

Egypt

Public Awareness on Water Scarcity



From 1995 to 1998, GreenCOM assisted USAID and Egypt's Ministry of Public Works and Water Resources (MPWWR) in initiating a participatory communication program to educate different segments of the public about water conservation and water pollution prevention. The MPWWR is responsible for managing the waters of the Nile, including irrigation canals, drains, and groundwater. Its mandate is of the utmost importance, as water sustains the social and economic well being of Egypt. In the mid-1990s, however, the country's limited water supply was under great strain from population growth, increasing use of intensive agricultural practices, and industrial development.



Although the MPWWR traditionally focused on the engineering issues related to water delivery, the late minister Dr. Mohammed Abdel Hady Rady recognized that engineering expertise had to be matched by careful consideration of people's needs and behaviors. He requested USAID's help to build his ministry's ability to involve water users in formulating and implementing new policies promoting efficient delivery, use, conservation, and protection of water resources.

Establishment of the Water Communication Unit

GreenCOM's first step was to develop a water communication strategy for the MPWWR. Included in this strategy was a recommendation to create a special department within the ministry that would be dedicated solely to communication. One month

after GreenCOM's strategy was presented to the minister and his senior staff, a ministerial decree was issued to launch the MPWWR's new Water Communication Unit (WCU). The decree encouraged all departments of the ministry to cooperate with the WCU.

One of GreenCOM's primary objectives was to build the WCU's capacity to carry out its critical mission within the ministry. A two-week training course was designed for unit staff and introduced them to development communication in theory and practice. Specific topics included:

- Development communication for behavior change
- Tasks of a development communicator
- Assessment of MPWWR communication needs
- Planning and implementing communication campaigns
- Project and personnel management
- Producing communication materials

After the WCU was established, its staff members collaborated with GreenCOM on a pilot research activity in the village of Manshat Essam in the governorate of Menoufia. Research was focused on *mesqa* (irrigation canal) clean up and consisted of focus group discussions and in-depth interviews to determine the issues facing village farmers. Following this initial practicum, GreenCOM and the WCU expanded their research to three other governorates—Aswan, Fayoum, and Damietta—before developing the WCU's first national public awareness campaign.

Research indicated that many people did not realize the gravity of Egypt's water shortage, nor did they trust the MPWWR because they perceived past experiences with the ministry in a negative light. Despite their lack of awareness about water quantity, they were very anxious about quality, voicing a high level of concern about pollution in the mesqas and other sources.

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First National Campaign

After GreenCOM helped the WCU staff conduct formative research and learn basic development communication skills, they were ready to implement their first national public awareness campaign on water scarcity. This campaign concentrated on four themes:

- **Egypt's water** comes from other countries and a treaty **limits** the amount Egypt can use.
- As the **population increases**, the amount of water available per person will decline.
- **Farmers use the most water** and can conserve the most.
- MPWWR field staff are in frequent contact with farmers and play an important role in **shaping farmers' water conservation behaviors**.

Farmers were the main target audience of this campaign, but GreenCOM and the WCU also targeted MPWWR field staff and the mass media. Campaign tools and products included:

Media Exposure

The WCU arranged 19 radio or television appearances for senior MPWWR staff, who were interviewed about the campaign. As relationships were built between the WCU and major media outlets, the two groups began to work together, identifying key MPWWR officials to be interviewed, developing interview questions, and preparing ministry staff for their television appearances. The WCU also arranged workshops in Cairo, Port Said, and Alexandria to brief media representatives about the campaign and introduce them to the roles and responsibilities of the ministry.

Communication Support Materials

GreenCOM guided WCU staff in preparing a set of print materials for distribution to MPWWR field staff, media representatives, and schools. Important links with other government

agencies were built, as the WCU collaborated with the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Agriculture on these materials.

Products included a special issue of the WCU monthly newsletter for field engineers to highlight the awareness campaign and a briefing folder for fact sheets, reports, and other written products for ministry field staff and media representatives. For schools, the WCU created a teacher guide on water scarcity issues and a wall chart to illustrate proper and improper uses of water. Students also received a coloring book calendar and an irrigation calendar to take home to their parents.



