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USAID Family Justice Project:

*The Role of
NGOs in Egypt*



وزارة الدولة للأسرة والسكان
Ministry of State for Family and Population

I. Introduction

The following report was prepared to document the role of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in recent efforts to support family justice in Egypt. In the last ten years the Government of Egypt has introduced a series of new laws pertaining to family justice and the rights of women and children. In particular, Law No. 10 of 2004 established new family courts and created family mediation centers to help promote a non-adversarial legal process that serves the best interests of the family and promotes access to justice for women, who comprise the majority of claimants in family law cases. In support of Egypt's goals to fully implement Law 10, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) established the Family Justice Project (FJP), a five-year project which began in January 2006. The FJP's overall objective is to strengthen access to justice, enhance family stability, and protect the rights of children. The FJP has worked closely with both the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) and the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood (NCCM) (now within the newly established Ministry of Family and Population) to execute two main tasks: (1) to strengthen family mediation, and (2) to improve access to and information about family court services. To accomplish these goals the FJP instituted a broad technical assistance and training program for the family mediation centers, including extensive infrastructure projects in three pilot jurisdictions, and also implemented a large grants program for NGOs in those same pilot areas to raise awareness of the family courts and provide additional services to families. This report details the work of the NGO sector and describes the lessons learned from the FJP grants program in order to replicate their successes in other initiatives.

USAID contracted DPK Consulting, a division of ARD, Inc. (DPK) to conduct a mid-project evaluation of the FJP in April 2009 to assess the impact of the activities within the two tasks in achieving the stated goals of the FJP and to make recommendations for future priorities. A team of three evaluators from DPK (Evaluation Team) conducted field research from April 20 to May 16, 2009 in Cairo and each of the three pilot regions where the FJP is focusing its efforts: Giza, Port Said, and Minya.¹ DPK's team began its work with an extensive documentation review of all project background documents including FJP work plans, quarterly and annual reports, training curricula, and media/outreach materials. Field research was conducted through in-person interviews with key participants in the FJP, including FJP staff and national-level counterparts within the MOJ and the NCCM, USAID officials, and all FJP participants in the

¹ DPK's Evaluation Team included team leader Julia Roig, Executive Director of Partners for Democratic Change in Washington D.C., U.S.A.; Deborah Chase, Senior Attorney for the Center for Families, Children and the Courts, of the Judicial Council of California, Administrative Office of the Courts in San Francisco, U.S.A.; and Dr. Shareef Ghoneim, Chief Executive Officer of the Egyptian NGO Support Center in Cairo, Egypt.

three pilot regions of Giza, Port Said, and Minya including judges, court administrators, family mediators, administrative mediation and court staff lawyers, and court users. In addition, DPK's team met the FJP NGO grantees (their staff and boards of directors), community leaders, and beneficiaries. Two documents were produced from the evaluation team's visit: a complete *FJP Evaluation Report* of the two main tasks, and this *Documentation Report* on the NGO activities.

This report first seeks to provide a historical context for the development of family law in Egypt and the role that NGOs have traditionally played in this sector. Then, the document describes the activities of the FJP NGO grants program and details the achievements of the NGO activities in supporting family justice services in Egypt. In conclusion, the document provides some brief observations for NGOs in the family justice sector in the future.



NGO Staff with FJP Staff and Evaluators in Port Fouad

II. Egyptian Family Law

The development of family law in the Egyptian courts has grown slowly over the last 80 years. Only during the 20th century did the Egyptian legislature begin to enact laws related to family disputes and the Egyptian courts begin to apply those laws to resolve them. Historically, community members with family problems did not seek assistance from courts. If problems escalated into outright disputes, there was no access to the courts because the courts simply did not deal with family law. Family problems were viewed as private matters to be resolved within the family in the first instance and, failing that, within the religious structure.

In Egypt, a Muslim woman must have permission of a male guardian to get married. The signing of a marriage contract is critically important because it is the moment when the parties define specifically their rights in the marriage. This provides women a chance to require certain conditions such as a right to obtain a divorce if their husbands were to prevent them from finishing their education or working. Men can also ask for conditions in the marriage contract, such as denying a woman her right to education or work.

Muslim men have a unilateral right to divorce without resort to legal proceedings (*talaq*). They simply need to repudiate their wives, saying “you are divorced” three times, making the divorce irrevocable, and register the divorce within 30 days with a religious notary to make it official. Muslim women who want to get a divorce must go to the courts and obtain a judicial divorce, a process that can take substantial time. Christian couples in Egypt currently have no legal way to get a divorce because it is prohibited by the Coptic Christian Church in Egypt, with only two exceptions being adultery and change of religious sect.

Until the Revolution in 1952, all family law matters in Egypt were handled by learned scholars in religious courts that applied the *Shari’a* laws pertaining to inheritance, marriage, and divorce. *Shari’a* courts had jurisdiction over these personal status matters for Muslim families while Christian communities had their own system of family justice. There were several Islamic schools of law being applied in the *Shari’a* courts depending upon which of the Islamic doctrines the presiding religious scholar was relying for legal authority. The *Shari’a* courts were not part of the Egyptian court system. In contrast, business, civil, and criminal cases were handled within the formal court system which was based largely on the French Napoleonic Code.

In 1920 the Egyptian legislature enacted the first family laws (referred to as personal status laws), which made divorce available to women if they had been abandoned, exposed to disease, if the husband had been imprisoned, or if the husband had failed to provide support and maintenance for them. In 1923, the legal age of marriage was codified at 18 for men and 16 for women, and in 1929, the legislature enacted Law No. 25 which allowed women to file for divorce on the grounds of abuse by the husband. The Egyptian courts, however, remained unavailable for family disputes, so the religious courts were required to apply these new laws.

After the 1952 Revolution, Egypt adopted a more progressive justice agenda that promoted the establishment of a centralized judicial system based on the rule of law. In 1955, religious courts were abolished, and their functions were absorbed into the secular justice system. *Shari'a* continued to dominate the substantive family law; however, the various doctrines were sorted out so that family law was codified into a unified set of laws that applied to everyone. The laws started to be applied by university educated civil judges trained in the French legal system rather than by religious scholars. The Egyptian courts were now accessible to families with one uniform rule of law available to be applied to the resolution of their disputes.

