2%) of the females from the lowest wealth quintile and 7.2% of the poorest males never attended (Population Council 2011)

Out-of-school girls are among the most disadvantaged adolescents in rural Egypt. Compared with girls attending school, they are more likely to be engaged in poorly paid farm work, are more likely to be married off early, and are at greater risk for a number of adverse health events, including malnutrition, early childbearing, and poor pregnancy outcomes (El Tawila et al. 1999).

Of course, gender gap in education adversely affects the available work opportunities for women. The concern for women's economic empowerment has been a priority in the agenda of many national, non-governmental as well as international stakeholders in Egypt. Despite the various efforts that were carried on by the government and the different stakeholders concerned with women's economic participation in Egypt, it is evident that there are still various challenges and gaps that still hinder women full participation in the labor market and economic life. These main gaps include: The low women economic participation (around 20%), high unemployment rate (around threefolds that of males), and the poor working conditions of women particularly in the informal sector.

There are significant constraints face women to access to labor market such as the mismatch between skills acquired in schooling and what the labor market requires. Social and cultural factors remain pertinent to understanding gender gaps in areas such as schooling and work. Cultural and social norms are often held to be paramount determinants of women's economic participation; for example , social beliefs in the predominance of women's domestic role. Moreover, lack of a suitable work environment for female employees could be another constraint for female job seekers. Women worry about the lack of respect or decent treatment.

In spite of all these constraints, the conservative culture that dominates wide spaces of rural villages in Upper Egypt is still decisive factor, besides the poverty factor. Dealing with both factors requires designing more integrated and creative interventions.

Existing Successful Models

ISHRAQ : Girls' Literacy Model

In 2001, the Population Council and Save the Children, in partnership with Caritas and the Centre for Development and Population Activities (CEDPA; now TFD), pooled their expertise to design and implement an intervention program to address the needs of out-of-school adolescent girls in rural Upper Egypt. The pilot intervention, referred to locally as *Ishraq* (“sunrise” in Arabic), was launched in four rural villages of el-Minya governorate in Upper Egypt, which is the country’s least developed and most disadvantaged region. Targeting girls aged 13–15, this holistic program was designed to promote literacy, impart life skills, build social networks, and foster leadership and self-confidence through sports. By establishing girl-friendly spaces in which program participants could meet, learn, play, and work collectively, the program sought to safely and confidently bring girls into the public space. At the same time, related interventions aimed at girls’ gatekeepers—parents, boys, and community leaders—were designed to initiate change in community norms and beliefs about the capacities and roles of girls in society.

The *Ishraq* program consists of literacy training, a broadly defined life-skills curriculum, and, for the first time in rural Upper Egypt, sports activities to enhance leadership and team-building skills and prepare girls for integration into formal schooling. For 24 months, girls meet approximately four times each week for three-hour sessions at youth centers, in groups of approximately 25–30 girls each. “Program promoters,” young women who have graduated from secondary school, are recruited from the community and trained to serve as teachers and mentors to participating girls and to lead activities, thereby lending credibility to the program.

Ishraq also benefits from the support of the National Council for Youth (NCY), which has designated unprecedented “girls-only” time at the village youth centers, thereby creating a “safe space” for these groups to meet. The *Ishraq* curriculum consists of mathematics, reading and writing in Arabic, and a life-skills component that provides information on reproductive health, citizenship, rights, and the opportunity to participate in sports. The approach emphasizes active participation and dialogue. Teachers introduce a topic, often through a picture, video, or song, to stimulate discussion. Girls use newly introduced skills, such as spelling, word definition, and problem/answer articulation, to explore the topic. The participatory nature of the curriculum is enhanced by a physical activities component. Girls don tracksuits to participate in sports, many of them for the first time in their lives. For the past decade, the *Ishraq* program has focused primarily on building literacy and social skills for girls in rural communities. More than 900 girls have graduated from *Ishraq* in 14 communities located in the two Upper Egyptian governorates of el-Minya and Beni-Suef. Based on a successful pilot,

Ishraq began moving into the next phase, which included recruiting younger girls into the program and strengthening the program content to include financial literacy.

Extending the benefits of the program for *Ishraq* graduates: Creating girls' clubs

In 2008, the Council established Girls' Clubs in two villages in el-Minya targeting close to 70 graduates from the pilot phase. These Girls' Clubs were led by former *Ishraq* promoters who have since become leaders in their communities. Each Girls' Club is comprised of 20 *Ishraq* graduates who meet twice a week at the youth center. Many graduates have remarked that "Youth centers are where we (as *Ishraq*

girls) had the best memories of our lives." The Girls' Clubs provide: 1) financial support to the graduates to continue their formal education in middle and secondary schools (around 74 percent of all program participants attended school after their graduation from *Ishraq*); 2) pilot-testing of a new financial education curriculum, *Microfinance Opportunities*, that is being integrated into the scale-up phase of *Ishraq* being implemented in 30 villages; and 3) legal rights awareness training to raise girls' awareness, legal understanding, and capabilities, and increase linkages to other community services. The legal rights training includes discussion of official documents (birth certificates and ID cards), personal status laws (engagement, marriage, divorce, and custody), the new Egyptian child laws and family justice project, and violence against girls/women, including FGM/C. Most of the *Ishraq* participants reported that the legal rights training was extremely valuable. In 2010, the Girls' Club model was replicated in an additional four villages each in el-Minya and Beni-Suef targeting 215 graduates.