GreenCOM and the Water Communication Unit developed print materials that conveyed urgency about water scarcity.

■ Public Service Advertisements

Another important aspect of the WCU's first campaign was the use of television, radio, and print advertisements on water scarcity. GreenCOM helped the WCU contract an Egyptian advertising agency to develop five radio and six television spots, two newspaper ads, and a set of promotional handouts (hats, bumper stickers, and pocket calendars) for MPWWR field staff and other groups. The reach of the campaign was extensive. During a three-month period, the television spots were broadcast free of charge more than 1,000 times and were viewed by almost 26 million Egyptians.



Building MPWWR Capacity

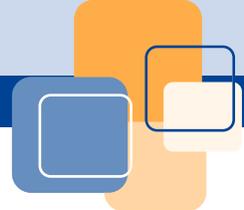
After GreenCOM had assisted the Ministry of Public Works and Water Resources in establishing the Water Communication Unit and developing the WCU's first public awareness campaign, USAID asked the project to provide further assistance to the WCU under the auspices of the Agricultural Policy Reform Project. There were two specific objectives for this next phase. The first was to increase water users' awareness of the need for water conservation and pollution prevention. The second was to build better relationships between water users and the MPWWR field staff, especially the district water engineers.

To design appropriate training interventions, GreenCOM conducted a knowledge, attitudes, and practice study with more than 1,000 farmers and their wives. The objective of this study was to help the MPWWR understand the concerns and perspectives of this critical segment of the population. Allowing the research was a remarkable step for the ministry, which was used to operating in a highly centralized, top-down manner, dictating from Cairo how much irrigation water each farmer received and even which crops the farmers could plant.* Demand for the resulting research report was so high that a second printing was required.

The research found that farmers were distrustful of the MPWWR and its district engineers, who worked in the field on managing irrigation water. Likewise, a survey of 183 district water engineers revealed that they perceived the farmers as ignorant and tended to blame them for all water problems. Thus, GreenCOM and the WCU's main task was to help each group appreciate the perspective of the other, build trust and open communication channels between farmers and engineers, and demonstrate the potential benefits accruing to each side from greater collaboration through such innovations as water user associations.



* Max Rodenbeck, *Cairo: The City Victorious* (New York: Vintage, 2000), 17.



GreenCOM and the WCU implemented a comprehensive communication training program for district engineers and other MPWWR employees. By the end of this program, 180 engineers had been trained in communication and customer service skills and 125 senior and mid-level ministry staff had taken part in seminars on management and problem solving. Eighty ministry inspectors also received management training. In addition, WCU representatives made nearly 20 visits to district engineer sites to help the engineers facilitate partnership meetings with farmers. The WCU staff and engineers also hosted four educational meetings with about 5,000 schoolchildren.

To complement the district engineer training, GreenCOM continued to strengthen the skills of WCU staff to enable the unit to support both the engineers and farmers as the MPWWR implemented new policies. GreenCOM provided training for the WCU in a variety of areas including technical writing, graphics software, video production, materials pretesting, evaluation, and customer service.

For example, GreenCOM purchased video and audio production equipment and trained staff members in producing short videos. One product was a 14-minute video illustrating aspects of field engineer staff training and meetings with farmers. Other videos documented the implementation of MPWWR policy initiatives such as the formation of water user associations. Staff members also gained



experience by videotaping all training events during the first six months of 1999 and covering the MPWWR's Nile 2000 Conference.

During this phase of the project, GreenCOM not only engaged in capacity building activities for ministry staff but also developed a second public awareness campaign on water scarcity.

■ **Television and Radio Spots**

Six television spots on Egypt's growing water scarcity were broadcast in the summer of 1998. Selected national and regional stations aired them more than 300 times per month for a total of 1,028 airings. It is estimated that the spots were seen at least once by 90 percent of the rural population (or 13,310,000 people) and by 87 percent of the total population (or 25,838,000 people).

A follow-on campaign of twelve television and radio spots was produced to exemplify the theme of government and farmers as partners, joined in a common endeavor to confront water scarcity. In this series, farmers were portrayed as successful businessmen who recognize that water is an essential resource upon which their prosperity depends. The benefit/rationale for behavior change was financial security and increased income for farmers who adopt recommended water management practices.

