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# EGYPT MEDIA DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

## MIDTERM EVALUATION REPORT

MAY 2009

This publication was produced for review by the United States Agency for International Development by ARD.

**Submitted to:**  
USAID/Egypt

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Prepared for USAID under Task Order No. 263-I-01-06-00008; USAID Contract No.: DFD-I-16-04-00227-00, under the Analytical Services II IQC.

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## **DISCLAIMER**

The authors' views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Agency for International Development or the United States Government.

# ACRONYMS

ABC	Audit Bureau of Circulation
ACU	Ahram Canadian University
AUC	American University in Cairo
COP	Chief of Party
CSO	Civil Society Organizations
DCOP	Deputy Chief of Party
DG	Democracy and Governance
ERTU	Egyptian Radio and Television Union
GOE	Government of Egypt
IDF	Institutional Development Framework
IREX	International Research and Exchanges Board
IT	Information Technology
LE	Egyptian Pound
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MDP	Media Development Program
MENA	Middle East News Agency
MIC	Ministry of International Cooperation
MOI	Ministry of Information
MOF	Ministry of Finance
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MSI	Management Systems International
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PPDG	Partnership Program of Democracy and Governance
SIS	State Information Service
SMS	Short Message Service
SPC	Supreme Press Council
TOT	Training of Trainers
UAE	United Arab Emirates

UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
US	United States
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WAN	World Association of Newspapers

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The media in Egypt is in transition. Although it still has one of the most widely read print media and developed radio and television networks in the region, it has lagged behind global changes in the media sector and is being eclipsed by more modern and profitable media operations coming from the wider Arab region. The Media Development Program (MDP) funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development in Egypt (USAID/Egypt) was designed to help Egypt address the challenges confronting the development of its media sector by helping to raise professional standards, improve media management and economic viability, and strengthen the enabling environment for free and independent media. MDP is more than halfway through its five-year program and is generally on track. It is working in a difficult environment and not all of its intended partners have yet to come on board. However, the successes that are starting to emerge are likely to bring most of these intended partners into the program. The MDP now is well positioned to make a substantial difference in the media sector in Egypt, but this will require a more strategic program implementation and integration of activities.

## BACKGROUND

MDP is a five-year media strengthening program is being implemented under a bilateral agreement between USAID with the Government of Egypt (GOE). MDP began in April 2006 and focuses on increasing the professional standards of Egyptian print and broadcast journalism and improving the economic viability of the media through the strengthening of marketing and advertising capacities. At the time of its design, the broader media environment was seen as open to change and a component to improve the enabling environment for a free and independent media at the national and local levels was also included. However, at the GOE's request, USAID limited MDP activities to the professionalization of the sector and has not directly addressed more politically sensitive topics such as legal reform.

MDP is being implemented through Task Order No. 263-I-01-06-00008 with Management Systems International (MSI) with the assistance of MSI's primary subcontractors, International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX), CARE, and D3 Systems. The total estimated budget for the program is \$15,499,707. USAID's Egyptian counterpart for this program is the Ministry of International Cooperation (MIC), which jointly chairs a Media Steering Committee with USAID that is made up of representatives of MDP's main media partners. These are:

- Al Ahram newspaper;
- Al Akhbar newspaper;
- Egyptian Radio and Television Union (ERTU);
- Supreme Press Council (SPC);
- Egyptian Press Syndicate;
- Faculty of Mass Communications, Cairo University;
- Middle East News Agency (MENA); and
- State Information Service (SIS).

MDP is organized into achieving four objectives:

- Objective 1: *Building training capacity to promote professional development;*
- Objective 2: *Improving management and economic viability of the print and broadcast sector;*
- Objective 3: *Strengthening the professionalism and economic viability of local and regional media;* and
- Objective 4: *Improving the enabling environment for professional, objective, and economically viable media.*

USAID/Egypt commissioned this midterm evaluation of its MDP program in order to assess the progress made to date in meeting project objectives, identify constraints and lessons learned, and to make recommendations on ways to increase program impact in the remaining time under the contract. The evaluation was conducted by an independent team of experts in April and May 2009. There were time constraints for the evaluation, but the Team interviewed most MDP partners and other media and civil society organizations (CSOs) in Cairo and in the governorates of Alexandria and Minya; conducted site visits to MDP-assisted training centers and media outlets; and reviewed project documents and other related materials. The evaluation is organized around the four objectives of the task order and focused primarily on MDP's activities and the progress to date towards meeting these objectives.

