



**Best Practices in Egypt:
Youth Committees**



Youth committee members discuss their ideas during a workshop

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

In Egypt, where 37.3% of the population is between 0–14 years old and young people aged 10–24 comprise 34.4 % of the total population,¹ the need to focus on the health needs of this group as they approach adolescence and young adulthood should be underscored. Egyptian adolescents and young adults face a wide variety of reproductive health/family planning (RH/FP) challenges such as early marriage, early onset of pregnancy, lack of birth spacing, lack of access to health care and gender-based violence, especially in rural Upper Egypt. For example, women in rural Upper Egypt marry at a younger age than their counterparts in rural Lower Egypt: 17.7 years and 19.3 years respectively.² In addition, cultural taboos prevent young people from talking about RH/FP issues—this is well known to health professionals and clearly demonstrated by research conducted by TAHSEEN. In Egypt, youth interests are represented by a number of groups and agencies; however, a large number of youth are not reached, informed or mobilized.

THE TAHSEEN SOLUTION

One of TAHSEEN’s major objectives is to bring different sectors of society together so that everyone with a stake in RH/FP can contribute to improved health outcomes in Egypt. To bring actors together in support of youth RH/FP, TAHSEEN developed governorate-level youth committees. The purpose of these committees is threefold:

1. Reach youth and their parents with RH/FP information, provide them with decision-making skills, and encourage intergenerational dialogue.
2. Involve youth in community education and mobilization.
3. Coordinate activities among the various stakeholders to ensure that youth-related activities within governorates are coordinated and not duplicated, and that the messages disseminated are accurate and consistent.

TAHSEEN worked with a variety of institutions and leaders—the MOHP, the Ministry of Youth and Sports, the Ministry of Education, the Youth Department of Minia Governorate, religious leaders, Minia University Youth Care Department, NGOs, and the media—to create the first Youth Committee in Minia in December 2003. When this committee proved a useful way to focus and coordinate governorate level youth RH/FP activities, it was scaled-up in Beni Suef and Fayoum governorates. Youth committees typically consist of:

- 10 adults from the above-mentioned institutions and leaders within the governorate who represent youth.
- 6 youth (3 females, 3 males), chosen for their interest in participation and their leadership potential. The youth are aged 18-24.

¹Egypt Demographic and Health Survey 2000, Fatma El-Zanaty and Ann A. Way, 2001. Cairo Egypt

²Egypt Interim Demographic and Health Survey 2003, Fatma El-Zanaty and Ann A. Way, 2004. Cairo Egypt

- To help establish the committees, TAHSEEN first conducted reproductive health/family planning (RH/FP), gender, and communication training. Youth committee members first participated in a three-day training, and then in monthly meetings, each of which featured a new RH/FP topic, such as men's involvement in RH/FP decision making, birth spacing, and how to discuss RH/FP issues with youth. By bringing members together in this way, the institutions represented began sharing information and lessons learned, coordinated activities, and even collaborated on joint activities; and the activities were enriched and became more relevant with the contributions of the committees' youth members.

Committee members began defining and implementing youth RH/FP activities. In fact, youth committee members initiated some of these activities. Religious leader members took steps to help youth programs gain acceptance with other local religious and community leaders. Two of these replicable activities were particularly successful: Shabab TAHSEEN Week and Shabab TAHSEEN Village (*Shabab* means youth in Arabic).



Participants of a youth committee meeting discuss their ideas

- **Shabab TAHSEEN Week.** The Minia Youth Committee designed a six-day youth empowerment and RH/FP awareness program for youth, aged 14 to 18 (half male, half female). Activities included youth community service, sports events, mobile clinics, and health presentations designed to improve the knowledge, attitudes, and practices of youth leaders. In each community, 20 youth, selected by their schools, and 10 out-of-school youth, nominated by NGOs, were taught skills to mobilize their communities.
- **Shabab TAHSEEN Village.** This activity grew out of Shabab TAHSEEN Week. The Minia Youth Committee realized that many residents of small hamlets were not always aware that the clinics in their areas had been renovated and were providing a broad range of services. Shabab TAHSEEN Village, piloted in five Minia hamlets in November 2004, was a four-day program designed to engage 100 youth leaders (half male, half female) to raise awareness and mobilize their families and neighbors to attend their local clinic. Minia Youth Committee members transferred leadership skills to these promising youth, who in turn educated and mobilized their communities and linked them to their neighboring clinic.

