



Best practices in Egypt:

Engaging the Media



Media professionals interview woman as part of their training in FP/RH/MCH issues

The CATALYST Consortium is a global reproductive health and family planning activity initiated in September 2000 by the Office of Population and Reproductive Health, Bureau for Global Health of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The Consortium is a partnership of five organizations: Academy for Educational Development (AED), Centre for Development and Population Activities (CEDPA), Meridian Group International, Inc., Pathfinder International and PROFAMILIA/Colombia. CATALYST works in reproductive health and family planning through synergistic partnerships and state-of-the-art technical leadership. Its overall strategic objective is to increase the use of sustainable, quality reproductive health and family planning services and healthy practices through clinical and nonclinical programs.

Mission

CATALYST's mission is to improve the quality and availability of sustainable reproductive health and family planning services.

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.

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THE NEED

The media is a major source of information for many rural women, who have little mobility outside their homes. According to the 2003 Egyptian Interim DHS, 80% of rural women from Upper Egypt watch television every week, 52% listen to the radio, and 8% read magazines or newspapers. For two decades, USAID has worked with the State Information Service, the Egyptian agency responsible for public education through the media, to create support for Egypt's family planning program. As a result, the role of television in providing family planning information is particularly well developed: television was the most recent source of information for 88% of women who had been exposed to a family planning message during the six months prior to the survey (as compared to physicians, cited by just 8% of women).

This effort successfully unified national messages regarding family planning. However, it did not support local- or governorate-level coverage of reproductive health and family planning issues or events. Although many local media professionals are respected sources of information, few had the information or skills to effectively educate their audiences about reproductive health and family planning.

THE TAHSEEN SOLUTION

TAHSEEN decided to involve local- and governorate-level media professionals as partners in its efforts to: (1) raise awareness about improved clinic services; (2) educate and mobilize communities in support of healthy behavior change; and (3) encourage more open dialogue about a range of reproductive health and family planning issues. This effort complemented national media activities, which focused more specifically on family planning information and messages.

In October 2003, TAHSEEN began assembling 18 interested local media professionals from Minia Governorate. The media group consisted of local professionals from television, radio, and newspapers, as well as local representatives of the State Information Service, senior governorate-level MOHP officials and physicians, and representatives of Cultural Palaces, which host some of TAHSEEN's educational plays and puppet shows. By providing this media group with accurate information about reproductive health and family planning, the tools with which to devise effective, consistent health messages, and a network of media professionals and government officials, TAHSEEN strived to make these professionals capable reproductive health and family planning advocates.

After participating in TAHSEEN's program, these media professionals were motivated and better able to report on reproductive health and family planning topics, including TAHSEEN-sponsored events. In addition, they covered the many community changes that were occurring as a result of TAHSEEN's mobilization activities, reaching women

and men in participating communities and throughout their governorates, which also contributed to the momentum arising from these events.

The program for media professionals consisted of a series of 12 workshops, co-facilitated by an expert physician as well as a communication specialist. Topics included the reproductive health and family planning situation in that governorate, optimal birth spacing, family planning methods, breastfeeding, postabortion care, sexually transmitted infections, safe motherhood, gender roles and men's responsible involvement in reproductive health and family planning decision making, girls' education, and premarital counseling.

At each workshop:

- The medical expert gives a technical presentation on the topic.
- The communication specialist presents key messages and helps group members understand how they might share messages with the public.
- The group is then divided into working groups of local media, government media, and health representatives, so they can prepare messages on the topic.
- The workshop concludes with a presentation and review of each group's message suggestions and a group discussion on which messages were most effective.

With messages in hand, local media professionals and government officials return to their jobs able to use local media effectively in order to educate, advocate, and encourage discussions about reproductive health and family planning topics.

RESULTS

The media group continues to meet. Media group members in Minia who completed the series of 12 workshops in October 2004 ("graduates" of the program) continue to meet as a group, without support from TAHSEEN.

The program is expanding. Initial success in Minia encouraged TAHSEEN to expand media activities to Fayoum Governorate, where it is working with 41 participants; to Beni Suef Governorate, where it is working with 28 participants; and to Cairo, where it is working with 15 participants (media professionals specifically interested in reporting on health in poor areas of Cairo). Based on local demand, in December 2004, TAHSEEN also launched training for a second group of 47 media professionals in Minia. As of June 2005, 48 training workshops had been conducted in the three governorates and two in Cairo. As these media groups continued to develop into active networks, TAHSEEN linked these networks to USAID's Communication for Healthy Living Project's efforts to work with the media throughout Egypt.

The program has resulted in significant levels of media coverage. As of June 2005, 149 media trainees produced 354 articles and segments on reproductive health and family planning: 112 magazine or newspaper articles, 113 television segments, and 129 radio segments. Channel 7 (TV station) and Upper Egypt Radio 'Shamal El Saeed' cover 4

governorates: Minia, Fayoum, Beni Suef and Assiut, reaching a population of approximately 12 million.

Much of this coverage was coordinated with the opening of TAHSEEN renovated health clinics or was timed to coincide with community mobilization activities focused on a specific reproductive health and family planning issue. For example, members of the Minia media group coordinated their stories on postabortion care.

The program has encouraged unprecedented cooperation between local media and government. Before participating in the TAHSEEN media groups, the governorate-level State Information Service, governorate MOHP officials, and local media had never worked together to bring local health issues to the public's attention. Government agencies have benefited from having their local health agenda covered and by becoming a part of a professional network that connects them to the local media. Local media professionals have benefited from having access to authoritative sources of information and from being able to report on issues and events of interest to their constituencies. And consumers of media have benefited from having another source of reliable reproductive health and family planning information.

As a result of TAHSEEN's training, local media in three governorates and in Cairo have been mobilized to become health educators and to share in creating an open environment where a public dialogue and awareness about reproductive health and family planning can be possible. The impact of their work goes beyond TAHSEEN's 55 focus communities to shape the discourse of reproductive and family planning health in their governorates and beyond.