President Sadat attempted to enact some bold family reforms in 1979, but due to fear of opposition from Islamic fundamentalists, he did so in a manner vulnerable to constitutional challenge. For example, his original 1979 reforms included providing women the right to divorce if the husband takes a second wife, a wife's right to the family residence if she has custody of the children, and support for women whose husbands divorce them for no good reason. As expected, there was serious opposition to these reforms from Islamic fundamentalists who lobbied heavily for their repeal. In 1985, the Egyptian Supreme Court struck down the reforms on constitutional grounds, and the legislature ultimately replaced them with Law No. 100.

Law No. 100 also provided women the right to divorce if the husband took a second wife, but only if she could prove that the second marriage had prejudiced or harmed her. Husbands were required to pay for housing for wives if they had custody of the children, but the women did not necessarily get possession of the family home. Judges were given wide discretion in deciding what constituted sufficient harm from a second marriage or what was a sufficient amount of housing support. The results were not always helpful to women seeking divorce.

The enactment of Law No.1 in 2000 made no-fault divorce available to women in exchange for any claim to financial settlement or support of any kind. Community groups also advocated for other issues such as a woman's right to travel from the family residence without the permission of her husband, and *urfi* (undocumented) marriages. No agreement could be reached on these issues nor on the issue of the marriage contract format itself, although a simplified form with available space on the form for written-in stipulations is now available.

Additional family court reform came with Law No. 10 of 2004 which established separate specialized family law courts in Egypt. Although exclusively procedural, Law No. 10 has created significant progress in providing justice to Egyptian families through its structural reforms. The family law court matters are heard by a three-judge panel. The judges are assisted by two court experts: one social work expert and one psychological expert. At least one of these must be a woman. These experts assist the judge with accessing information and helping the parties with settlement.

The Mediation Offices are perhaps the most important feature that has been added to the family justice system with Law No. 10.² They are located in the family law courthouses, and services are free to the public. Before a litigant can file a case with the court, the litigant must complete a 15-day mediation period. The Mediation Offices are staffed with three specialists: one legal specialist, one social work specialist, and one psychological specialist. The mediators attempt to reconcile the parties, and where that is not possible, they attempt to negotiate a settlement.

The family court is required to prioritize reconciling the parties with the goal of keeping families together, particularly when there are children involved. Both mediators and judges are charged with this priority. It is less clear if this priority has any practical significance to the non-judicial divorces initiated by Muslim men, or whether it is a value exclusively attached to preventing judicial divorces initiated by women.

There is continuing debate in the area of family law, such as how to manage undocumented marriages, remedies for the enforcement of support agreements, and custody and visitation orders. The existing statutory scheme for visitation to a non-custodial parent is quite restrictive and orders are routinely restricted to a few hours per week in a supervised setting.

It is worth noting that the positions among advocates on the various sides of these issues tend to be based in religion; citing religious authority to support one's position or weaken another's is common. One author points out, however, that while this is not surprising, it should not cloud the fact that important issues other than *Shari'a* routinely arise in these debates. Issues of changing socioeconomic

² Alternative dispute resolution itself was not completely new to the family law cases. Previously, arbitration had been required; however, the process involved bringing in representatives from each of the spouses' families to try and reach agreements. Additional participants in the arbitration were involved if no agreements could be reached by the family members. This model, which bears an interesting resemblance to the modern model of family group conferencing, did not result in many settlements because the extended family members tended to exacerbate the problems between the spouses. In rural areas, community leaders (often referred to as "natural leaders") often served as mediators in family disputes. These mediations worked to reconcile families. They were often conducted by religious leaders, elders in the community, relatives, and other community leaders.

conditions, the relation between church and state, and the changing roles of men and women are also very prominent.³

The role of the family courts will continue to grow as a critical component of Egypt’s judicial system. Family law deals with a broad and complex array of issues that are fundamental to Egyptian society. While the protection of family privacy and resistance to use of public resources to intervene in family disputes may still be widely articulated, there is also a simultaneous increase in demand for the services of the family Mediation Offices and the family courts. The strain on family court resources is noteworthy - the rising caseload alone is an indication of the public’s increasing acceptance of courts as institutions capable of resolving family disputes. Attitudes toward the court in the community are clearly changing, and the activities of the MOJ in implementing Law No. 10 suggest a serious intention on the part of the judiciary to meet the needs of the public and encourage their trust and confidence in the family law courts.



Working to increase demand of Family Court Services

³ Mulki Al-Sharmani, *Recent Reforms in Personal Status Laws and Women’s Empowerment, "Family Courts in Egypt"*, American University in Cairo, Social Research Center, Pathways of Women’s Empowerment, 2008.

III. The USAID Family Justice Project

Historically, Egyptian NGOs have played a significant role in promoting family court reform. In 1988, for example, a group of Egyptian activists began to advocate for a new marriage contract that included stipulations, and in 1994, a coalition of Egyptian NGOs presented the new marriage contract at the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) held in Cairo. The MOJ eventually rejected the document under pressure from the religious establishment, and a watered-down version was adopted in 2000. Since the 1980s and up to the present day, various efforts have been undertaken by a coalition of women activists, lawyers, local NGOs, government officials, and public thinkers to introduce a series of reforms that would address the gaps in the current family laws and Egyptian legal system. Successes include the adoption of the above-mentioned Law No. 1 of 2000, which allows women to obtain a no-fault divorce, and Law No. 10 of 2004, establishing the family courts and Mediation Offices.

Because of the involvement of the NGOs in the family court reform movement, it makes sense that they should play an important role in the implementation of the new family courts and the Mediation Offices. The collaborative efforts of both governmental and civil society organizations have provided a strong base of support for legal reform. Given that Law No. 10 was passed in large part in response to the advocacy work of these NGOs, the NCCM, the National Council for Women (NCW), and other sectors of society, it is reasonable to expect that this collaboration should continue to promote the success of the family mediation offices in the family courts.

The type of involvement by NGOs in the movement for family court reform has guided the strategy for their involvement in the implementation of the family Mediation Offices. For example, Egyptian NGOs played a role in raising public awareness about existing problems and their effect on family life. As mentioned, the Law No. 1 of 2000 granting women the right to sue for divorce, named “*khol*” (removal), was defended and promoted by women advocates as a progressive law that helped achieve equity in family relations while more conservative elements of Egyptian society insisted it would destroy Egyptian families. NGOs have continued to play an important role in raising awareness about the legal problems women face in accessing the law. The Alliance for Arab Women, for example, has advocated for the appointments of women judges and prosecutors.

