

Lessons Learnt from CARE Egypt's Partnership Program for Democracy and Governance (PPDG) – Hewar

Executive Summary

CARE Egypt's Partnership Program for Democracy and Governance (PPDG) - Hewar in Beni Suef and Qena has created a visible impact with almost all stakeholders. One clear impact identified by the consultants was the moral empowerment and inspired activism that the program's activities have induced into the participants.

More specifically, and based on the sample villages where interviews were conducted, members of the local popular councils (LPCs) who participated in participatory planning (PP) activities, social activists at civil society organizations (CSO) who were instrumental in organizing public consultations (PCs), and the young men and women who participated in training geared toward "youth-led initiatives", all spoke with gratitude and stated their determination to continue to use the skills they learnt and to play an active role in their local community's affairs.

All weaknesses within the program's activities seem manageable and nothing appears detrimental to the program's continued success. It is only the lack of reactive adjustments by the government, particularly regarding budget allocations, that may lead participants to lose faith in the effectiveness of their efforts.

In general, CARE's support has been instrumental and measures need to be taken to institutionalize the PP and PC activities undertaken by PPDG-Hewar. Such measures include: legislation that requires and regulates PP activities between local government executives and LPC members; working closely with the ministry to showcase the program's results and mobilize its support; developing a withdrawal plan that assigns specific roles to specific stakeholders; and developing a guide book that documents Hewar's concepts and serves as a manual to continue its activities.

To follow is a summary of the program's achievements and significant recommendations for the future, divided by PPDG's three activities.

Participatory Planning (PP)

Participatory planning (PP) activities were successful in producing annual village development plans that reflected communities' needs. Such is the conviction of all stakeholders. The skills acquired by participants in service mapping, identifying deprived areas, and basing budget priorities on such assessment are perceived as eye-opening by many. In addition, stakeholders testify to a newfound tradition of collaboration between local executives, LPC members, and CSOs that did not exist before.

Apart from local executive council (LEC) members, LPC members, and CSOs, PPDG-Hewar should increase activities targeting the public at large to raise awareness.

Also, LPC members should be trained not to marginalize the requests and opinions of citizens they perceive as "inadequate", such as illiterate citizens.

Ways to improve and institutionalize Hewan's PP activities include: establishing periodic meetings between the LEC Head, LPC members, and CSO representatives to discuss community needs; holding public forums on PP and printing newsletters; and publicizing the results of PP activities to inspire people's faith in the process.

Public Consultations (PCs)

PCs generally tended to represent town hall meetings to discuss problems rather than to hold officials accountable, but they were successful and popular nonetheless. PCs ranged from small issue-based consultations to larger meetings that covered several issues and involved more than one executive. They were largely successful in identifying problems and implementing solutions and also fostered a new relationship and spirit of cooperation between LECs, LPCs, and CSOs. There is a changed attitude toward being held accountable and both LEC and LPC members have expressed willingness to be subjects of PCs in the future.

Ways to improve and institutionalize PC activities include: training local government officials on their roles in delivering citizens' rights; training LPCs and CSOs on organizing and managing PCs; raising public awareness on the concept and practice of PCs through forums that would precede actual PCs; and establishing a system of hierarchical monitoring that would include reporting on the proceedings and recommendations of PCs to higher levels.

It is noteworthy that many participants perceive the idea of publicly questioning an official as inappropriate.

Youth-led Initiatives

Two youth-led initiatives were implemented in each of the six villages in Qena and the seven villages in Beni Suef. Beneficiaries of these initiatives are estimated at 180 in Qena and 210 in Beni Suef. The participants in the CARE training became strongly motivated about volunteer work and also became a source of motivation for others.

It is worth mentioning that the regional CSOs that partnered with CARE in managing the Youth-Led Initiatives were instrumental to the success of this component.

There is little doubt that these trainings should continue. The passion and inspired action of the youth, although intangible, provide assurance that efforts will sustain in the future. Many of them spoke of the need to go beyond the limited community studies that they learned to conduct and to carry out comprehensive needs assessment surveys of their villages.

One possible way to supplement the youth's activism is to hold forums on volunteer work and raise awareness of the achievements of volunteers and local CSOs.