■ **Documentaries**

Two 15-minute video documentaries were produced as part of the campaign that focused on specific water conservation practices in certain geographical areas and particular agricultural sectors. These documentaries were designed for use in farmer meetings conducted as another part of USAID's Agricultural Policy Reform Project. The first featured a water-saving method for sugar cane irrigation. The second encouraged farmers to plant a new variety of rice that consumed less water due to a shorter growing season. The need for such a

video was underscored by data from the KAP study of farmers, which revealed that only 36 percent of farmers believed they had sufficient information to select new, water-saving crops. WCU media personnel cooperated with a commercial producer to create the videos, which provided additional on-the-job training.

■ News Programs

Twenty-six episodes of a 10-minute television show called *Water News for Farmers* were produced with the cooperation of a television station that covered the entire Delta in Lower Egypt, where agriculture is intensive. Viewership for that channel was estimated at more than three million. The program featured news about water developments, recommendations and schedules for irrigation water delivery, and interviews with local farmers. The program was very useful for disseminating water messages and also served as a model for future co-production with regional broadcasters.

■ Other Video pProductions

GreenCOM and the WCU also collaborated on educational/instructional videos, water announcements based on verses from the Koran, and two other documentaries. Training and experience provided through GreenCOM gave the MPWWR a strong foundation for future media campaigns. By the end of the project a new facility had been designed and constructed and an annual budget secured for the WCU, thus enabling the group to produce materials on its own.

■ Print Materials

GreenCOM and project partners produced an extensive library of print materials, including fact sheets to convey core campaign messages to a wide variety of groups including senior staff of the MPWWR, donor agencies, water specialists, and journalists. Such widespread information sharing was not a standard practice



GreenCOM comic books communicated water scarcity to Egyptian children.

in Egypt, so it was a very significant part of the campaign. Other print and electronic materials (posters, booklets, leaflets, brochures, wall charts, calendars, notebooks, coloring books for children, t-shirts, and an assortment of promotional giveaways) were also produced after extensive pretesting with target groups to ensure message comprehension. Post-distribution reports from field staff, trainers, and farmers confirmed the appeal and usefulness of WCU print materials, and in many cases, the MPWWR provided funding to increase print runs.

■ Community Mobilization

In addition to the materials produced with GreenCOM, WCU representatives made visits to meetings organized by district engineers to build partnerships with approximately 500 farmers. The WCU staff members helped engineers distribute educational materials and collaborated with them on educational sessions with nearly 5,000 schoolchildren.

Results and Lessons Learned

From 1995 to 1998 GreenCOM played a significant role in helping USAID and the Egyptian government reshape the relationship between a major water user group—farmers—and the Ministry of Public Works and Water Resources. One important result was the formation of the MPWWR’s Water Communication Unit, which reflected the ministry’s commitment to a better relationship with farmers.

Through training in research and a wide variety of communication tools, GreenCOM also sharpened the professional skills of ministry staff. The WCU, for example, gained the ability to implement research-based communication interventions to help other MPWWR departments carry out their work more effectively. One concrete result was the creation of Egypt’s first national communication campaign on water scarcity. The WCU participated in all stages of this campaign, from the formative research to message development and materials production. WCU staff also began to make regular visits to the field to meet with district engineers, a necessary step for improving internal ministry communications.

Another major outcome for GreenCOM and project partners was an increase in district engineers’ knowledge about water-saving techniques and the importance of water user associations. An evaluation at the end of the project found that engineers’ knowledge of water-saving techniques for farmers increased by more than 100 percent; the percentage of engineers who could define a water user association jumped from 53 to 100 percent; and the percentage of engineers who could cite at least two reasons why a farmer would join a water user association increased from 51 to 76 percent.

After participating in GreenCOM’s training workshops, the engineers began to hold community meetings with farmers to discuss water scarcity issues (representing an almost 200 percent increase in the number of meetings held) and built a framework for creating water user associations in the future, a long-term goal of the MPWWR.

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Selected Publications and Products

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GreenCOM

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