In an early assessment (2004) of the newly formed family court conducted for USAID,⁴ the assessment team found that local NGOs played the following roles in the area of legal reform:

- Advocated for new and progressive family law reforms. Today many continue to advocate for involving women as members of the Office of Mediation, in prosecutor roles, and as judges;
- Conducted research and training to foster greater understanding of social and psychological issues;
- Raised public awareness about family laws—some NGO leaders have participated in media activities to propose desired changes in Family Courts Law;
- Sponsored workshops and other training activities to explain the law to various target groups such as community leaders, lawyers, and the general public;
- Assisted in providing legal aid to indigent women—many NGOs assisted families by offering informal mediation sessions, especially in rural areas where such services are needed;
- Coordinated efforts to publish booklets, brochures, and other printed materials to educate women about their legal rights; and
- Provided family counseling to disputing couples, especially in rural Egypt.

The assessment team recommended to USAID that it provide support to NGOs already involved in women's legal rights to:

- Promote awareness, through focus groups with targeted and influential personages such as community leaders, lawyers, and the general public, of the new family courts and how Egyptian families can access them,;
- Provide legal information to women and men in both urban and rural areas through use of the media, theater, or other culturally relevant means of communication;
- Assist in providing legal aid to women and promoting awareness on how to access legal aid; and
- Conduct gender-sensitive training for the judicial sector.

It was noted, however, that there were not many NGOs at the community service level dedicated to family law legal reform issues.

⁴ Egypt Family Courts Legal Assessment and Design Team, Final Report (2004) under USAID Contract No. AEP-I-00-99-00041-00, Task Order No. 828, ARD, Inc., Burlington, Vermont.

Based on the recommendations of the assessment report, USAID designed the Family Justice Project (FJP) in 2005, and the program began implementation in early 2006. The FJP worked in close collaboration with the MOJ and NCCM, and USAID made funds available for grants to NGOs to participate in the FJP. The MOJ recognized the key role that the NGOs could play, particularly with respect to educating the public about the new family law courts and the mediation offices. It was foreseen that NGOs could participate by:

- Raising public awareness about the new family courts;
- Providing free legal information to the public;
- Offering pre-mediation and marriage counseling services to couples;
- Providing free legal aid to indigent populations;
- Preparing media campaigns to disseminate information about the new family courts; and
- Organizing psychological support groups for both men and women who are undergoing divorce.

The NCCM also stressed the importance of focusing the project on the entire family and not strictly on women's rights. The NCCM believed that the FJP should clearly promote the safety of women and children, but should not ignore the interests of fathers. Furthermore, it seemed optimal for the FJP to consider the economic problems facing Egypt's families in its strategy with the NGOs. The effects of poverty on families, and particularly on children, were a central concern.

As a result, the FJP identified four objectives ("pillars") for the NGO grants program that were later included in the Request for Proposals (RFP):

1. Raise awareness about family law and mediation offices through training programs and informational brochures to combat family violence, promote a healthy atmosphere, and promote equality within the family.
2. Establish counseling centers within NGOs that include social workers, legal specialists, and psychological specialists to provide counseling services for the family and work towards amicable settlement of family disputes.
3. Provide security and protect the rights of children in family disputes with a focus on the best interests of the child in reaching settlement.
4. Provide economic empowerment to support low-income families in dispute by providing them with work opportunities, micro-credit loans, project development, and occupational training.

The FJP also took into consideration the issues of regionalization and accessibility of services. The grants program was designed to coincide with FJP pilot sites for the family Mediation Offices (Giza, Port Said, and Minya), so a widely-disseminated RFP was issued for grant applications from NGOs operating in those target regions. The strategy of selecting only NGOs who had previously worked in legal reform efforts for women would considerably limit the number of NGOs that could be selected and would limit geographical access to services. Therefore, it was decided that any NGO could apply for an FJP grant as long as it could fulfill the objectives set out by the project. Furthermore, each grantee would be required to accomplish all four objectives, rather than work on only one or two of the grants program pillars. The FJP wanted the public to have access to a “one-stop-shop” where any of the services would be available without having to travel to another location.

NCCM Relationship with the FJP

From the very beginning the FJP was implemented with close cooperation with the NCCM; initially the FJP grants program staff were located within the NCCM headquarters. This physical proximity allows for ease of communication, close collaboration, and on-going technical support to NCCM and the NGO community. The FJP has supported the grants program with additional technical assistance to the NCCM, including an NGO database for NGO activities and capabilities and a much-used NCCM 16000 hotline with dedicated lines for family disputes. In addition, some NCCM premises have received infrastructure improvements and new equipment.

Selection Process

The FJP provided specialized training to NGOs interested in submitting proposals. The training familiarized potential grantees with the parameters of the program, the grant requirements, effective grant writing, and targeting results. Proposals were reviewed by a joint panel from USAID, NCCM, and the FJP and were ranked numerically for awards. The FJP staff conducted additional due diligence through technical and financial reviews of the NGOs and a final decision was made. To date, the FJP has awarded 34 grants, totaling approximately \$2,000,000, to 27 NGOs (including seven extensions) in Minya, Giza, and Port Said.

IV. Significant Achievements of the Family Justice Project Grants Program

Efforts to work on family justice issues within the civil society sector in Egypt had been fragmented prior to the FJP, and many NGOs reported closer coordination and experience sharing with their colleagues who participated in the FJP grants program. This improved coordination amongst NGOs has contributed to burgeoning innovations in family services and improved advocacy efforts to translate their grassroots experiences into better policies for Egyptian families. In addition, the relationships facilitated by the FJP that have been built between the NGOs participating in the program and government institutions such as the NCCM, the MOJ, and the Ministry of Social Solidarity, to name a few, have assisted in the growth of a more credible and proactive third sector that can contribute meaningfully to family justice in Egypt.

“Change in the family will come from the people.”
~ NGO Worker ~

Change will not come easily. The issues that the NGOs are tackling in the three pilot regions to complement the new family court system are difficult, culturally-entrenched problems that will take time to solve. Many of the NGOs have developed creative strategies to begin engaging their target communities, thereby exemplifying their belief that Egyptian families are capable of progressive change for the good of the family unit and the community. The FJP grantees started their initiatives subtly, easing introduction of new ideas, and quickly realized the benefits of joining forces with grassroots, community-based NGOs as partners in their target areas to gain credibility within the “tribe-like” urban neighborhoods and villages. The NGOs worked hard to gain the confidence of the community and demonstrate that their services are not just for women and children, but are available to the whole family. Some of the earliest and most effective outreach was therefore targeted towards men and community leaders to launch the new NGO programs.