RESULTS

Youth committees institutionalized and replicated. The youth committee from Minia Governorate began constructive action, creating Shabab TAHSEEN Week and Shabab TAHSEEN Village. The youth committee concept was scaled-up to 11 communities in Beni Suef, 12 in Fayoum, 18 in Minia and in three poor urban areas in Cairo.

There is also evidence that youth committee members are encouraging a broader commitment to, and awareness of, youth RH/FP among their own institutions (see box below).

Minia's Youth Committee Initiatives
<p>The NGO representative used TAHSEEN's seven adolescent reproductive health/family planning booklets in the curriculum for that NGO's youth awareness classes. The booklets cover puberty changes for girls and boys, hygiene, nutrition, sexually transmitted infections, pregnancy, and birth spacing.</p>
<p>The religious leader, a Christian priest, worked with local youth to develop a play about youth and RH/FP that was shown during Shabab TAHSEEN Week and in local cultural institutions.</p>
<p>The representative of the Ministry of Youth and Sports modified an existing "Best Mother" contest conducted through ministry youth centers on Mother's Day so that qualifications now include mothers who have no more than 3 children, use the local health center, enroll all their children in school, and are involved in NGO activities in some capacity</p>
<p>Media representatives produced shows on TAHSEEN activities and topics, such as (1) the role of youth in educating communities about renovated clinics; (2) youth and voluntarism; (3) interviews with youth members of the youth committee; and (4) premarital counseling.</p>
<p>The governorate representative introduced the idea of Shabab TASHEEN Week, adapting it from a governorate level vocational training program to improve schools. The representative worked with local councils to facilitate official formalities for Shabab TAHSEEN Weeks and to arrange for transportation for Shabab TAHSEEN Village participants. They included the STW in their youth summer activities.</p>
<p>The Minia University representative established a link between university peer educators and the youth committee. Peer educators are now active in Shabab TAHSEEN Week and other Minia based youth activities.</p>
<p>The MOHP representative used TAHSEEN's youth booklets to train MOHP community outreach workers and organized the mobile clinics for Shabab TAHSEEN Week.</p>
<p>Youth members have become volunteers with local community development associations involved with TAHSEEN. One young member, who is also a Sunday school teacher, is using the seven youth booklets in his Sunday school class and sharing them with other Sunday school teachers. Another youth member is preparing to obtain a postgraduate degree in the RH/FP needs of adolescents. Two youth members are working together to encourage school principals to allow RH/FP awareness sessions in schools and they are then conducting those awareness sessions. Another youth member shared booklets with the Youth Association for Population and Development on how adults might talk to youth about RH/FP and how young engaged couples can prepare for marriage. This association is now using these booklets to design questionnaires for identifying gaps in the RH/FP knowledge of youth.</p>

- Youth Committee activities implemented and replicated. The Shabab TAHSEEN Week was implemented with 1944 young people in 44 Minia, Beni Suef and Fayoum governorate communities in addition to three poor areas urban in Cairo. Shabab TAHSEEN Village was piloted with 100 young people in five Minia Governorate

hamlets.

- The Youth Committee encouraged those working to improve the RH/FP of young adults at the governorate level to exchange information, coordinate activities, share resources, and exercise their creativity to both educate youth and begin building a cadre of capable youth leaders. Youth committees have implemented some promising programs, described above, but the full potential of these committees will become even more apparent as they continue to take the initiative to respond creatively to opportunities and challenges as they arise.
- Youth empowered to take proactive role in decision making on RH/FP issues of their own interest.