## FINDINGS

The evaluation found that **MDP has made significant progress in some areas during the first half of the program, but that some of the most important intended partners—ERTU, Al Ahrām and SIS—have yet to come on board.** MDP focused most of its attention on its partners through Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs). This MOU approach includes an institutional self-assessment process (IDF) which provided for more systematic and effectively targeted assistance than other assistance provided by the program, which appeared more ad hoc. MDP works in a difficult environment and this has affected the way the program has been implemented and assistance targeted, resulting in an **implementation bias toward achieving buy-in over professional improvements**, especially in its initial years. **Implementation and management issues have limited its impact** in some cases and **a more integrated and synergistic programmatic approach to implementation is needed** in order for the program to be able to make a significant difference in improving the professionalism, economic viability, and editorial independence of the Egyptian media sector, which is USAID's ultimate goal for MDP.

### *Objective 1: Building training capacity to promote professional development*

MDP provided training to more than 1,600 media professionals and worked to strengthen six training institutions in Cairo (MENA, Cairo University, Ahrām Canadian University [ACU], Al Akhbar Training Center, Supreme Press Council, and the Egyptian Press Syndicate). Assistance was provided through an MOU framework based, for the most part, on institutional assessments of needs and included technical assistance, training, and some commodity support (mostly computers and media labs, including Simulated Editorial and Broadcasting Environments, sophisticated media software, desks, chairs, and other structural upgrades). MDP assistance also focused on improving their institutional capacities as part of the overarching goal of enabling Cairo to become a regional training hub. MDP has also organized six international study tours and provided training for the broader media community through a variety of courses and in multiple locations.

**The evaluation found** that MDP undertook a considerable level of training for its MOU partners and media professionals and in particular that the program has:

- **Served as a catalyst for the establishment of new training centers and the rejuvenation of existing ones.** In particular, the Supreme Press Council, which invested Egyptian Pound (LE) 10 million of its own funds to build a new training facility, and MENA which has now linked job promotion to training.

- **Started to increase the competitiveness of Egypt as a regional training hub** through its support to MENA, which now has a state of the art newsroom simulator; to the new SPC training center, which is poised to become a regional centerpiece of training for journalists from the Middle East and North Africa region as well as French and Arabic speaking Africa; and to the Al Akhbar Training Center which is on its way to becoming an authorized Adobe training center.
- **Raised awareness among Egyptian media institutions and professionals** of the need to improve the quality of journalism; adopt more modern approaches to storytelling, photography, layout, and design; and, among some, to develop a greater understanding of their role as providers of information and a belief that they could be the leaders of such a transformation.

However, MDP tends to do training itself rather than building the training capacities of its MOU partners to do its trainings, which is not sustainable. The approach also tends to lack effective targeting of trainees and course development. Non-MOU training efforts seem more ad hoc and lack follow-up. ERTU, Al Ahram, and SIS have yet to agree to work directly with the project, although it appears the SPC's and other MDP successes may be pulling ERTU and Al Ahram in that direction. To improve implementation of Objective 1 activities, **the evaluation recommends:**

- **Strengthened use of the IDF and MOU process by MDP and its partners to ensure strategic targeting and tailoring of training assistance and capacity building and increased focus on building institutional trainer capacity** to increase impact and ensure the type of professional training now being provided directly by MDP and its experts continues beyond the life of the project
- **Emphasized institutional capacity building in business and marketing skills**, including fundraising and attracting major international donors to use these centers to jump start their regional use and to direct them toward financial sustainability.

### ***Objective 2: Improving management and economic viability of Egyptian print and broadcast sector***

MDP assisted national newspapers and media institutions to improve their ability in marketing and managing their media products and business. It did this by providing technical assistance and training and by recruiting and training seven business consultants. MDP conducted market research in the governorates of Cairo, Aswan, Alexandria, and Minya on the usage of different media, and used it as a training tool. The evaluation found that MDP had made some progress in raising the awareness on the value of market research and in improving market techniques. There is anecdotal information that some institutions increased the number of advertisers and possibly some revenues after assistance but as MDP does not collect financial information for policy reasons, this is not documented. In general, advertising revenues appear to be declining because of the economy. It does appear however, that MDP:

- **Strengthened the ability of some institutions to gain subscribers through improved media platforms and strategy.** For example, MENA increased its Short Message Service (SMS) subscribers from 1,300 to more than 31,000, along with an increase in revenues.
- **Exposed journalists and media managers to the future of news** through overseas study tours that spurred several newspapers to develop their Internet platforms, reaching audiences and generating traffic to the sites with photos and stories, and in MENA's case, finding sponsors.