As a starting point, some of the FJP grantees conducted community studies or participatory rapid appraisals to survey their target population on attitudes, perceptions, and needs for family justice services. The centrality of economic issues in these impoverished areas was clear, as well as the need for improved awareness on child

protection against violence. Many of the NGOs also identified priority areas such as girls' illiteracy, female genital mutilation, and early marriage, as central concerns of gender equality to be resolved. The FJP offered an opportunity to work on the health of the family in a holistic manner, providing information on family justice issues and children and women's rights, providing needed services for children, as well as counseling for mothers and fathers, and legal or economic assistance, if necessary.

Because many of the organizations were already present in the communities working on issues such as reproductive health, or services for disabled persons, the transition to becoming more of an advocate and service-provider for family justice was an easier transition. Through the FJP grants program, many of the participating NGOs were indeed able to build a much-needed new service for the community to support improved access to justice for Egyptian families. The following describes the activities and successes of the FJP grantees:

A. Community Outreach and Awareness Building

1. Outreach

One of the first tasks that the NGOs confronted in offering their new family justice services was to let the potential users of the service know about the NGO and to feel comfortable coming to them for help. The first pillar of the program, therefore, included outreach to the community and awareness-building activities to increase the public's knowledge of family rights and issues of child protection. Clearly it has not been a part of Egyptian culture for families to talk about intimate problems with outsiders and the NGOs have had to slowly build the confidence of the community in which they operate.

Community Celebrations

*Many of the NGOs organized large community celebrations with different names: "**Family Love Day**," "**Family Day**," "**Kindness Day**" -- these events involved the whole family and promoted family unity and a stable environment for kids through games, puppet shows, seminars, food and music. Some of the events included the display of a short video on Egyptian children's feelings and thoughts about family disputes, and had counselors available to talk with participants in private. Families were photographed together, and kids were asked to draw pictures of their "ideal family home." The events received extensive media attention in print and on television.*



Family Day Celebration – July 2008

Proactive Strategies

One of the first lessons learned was that the NGOs “needed to go to where the community is. We cannot wait for families to come to us.” The most effective outreach activities were the most pro-active, placing NGO staff (“community facilitators”) within the community where families would naturally gather to let them know about their family services. Community facilitators go to the market to meet women there, go to the schools and talk with mothers while they are waiting outside for their kids to emerge, or organize medical convoys to offer health services for children and then develop relationships with the mothers and fathers. Many NGOs made inroads with the communities by holding community events, such as Mother’s Day parties or holiday lunches to develop relationships and build trust.

Strong Referral Networks

Many NGOs established links with potential users of their services through sophisticated referral networks, including social workers in schools and health workers. Many of these referral networks were institutionalized through *Protocols of Cooperation* with institutions such as Motherhood and Childhood Centers, the Ministry of Social Solidarity, and the Ministries of Health and Education.

Inclusion of Religious and Community Leaders

All NGOs, to some degree or another, use community and religious leaders to get out the message to the public of an NGO’s services. NGOs involve religious leaders in their programs by inviting them to speak at their events, and many of the rural NGOs indicate that religious leaders are one of the biggest influences on their target constituencies. In one NGO in Minya, religious leaders from both the Muslim and Christian communities work side by side with NGO counselors to provide services for the beneficiaries.

Embedded Outreach

Some of the most effective outreach was embedded in the other traditional services of the NGOs. For example, an NGO dedicated to disabled children already has a strong relationship with the families who were familiar with using the rehabilitation services of the NGO

and so the transition to speaking with them about the availability of counseling and dispute resolution services was easier. Another effective outreach technique is to hold a seminar for the community and then have the counselors available on the spot to offer counseling services to women attending the seminar. Some women find it difficult to leave the house to pursue needed counseling services, and therefore the chance to attend a seminar and then speak with a counselor about a particular problem immediately afterwards was extremely helpful.

Outreach to the Parents through their Children

The focus on the family has allowed many NGOs to capitalize on existing children’s services such as day care centers and after-school youth programs to conduct outreach to parents. Those NGOs who work directly with children in the community have held special events, parties, activities, and outings for the children they serve and their parents. The NGO will often find out about a problem in the family through the children and reach out to one of the parents to offer additional counseling services.

Focus on the Whole Family

Sometimes the wife is willing to come to the NGO, but asks that the NGO not call the husband. An intervention may have to begin with the woman alone, but eventually the NGO tries to bring in the rest of the family that is affected by the problem in an appropriate manner. Men, however, also use the NGO services and are an important constituency for the outreach activities. For example, one husband interviewed noticed a change in his wife and wanted to come to the NGO to see what it was all about and then started attending the seminars. In another case, a father reported bringing his daughter to the NGO for help with her marital problems. Many men are concerned with visitation and custody issues and are also in need of the family justice services provided by the NGOs.



Men also use Family Justice Services

CASE: A father's love for his young daughter

A young couple with one daughter was facing the familiar struggles of holding down two stressful jobs while trying to raise their child. The father was completely committed to his daughter, but the marriage eventually cracked under the pressure and the couple split up. A court proceeding allowed for very brief and restricted contact with his daughter as his wife received custody under the separation agreement. The man was distraught, but then saw the sign for the NGO dispute resolution services which made him think of TV shows showing family counseling services. He was willing to try. The NGO social workers worked with him and his wife and the family eventually reconciled.

Outreach Materials

Many NGOs developed posters and brochures and placed them around the community and in schools and government institutions to publicize their new services. The materials were appropriate for the target communities and included simple messages and pictures to explain the family services of the NGOs. In addition, some NGOs also made announcements to the communities via microphones on cars touring streets or on loud-speaker systems.



Outreach Materials developed by the FJP

*"We are not ostriches
with our heads in the
sand! There are
problems in our
families and they need
to be addressed."
~ NGO Worker ~*

Importance of "Word of Mouth"

The majority of the beneficiaries reported hearing about the NGO services through their neighbors, friends, and relatives. The importance of the *word of mouth* cannot be overstated in winning over the confidence of the community. The most successful strategy of an outreach program, therefore, is to provide a quality service to the community so users will want to recommend the NGO to others.