Building financial literacy and legal rights knowledge

In 2008, the NCY collaborated with *Microfinance Opportunities* in Cairo to provide financial education master training to former *Ishraq* "program promoters." Upon completion of this training, the promoters piloted the financial education curriculum, which consists of modules on budgeting, savings, debt management, bank services, and financial negotiations, with a group of 70 *Ishraq* graduates. Field testing of the financial education curriculum was completed in December 2009, helping to clarify and strengthen the curriculum and its delivery model for scale-up within the *Ishraq* program. An important component of the pilot was creating an incentive for girls to apply their knowledge by opening individual savings accounts at the post office in their village and to begin saving. Former *Ishraq* "program promoters" are preparing to deliver financial education to approximately 200 girls located in eight villages of el-Minya and in Beni-Suef. The next step will be to promote and scale-up a financial education curriculum to the larger group of beneficiaries currently participating in *Ishraq* in 30 rural communities located in governorates of Fayoum, Sohag, and Qena.

From pilot to scale

The NCY and the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood (NCCM) have embraced *Ishraq* as an important program model. International partners, with the collaboration of NCY

and NCCM, are expanding *Ishraq* activities into three of the poorest and most socially conservative Egyptian governorates. In 2009, the successful *Ishraq* pilot program began an ambitious scale-up effort to reach girls living in 30 villages in Fayoum, Sohag, and Qena. In addition, 120 secondary school graduates were recruited and trained as *Ishraq* program leaders to serve as teachers, role models, and advocates. The program currently targets girls 13–15 years of age, but younger girls benefit from the program as well; for example, 23 percent of participants are 12 years old. In many of the communities where *Ishraq* is being implemented, there is high demand among girls as young as 11 to participate.

Furthermore, the *Ishraq* program is helping to get girls into school. Upon completion of the 24-month *Ishraq* program, girls who passed the official government literacy examination (the GALAE) are eligible to enter the formal education system as long as they are younger than 18 years old. In 2011, 1,531 girls who participated in *Ishraq* took the GALAE, the first step toward entering formal education. The *Ishraq* program has shown that it is possible to reach girls in traditionally conservative areas and encourage them to attend school, question social norms, and think about their futures in ways they have not done before.

Opportunity:

Ishraq is different from other literacy programs which focus on education only. No doubt, the holistic approach of *Ishraq* provides the girls with a lot of skills besides literacy and helps to build their personalities. Financial education is important and must be complemented with qualifying the girls for the labor market.

Providing vocational training skills then work opportunities for graduated girls from *Ishraq* will fill the gap between education and work and foster empowerment by linking them. The girls graduated is divided into two groups, the first are the girls less 18 years, who can join the formal education whilst the second are the girls more 18 years and have not the same opportunity. Meanwhile, the quality of girl graduates whether those older or those that refuse to join formal education, make them more qualified to join vocational training centers.

The ENID Approach:

The Egypt Network for Integrated Development (ENID) will build on what has been achieved by *Ishraq* focusing on Qena governorate, namely in one of its poorest villages. El Rezka is located in Abo Tesht district/north Qena, and belongs to the poorest of the poor villages of Qena. It is worth mentioning that other villages in Abo Tesht have not witnessed enough attention from donors and NGOs, contrary to other locations such as Dshna. In spite of the fact that *Ishraq* was implemented in El Rezka, there are still numerous of out-school girls, not to mention the very high percentage of unemployment among women, indeed the majority.

ENID is seeking to establish literacy class for out-school girls and a vocational training centers for girls already graduated from *Ishraq* classes previously, as well as those girls who will

graduate in the future. The idea is simply to link between education and work to achieve actual empowerment of women. The vocational training center will not confine itself to training but its role will extend to production. The final goal is to create jobs for women in a safe environment based upon decent criteria, with the participation of private sector concerns.

ENID will also build a number of partnerships with all stakeholders whether government, NGOs, donors or private sector. Moreover, the partnership with some concerned NGOs inside El Rezka village are committed to the idea of ownership by the local community and to secure sustainability.

Benefits and Possible Impact:

- ✓ Targeting more girls to literate, train and work: linking between education and work will foster the capabilities of rural women and change the culture of the community away from the traditional homebound role of women towards more participation in all life spheres.
- ✓ Providing the girls with safe learning spaces will encourage the community to send their daughters to literacy and training.
- ✓ Creating jobs will reduce the severity of poverty in this village.
- ✓ Modifying the conservative social norms regarding women will lead to empowerment.
- ✓ Creating a cadre of trainers and promoters from the local community, representing an important human asset, which will in the future be able to act as change catalyst.
- ✓ Designing an integrated intervention, with links between education and work will improve all aspects of livelihood of women regarding health, awareness, child care and, eventually, community and political participation.