As with Objective 1, the evaluation found that MDP tended to use its staff or contracted experts to deliver assistance and its efforts to build local capacity to provide business consulting services focused primarily on strengthening individuals rather than building institutional capacity which limits its ability to make an impact in the bigger picture. **The evaluation recommends:**

- **Expanded use and wider distribution of market research with MOU partners** for use as a teaching tool as well as a means to help improve the economic viability of the media.

- **Focus on building institutional capacities for business consulting and for training in business consulting** and provide more in-depth training than is currently given, so that these capacities become institutionalized and reach a greater number of beneficiaries.

***Objective 3: Strengthening professionalism and economic viability of local and regional media***

MDP provided training to local media outlets in its three targeted governorates, Alexandria, Aswan, and Minya. It signed an MOU with Akhbar El Youm to assist with the development of a weekly local supplement for Alexandria, and with its marketing efforts to enhance the quality of presentation and illustration of the local content provided in the supplement. It also signed an MOU with the Library of Alexandria to develop Alex FM, a commercial local radio station. MDP intends to assist the Syndicate's branch in Alexandria to establish a training center and is in discussions with local associations in Aswan about establishing a local media resource center there. In Minya, MDP provided the governorate's newspaper Sawt Al Minya and the local private newspaper Sawt Al Mar'a with business and technical assistance.

The evaluation found that MDP has made some progress toward meeting Objective 3, primarily through its assistance to its two MOU partners. Akhbar El Youm has issued a weekly Alexandria supplement in its national paper since July 2008 and its marketing department expects to increase its advertising revenues by 30% based on lessons learned in MDP training. The Library is well under way with its plans to launch its radio by 2010. Fewer results were evident from the MDP work done directly with local media, although some results were evident in Minya, where Sawt Al Mar'a saw a 50% increase in readership and created a blog. Objective 3 suffered from implementation and management issues, which need to be addressed if MDP is to make a significant difference with local media by the end of the project. Nevertheless, MDP assistance:

- **Provided significant value added to the local media activities planned by Akhbar El Youm and the Library** by tailoring assistance directly to their needs and visions, and by providing the appropriate information, including market research and expertise. There is significant potential for results with the work with the Syndicate branch in Alexandria to increase the professionalism of their local members.
- **Raised awareness among media professionals on the need for improved local coverage** both in Cairo and in the targeted governorates, and raised awareness among local media on **the potential of the new media** to attract new customers and help ensure future economic viability.

To improve local media strengthening activities, **the evaluation recommends:**

- **Increased efforts to include local journalists in trainings conducted by MOU partners in Cairo and increased efforts with the Press Syndicate in Alexandria to provide training and act as a training facility** for the north.
- **Strategic planning exercises by MDP for its programmatic activities to strengthen the local media for the remainder of the project** to prioritize activities and identify essential activities needed before the end of the project.

***Objective 4: Improving the enabling environment for media***

There was a non-governmental organization (NGO) grant component foreseen in the program under Objective 4 to assist with improving the enabling environment for media. This was cut back early in the program at the request of the GOE. As a result, MDP worked around the margins on this Objective, primarily providing training to NGOs to improve their media and computer skills. These trainings seemed ad hoc and had limited follow-up or integration with Objective 3 activities on local media. The targeting of some NGOs also seemed questionable as some NGOs assisted were characterized as "not credible" during the MDP NGO baseline assessment, while other NGOs that appeared appropriate and with a media focus were not assisted. As a result, the evaluation found limited results for this objective beyond a general awareness raising and some new NGO websites.

Objective 4 also seeks to create a community of advocates for independent and economically viable media. MDP efforts did try to develop cross-sectoral advocates, particularly among NGOs and various professions; but opportunities inherent in leveraging social networking platforms that could consolidate this effort seem to have been overlooked. This could help develop a critical mass of media professionals and citizens, who care about and advocate for quality journalism, ethical standards, and fairness and balance in the media, particularly as mobile technology now allows for anyone with a handheld device to receive and share news and information. However, MDP cannot do everything and its activities need to be focused and prioritized for its remaining two years. MDP's comparative advantage is its relationship and assistance provided to the professional media sector. As a result, **the evaluation recommends:**

- **Focus by MDP on professional media associations rather than NGOs** in the broad sense and MDP should serve as a resource on media reform expertise for other programs assisting civil society media monitoring and reform activities.