2. Awareness-Raising

The NGO grantees were committed to providing their constituencies with information on family justice and the rights of women and children in particular. The awareness-building campaign's central focus from the perspective of the FJP objectives was to let the population know about the new family courts and to build confidence in the court mediation services, but also to promote prevention of family disputes and implement activities to proactively support a healthy family life in Egypt. This is a particularly challenging component of the NGOs' work, because they are trying to change attitudes and create new dynamics within society between men and women and their children. A strong cultural taboo has existed against publicly acknowledging that Egyptian families have problems, which has hindered effective policies and services to confront them.

Awareness of family justice concepts in Egypt has been imparted mostly through seminars and dialogues with community members, drawing upon a rights-based approach that recognizes international law and conventions to protect women and children. Nearly 2,000 awareness-raising events have been held since the FJP's inception for over 70,000 community members. Some examples and lessons learned include:

Embedding the Awareness-Building Activities

The most promising and sustainable awareness-building activities have been incorporated into the NGO's other main activities, such as taking advantage of a computer training to briefly discuss women's rights with a group of girls, or working with a group of mothers who are present at a children's party to talk about children's rights. When the NGO holds large community celebrations or special meals they will often conduct small, impromptu seminars to discuss family issues, healthy parenting skills, or positive communication.

Combating Domestic Violence

NGOs took a comprehensive approach to domestic violence, conducting seminars for men to impart new strategies for dealing with conflict and communication skills to break the cycle of violence in the home. Women also participated in awareness workshops so they could understand their rights and the illegality of domestic violence against women and also children. Awareness events were coupled with counseling services, and NGO social workers were able to make referrals to other services for a battered spouse.

NGO Message

"It is not your religious duty to be beaten."

Importance of Religious Messaging

Many of the NGO events included religious messages and promoted pro-family and equality teachings from Islam, such as “The Mother is the Bedrock of the Family” and “Women are the Light of the House.” Successful awareness events incorporated faith-based themes and invited religious leaders to help lead discussions on the family such as *Family Rights from the Religious Point of View*.

Positive Communication

Strong communication skills are one of the most important elements of a healthy family, and many NGO grantees focused on this issue for seminars separately targeting men, women, couples, young people and children. NGOs engaged experts in psychology initially to provide the seminars, but eventually trained their own staff to replicate the seminars and are continuing to provide communication skills in many community scenarios.

Prevention Activities with Youth

NGOs targeted university students for seminars on *How to Pick a Life Partner* and the *Dangers of Early Marriage* (*urfi* or non-official marriage). One NGO produced a documentary on the reality of *urfi* marriages for the audience of young people to draw attention to the long-term legal and social implications on their lives. In addition, youth participated in discussions on *Accepting Differences in Others, Rights and Responsibilities of Couples*, and *Gender Issues*. These sessions have taken significant strides toward the goal of preventing family problems in the future and changing the perception of men and women in the family for the next generation.

Child Protection

As one of the FJP’s central goals, issues of children’s rights and protection were given much attention within the NGO awareness-raising activities. Events focused on prevention such as *The Best Ways of Raising Children, Alternative Discipline*, and *Children’s Cooperation in the Family*. One NGO commented that establishing a new vision of children was necessary, that they are much more than just machines that eat and study but rather are integral members of the family unit. Some NGOs focused on children with special needs and provided awareness training to parents of disabled kids or for children of parents in prison. These specialized NGOs offered physical therapy to disabled children and provided medical attention, and ensured that the family justice advocacy work of the FJP NGOs incorporated the needs of the disabled population.



Two Young Beneficiaries of the NGO

*“Now the silence of
the family is broken.”
~ NGO Worker ~*

Planting the Seeds for Wider Awareness

Some NGO grantees developed a strategy for replicating their awareness-building messages by training other community-based organizations in delivering important messages. Many of the sub-grantees participating in the FJP network of service providers have received intensive training from their “umbrella NGO” on issues of family justice and best practices in social work, psychology and mediation. In addition, many NGOs are providing seminars for institutional social workers in schools and the Ministry of Social Solidarity to build their skills and knowledge of family justice issues. Seminars for a broad group of social workers were held on *How to Deal with Violence, Introduction to the New Child Law, and Family Problems and their Impact on Children*.

Building Strong Links with Credible Community Leaders and Subject-Matter Experts

Some NGOs conducting awareness-raising activities invited strong community leaders to discuss their areas of expertise. Judges and law professors were invited to speak about family law, medical experts were invited to speak about health issues as they related to sexual relations and healthy couples, and child development specialists participated in seminars for parents. Many of the NGO grantees coordinated these seminars and, when possible, shared the costs for expert presenters.

Dealing with a Dispute in a Positive Way

NGOs acknowledged that sometimes families break up and that couples, grandparents, and children need the skills to manage a divorce in the most positive manner possible. NGOs conducted seminars on the *Effect of Family Conflict on Children* for parents and grandparents and to let the community know about other services available for separating couples and their children. These seminars supported the NGOs’ dispute resolution services by preparing

couples to handle their conflict in an amicable manner that helped diminish the negative impact of the separation on their children.

NGO Message

“Happy Family, Happy Life”

Family Courts and Mediation Services

Some NGOs conducted seminars and workshops within the community on the family courts and the new mediation services or incorporated these issues within other seminars on family justice, but this did not appear to be the predominate focus of the broader awareness-raising activities. Opportunities for individual referrals to the family courts were available within the dispute resolution services provided by the NGOs if a conflict was not settled by the NGO counselors and the parties wanted to pursue their case within the court system.



NGO and FJP Staff

B. Dispute Resolution Services

The FJP grants program is designed to offer concrete services to families in conflict through mediation processes and a holistic approach to resolving the underlying circumstances that may lead a family into crisis. NGOs reported success in keeping the family together if they could get both parties to show up to the mediation counseling session, but encountered difficulties with the unwillingness of husbands to participate. NGOs have developed many creative tactics in reaching out to husbands through male friends or family members, and, in some of the more rural communities, NGOs formed ‘Community Councils’ comprised of community leaders and the heads of big families who helped a great deal in reaching out to the husbands who would not otherwise attend.

The FJP trained the NGOs’ legal, psychological, and social worker specialists in family law and mediation techniques in order to prepare them to offer this dispute resolution service to the community. The

central intent of the service is to keep families from breaking apart and reach reconciliation between the parties if possible. Where this is not possible, the NGOs help the couple separate in an amicable manner with the best interests of the children always as the central focus. Some lessons learned and best practices from the NGO Dispute Resolution activities include:

Using Community Councils

Many NGOs drew upon tribal traditions of asking respected members of the community to sit on dispute resolution councils to help conduct outreach to the community and individual parties, to interview disputants, to determine obligations and interests of each party, and to help reach reconciliation. In the more rural areas, the NGOs reported that these councils were effective at resolving family disputes and were able to personally oversee the implementation of agreements because of their relationships and status within the community.

Community Councils

NGO board members and beneficiaries reported that Community Councils help reconcile many disputes in the targeted families and also bring the community closer together. For example, the members of one Community Council in a village in Minya were both Muslims and Christians who reported that they were a much more integrated community because of their participation with the NGO dispute resolution activities.

Drafting “Moral Agreements”

The result of many of the NGO mediations is a written agreement that does not necessarily have the effect of a legally enforceable document, but rather is considered a “Moral Agreement” in the eyes of the community. Often because the parties developed their own solutions within a mediation session, they may be more likely to comply with the agreement which they voluntarily determined was in their best interest. If one of the parties does not hold up his or her end of the agreement the “Moral Agreements” usually include payment clauses for non-compliance. For legal certainty, however, the parties must go to the family courts.

Offering Comprehensive Legal Assistance for a Variety of Disputes

NGOs did not limit themselves to providing dispute resolution services for traditional marital disputes, but also addressed family problems generated by other types of disputes as well. For example, a family of eight living in a one-room apartment had legal difficulties with their landlord, and the parents were suffering from the stress which was causing instability in the home. The NGO’s legal specialist provided legal advice to the couple and helped to negotiate an agreement with the landlord for them to stay in their home. In

addition, problems of inheritance, financial support of a parent, and conflicts between siblings were addressed by the NGO dispute resolution services. In some cases, the NGO legal specialist provided *pro bono* legal advice and representation for a spouse in pursuing his or her rights.

CASE: Legal Support during an Ugly Custody Battle

A woman who was divorced from her husband explained that her ex-husband took away her child and refused to return him to her. She had been unable to contact or see the child, and did not know where to turn for help. Then a friend suggested that she see if the NGO might be able to help her. The NGO provided her with an attorney to represent her and they were able to get her child back. Now, however, she is about to be re-married, so her ex-husband is taking her back to court seeking custody of the child. The NGO legal specialist is continuing to help her.

Working with Lawyers

The legal profession in Egypt seems to be lagging behind other institutions in supporting mediation as a viable alternative dispute resolution mechanism to traditional court proceedings. The NGOs offering mediation services have had to conduct outreach with lawyers and build their support for their dispute resolution activities. Lawyers sometimes participate in the mediation sessions within the NGOs, or many lawyers are now referring their poorest clients to the NGOs for legal assistance and help in resolving their family disputes if the clients are unable to pay. Again, one of the most powerful strategies of winning over lawyers is for the NGO to provide a high quality service that helps the parties fairly and amicably resolve their disputes, building credibility through *word of mouth* both within the legal community and among their clients.

Family Conferencing

Many extended families live together in Egypt, and the relationship of a wife with her in-laws appears to cause many conflicts. Also, when children are involved in a dispute, grandparents, aunts and uncles, and friends are often necessary participants for a productive discussion to resolve the issue. Therefore, the NGOs' dispute resolution services often bring together a large group of people that extends beyond the nuclear family. The NGO mediators on staff must use sophisticated family conferencing techniques to build support from all the members of the family for a resolution to a problem facing the family. The NGOs use all of their resources, including bringing in respected members of the Community Councils to meet separately and together with various members of a family to

build understanding and encourage each of the parties to reach a resolution.

CASE: “Mrs. Nerves”

A woman who came to the NGO counseling services initially earned the name “Mrs. Nerves” because she was always “on edge.” She confided in the NGO social workers that she had separated from her husband because she could no longer endure living with her in-laws. She suffered from the lack of privacy, and was taunted by her extended family and even her neighbors for the intimacy with her husband to which the whole house was privy in such close quarters. In response, she became aggressive with her husband and his family and eventually left with her children to live with her own parents. After filing a case in court, she heard about the NGO service from a relative and asked for assistance in resolving her situation - she either wanted a divorce or separate living quarters with her husband. The social worker and the Community Council met with the husband and his family and after many meetings secured an agreement to designate a separate two-room section with a separate entrance in the family house for the woman and her family to live in peace. The couple is now back together, and the woman frequently participates in other NGO activities. And she is no longer called “Mrs. Nerves.”

Providing Follow-Up

One of the most successful aspects of the NGO dispute resolution service is the NGOs’ ability to provide personalized follow-up for cases to help the parties implement their agreement, or provide needed assistance to the family as necessary. Many NGOs conduct home visits with their beneficiaries and, if and when a new problem arises in the family, they are able to bring the parties back to the table to discuss in a positive environment a way to solve their problems. This is a time-consuming practice and is not feasible for every case the NGO handles, but is an effective tool in supporting long-lasting positive relationships in the family when possible.

CASE: Carefully Preparing for the Mediation

Prior to a mediation session, the NGO social worker visited the home of a woman to coach her on how to prepare for the session the next day with her father-in-law. The woman was hysterical but she was able to talk through her anger and calmed down. She eventually was able to greet her father-in-law in a respectful, conciliatory manner the next day. This was enough to melt the tensions, and the father-in-law embraced her and they were able to come to an agreement to pay the daughter-in-law a monthly allowance for financial support.

Referrals to Other Services

Within the dispute resolution process, the NGO is able to identify other needs that the family has, such as economic assistance or counseling for children. For example, a family of a disabled child is often under stress which may exacerbate existing conflicts, and an NGO that specializes in these cases can offer needed medical services, support groups, and counseling for the parents. The NGOs may be able to provide the service themselves, or they use their networks within the community to refer the family members to other institutions for assistance. This holistic approach to the conflict offers the family an opportunity to reach a long-term solution and arms them with the necessary tools for future problem solving.