### *Program design and implementation*

The evaluation found the design of the program to be appropriate and strategically targeted to the major media institutions in Egypt, thus able to reach the majority of media professionals. It allowed for multiple channels of participation that provided the opportunity for participants from non-participating institutions to benefit, which is a best practice in implementing programs under difficult circumstances. The regional hub focus was another appropriate choice as this meshed USAID's interests in professionalizing the media through training with Egypt's interests in asserting itself as a preeminent hub for media training in the Middle East and North Africa region. MDP had a rapid start-up and an ambitious program and is well on its way to delivering some of the task order outputs. However, implementation and management issues are impacting program performance and limiting its potential results. Needs include:

- **Better coordination and transparency** at all levels. Many partners and participants at the implementation level felt uninformed about MDP activities and their results even within their own institutions. Their decision-makers had similar sentiments, noting that the Media Steering Committee, where general information should be shared at that level, had not met for one year.
- **More strategic planning, targeting, and prioritization.** The program has a strategic vision but this is not evident in implementation where many activities seemed ad hoc or generic and lacked synergies and follow-up.
- **Increased staffing and more effective use of existing staff.** Staffing levels are insufficient for the level of effort required to effectively implement a program of this magnitude and complexity. In addition, implementation is centralized, leaving some staff underutilized and others overburdened. This impacts the coherence of activity implementation where some activities are implemented in fits and starts.
- **Building local trainer capacities.** MDP has focused more on delivering training than on training the trainers and building the institutional systems needed for sustainability after the end of the project. This approach also affects MDP's staffing needs and the effective use of staff as noted above.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

MDP is serving as a catalyst and as a means for Egypt's state-owned media to improve the quality of their news reporting and operations. This is an important component toward strengthening the independence of the media and increasing its professionalism in order to improve access to information and encourage more informed participation by civil and political society. Despite the inroads made by Arabic satellite television and other Arabic language media, including the new media, most Egyptians still get their news from Egypt's large state media institutions, which also participate in setting media policies and regulating the sector. Advances in digital technology will also fundamentally change the way Egyptians share and access

information. However, new policy initiatives, such as the broadcast law, are all on hold pending the presidential elections scheduled for 2011 and little is likely to change in the sector before then.

Three years into the program, MDP's design still seems appropriate and the objectives identified in the task order still seem to address the major constraints towards the development of the professional media sector.<sup>1</sup> MDP's strengths are its bilateral nature and the scope of media expertise that is able to provide. Its relationship with the MIC has strengthened its ability to work with the public and private media and facilitated access and reception within the state media institutions to MDP expertise and assistance. In return, MDP has been able to provide some world class expertise and experiences. As a result, MDP is now in a position where it could start to make a significant difference in the development of the media sector in Egypt.

As a result, the evaluation recommends:

- **Strengthening the existing program by more strategic targeting and integrated planning for implementation and an increased focus on institutional capacity building** by MDP as detailed in the objective-level recommendations. In addition, MDP should take a strategic look at its program in order to **prioritize the use of its remaining time and resources**. This should include discussions with its partners and identifying the desired end state for its assistance for each of the objectives and partners. To expand the reach of the program's expertise and to build synergies, MDP, USAID, and the MIC should foster networking and information sharing between MDP partners and with others and leverage the results made with the regional training centers and business development approaches to interest other state media institutions and departments to participate in the program, and to make the type of changes that will be needed to strengthen their operations and news reporting.
- **Strategic planning by USAID and the MIC for the future of this bilateral program**. There are only two years remaining under the task order for this program. Now is the opportune time for USAID and the MIC to take a strategic look at this program and determine what they would like its end state and results to be. MDP's own look at its program should inform this process. As part of this process, the evaluation recommends:
  - **Consideration of a two-year time extension for MDP** so it has the time to make the type of institutional and attitudinal changes required—especially now that it looks like the important broadcast sector and Egypt's largest publisher will come on board in Year 4. This would also take the program through the presidential elections and give USAID the time to assess the new government's policy environment and changes brought about by the advancing reach of mobile technology and to design its next phase of media assistance accordingly; and
  - **Exploration of additional funding options for MDP** as there is increasing demand for MDP assistance and current funding is not sufficient to meet this demand or to leverage emerging opportunities, in particular those that the participation of the broadcast sector will bring. Additional funding sources should be explored, including GOE support and other donors- in particular, partnerships with the United Nations (UN) (such as United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], and United Nations Development Fund for Women [UNIFEM]) as they often provide parallel funding to replicate or expand existing training programs and the bilateral nature of this program is ideally suited for UN assistance.

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<sup>1</sup> As identified in the task order, these were inadequate training opportunities and technical support facilities; poor management and weak business development; underdevelopment of an enabling environment necessary for legal, regulatory and policy reforms; and underdevelopment of the local media.