Referrals to the Family Court Mediation Program

If a dispute is not resolved within the NGO, another opportunity exists to forward that case to the family court-annexed Mediation Office. This is often seen as an undesirable last resort for the NGOs because “taking a family member to court” is seen by many in the community as escalating the conflict beyond the possibility for reconciliation. The NGOs feel it is often their role to keep the family out of the court system if possible, reflecting perhaps the historic community mistrust of the courts in resolving family disputes.

C. Counseling Services

A large problem in Egyptian families is the breakdown in communication and a lack of coping skills to turn to solutions other than violence. Many NGO grantees are addressing this problem through counseling services and other preventative strategies to promote healthy families and provide security and protect the rights of children. Some NGOs conduct support groups with women to encourage them to talk about their problems, or provide one-on-one counseling. Initially women did not feel comfortable (they reported that they “don’t want to be laughing stocks”), but the NGOs often win their confidence once women come to see how the NGO operates and begin to feel comfortable talking about their problems

*“We have embraced
life once more.”
~ NGO Beneficiary ~*

and getting advice from their peers and NGO staff. These are very new services for the NGOs to offer within their community and they report that they confront a culture used to complaining about problems, but not necessarily capable of determining viable solutions to address those problems. The counseling services are oriented towards changing that dynamic and helping family members reach feasible solutions to the problems they face. The counseling pillar of the program is closely linked with the awareness-raising and dispute resolution activities of the FJP grants program so many of the above-mentioned observations apply to the NGOs' counseling services, but some notable reflections on this pillar include:

Importance of Confidentiality

The sensitive nature of family problems and the cultural taboo of talking to an outsider about these types of issues mean that the NGOs must strictly adhere to confidentiality as essential to the counseling services. This promise of confidentiality is explained during the first encounter with a beneficiary and then must be observed during all interventions. Sometimes a woman may disclose her situation in detail to the NGO community facilitator, but then not want to tell all details to a medical expert or legal specialist because she is ashamed. In these cases, the Facilitator gently encourages the woman to open up in order to receive the support necessary to resolve her issue.

Need for Specialized Training in Domestic Violence Issues

For those women who seek the services of the NGO for a problem involving domestic violence, it is of paramount importance that the NGO staff is prepared to deal with that situation appropriately so as not to put the woman in more danger of future violence. Some progressive NGOs are providing temporary shelters for battered women and offer counseling not only to women who face abuse, but also are working with groups of men to ensure that the whole community knows that "domestic violence" is considered "violence" and therefore against the law. A specific draft law on domestic violence is currently pending.

Counseling Services for Children

Many NGOs provide group and individualized counseling for children from troubled families and give them an opportunity to express themselves and access psychological care. These services are intertwined with other recreational activities and educational programs and counseling for parents as well. One NGO has been providing innovative arts therapy for children to deal with their emotions through the arts. This intervention has been shared with other NGOs within the FJP so they can incorporate the strategy within their own counseling services. Some of the specialized NGOs also offer counseling and support services for families with disabled children.



Over 16,000 children have received social and psychological support from the FJP grants program to date.

*“We provide matchmaking with other services in the community.”
~ NGO worker ~*

Providing Comprehensive Support and Follow Up

Beneficiaries have the opportunity in most of the FJP NGO programs of speaking with a legal specialist, a social worker, or a psychologist about their issues. This allows for a comprehensive counseling service within the NGO, as well as the ability to refer the beneficiary to other necessary services within the community (for example, assistance in accessing public financial aid or receiving government pension payments.) As mentioned, many NGO staff members conduct follow-up home visits and are closely engaged with the families they serve to ensure their support offers opportunities for successful long-term solutions.

D. Economic Empowerment

Most NGO grantees are convinced that the root of conflicts in families is economic and therefore stress the need to focus on the economic empowerment of the family and building job skills and economic opportunities. Many reported that they “can’t separate out the economic problem from the family problem.” Beneficiaries often come to the NGOs initially for economic help because that is their immediate need and the request represents a relationship with NGOs that the people know best. Beneficiaries likely feel most comfortable talking about their economic problems because of the cultural taboo of talking about family issues with strangers and concerns about confidentiality. With additional inquiry, however, counselors sometimes discover problems with the in-laws, early marriage, domestic violence, second wives, sexual problems, blood feuds, inheritance issues, and neighborhood disputes. Access to a process or

*"We were already divorced...but the NGO helped find my husband a job and gave us counseling. We are back together now...we just had a new baby."
~ NGO Beneficiary ~*

service to address these types of legal issues is the central domain of the FJP.

Over 8,700 families in Egypt have received economic empowerment assistance through the FJP since its inception. Observations about the success of economic empowerment activities include:

Effective Outreach

The economic empowerment activities often serve as an effective outreach tool for the other services provided by the NGO. Many beneficiaries see the poster for the NGO and notice the economic empowerment component first and come to the NGO for financial assistance. Once they get to know the NGO better and the counselors are able to establish trusting relationships, the beneficiary may use other family services, or recommend the NGO to a friend or relative. For example, one wife reported that she was able to bring her husband to the NGO because they had received a loan, then they also began attending some of the seminars and now have a much happier marriage due to improved respect and communication.



Beneficiaries and NGO Staff at an Economic Empowerment Center for Embroidery

Instilling a Positive Work Ethic

Historically, NGOs in Egypt have acted mostly as charities, and families and beneficiaries therefore often expect to get money from the NGOs. The staff has had to work hard to explain that they are there in the community to help solve problems and not just to hand out charity. NGOs reported a re-orientation of their work to focus on promoting a positive work ethic, providing job and skills training, or making micro-loans to start businesses instead of just giving handouts. NGOs conduct community seminars on the importance of working, and incorporate economic empowerment into their family counseling services. Poverty alleviation is one of the biggest development challenges facing Egypt, and economic problems are the overarching cause of stress and conflict in the impoverished

families that the NGOs serve. As one NGO worker commented, if they help solve one small problem in the family by getting the husband a job and therefore lessen his anxiety and the tension in the family, there is a greater likelihood his family will be happier and healthier.

Networking with Business Leaders in the Community

NGOs have established networks with business leaders in the community to offer employment opportunities for their beneficiaries. For example, one NGO developed a formal protocol with a textile factory to employ the women who came to the NGO for economic assistance. The NGO followed up with both the factory and the employees within six months to monitor the success of the job placement. Hearing from the business community about their needs for skilled workers also informs the NGO's job skills training program to meet the needs of future employers. For example, many of the NGOs now specialize in computer skills because local businessmen have identified that particular need.

Job Skills Training

One of the central economic empowerment activities of the FJP grantees has been to provide their female beneficiaries with needed job skills training. One NGO has a small factory for embroidery and sewing and has a shop for trainees to sell embroidered dresses. Another NGO works with young girls to make jewelry, bags, and other household items and holds exhibitions to sell these items within the community. Another NGO is teaching women about cultivation techniques for vegetables, particularly mushrooms, and helps them prepare their crops for market. Yet another NGO has a large bakery on its premises and teaches women to make baked goods to sell to the community. As mentioned above, many of the NGOs have purchased computers with their FJP grants and offer extensive computer skills training to young people and women, and offer internet access to their beneficiaries. These are not only revenue generating activities for the NGOs; they provide much-needed income to the participants in the program and instill a work ethic and confidence in their own abilities to earn a living.

CASE: The Happy Hairdresser

A woman in Minya found out about the NGO service through a community health care facilitator. She was having fights with her husband because she had a hairdresser service in her home and her husband was upset by all the women coming in to his home at strange hours. With the help of the NGO she was able to rent a small space to open up her own hairdresser shop and now she and her husband are much better.

Legal Assistance on Economic Matters

NGO legal specialists provide support to beneficiaries regarding economic issues. For example, they may give advice in situations of the non-payment of rent, provide assistance with paperwork for public assistance, or help a family member get a license to set up a small business.

Micro-Finance to support Family Stability

Many NGOs provide short-term loans to beneficiaries to start their own business or to get out of an immediate economic crisis. Some grantees have extensive experience with micro-finance programs within their community and are now incorporating family counseling and dispute resolution programs to create a one-stop-shop for families to access needed financial and justice services.

V. The FJP Media Campaign

To bring about the intended changes within the Egyptian family and to promote increased access to justice, the media has been an important tool to enhance the work of the NGO grantees. The FJP has a media team that is dedicated to helping raise public awareness about the family court mediation offices and the services offered by the NGOs and to providing capacity-building to NGOs to improve their media and public relations strategies.

The FJP has taken advantage of many of its activities to build media interest in family justice issues and to model good public relations strategies. The NCCM and the MOJ have collaborated, working with the FJP, on a series of joint trainings for NGO legal specialists. These workshops have been covered by local television stations and have included interviews with representatives from NGOs, the NCCM, and the MOJ. One local station aired an extended segment about the training program and family mediation.



Ambassador Moushira Khattab (second from left) of the NCCM at NGO Presentation

The FJP has provided a series of capacity-building workshops for project managers and media personnel from the NGO grantees specifically on media and public relations skills. The purpose has been to provide the NGOs with the know-how to implement a communications strategy to organize and execute public relations campaigns and public events. Participants engaged in interactive sessions on the role of NGOs in relation to media and received information on how to produce brochures, flyers, and other tips on

supporting their public outreach efforts. Other successful media initiatives of the FJP with NGO grantees have included:

Video of NGO Activities

The FJP media staff documented and filmed FJP activities in Minya and Giza for a short video to depict the NGO work in the community to provide public awareness and counseling centers. This video has aired at several outreach events and has served the purpose of building confidence and trust in the NGOs' services.

Informational Materials

The FJP media staff developed and distributed informational materials for the public on mediation and family law matters, including question and answer booklets, posters for courthouses, and FJP brochures.

TV Programs for Children

The FJP is coordinating with *Alam Semsem* ("Sesame Street") to develop 12 segments for children on handling family disputes. The TV programs are intended to build awareness of children's rights and the effect of family conflict on the psychological well-being of children. The series will air during Ramadan 2009.

Radio Programs

The FJP media staff worked closely with *El Bernamig El Aam* (General Program) at a local radio station to develop and air radio slots for awareness programming. They produced 30 episodes beginning with a two-minute drama on a specific issue followed by a discussion of both the legal and psychological aspects of the family issues. The programs, entitled "Family Justice," received prime airtime during Ramadan to reach a targeted audience and raise awareness about handling family disputes from both a legal and psychological perspective.

Media Manuals

The FJP compiled two manuals for use by the NGOs and other FJP counterparts, a *Media Messages Manual* and a *Psychological Manual for Media Message*, and developed a training plan to reach both print media and television. The FJP staff organized a roundtable workshop for opinion leaders and media producers to train them on how to promote messages *for* children and *about* children and on the contents of the new Child Law amendments.

NGO Brochure

The FJP drafted a specialized brochure on NGO activities in the field. This brochure highlights the work of NGOs working on family justice issues and the collaborative efforts with the NCCM, and serves as an informational tool for media and the public. Copies of the brochure have been printed and are currently being distributed to NGOs, media outlets, and the public.

ICT Buses

The NCCM received specialized ICT buses from another donor that will travel throughout Egypt to provide information and awareness-raising for communities. The FJP is compiling materials developed

throughout the life of the Project and by NGO grantees to disseminate in the buses.

VI. NGOs and Policy Reform

In 2008, the Egyptian Parliament passed amendments to the Child Law. These reforms included increasing the legal age of marriage to 18, criminalizing female genital mutilation, and requiring medical testing before marriage. This new law is heralded as one of the few policy reform efforts that involved substantial input and participation from the civil society sector in Egypt, in large part thanks to the leadership of the NCCM. NGOs held many workshops and discussions to provide input to the draft law, and the FJP in particular held many interactive events with NGO leadership and legal specialists and collected their input into a memo to the NCCM.

All NGOs interviewed expressed deep satisfaction with the process of contributing their input to the recent amendments to the Child Law. They felt that all of their input and concerns were addressed in the final version of the Law, and many reported that this was their first experience of a truly participatory process of developing policy in Egypt. In particular, the success of the effort seems to stem from the role played by the NCCM as an intermediary between the NGOs and various roundtables that were conducted, to then relay the collected information to the Committee tasked with drafting the final version of the Law. They realize that the effect of the new Law will be realized only through passage of the necessary bylaws and regulations, but they appear to be very positive about the future legal framework and are committed to continuing their advocacy work on the implementation of the Child Law and their participation in the new Family Law.

VII. Conclusion: Challenges and the Road Ahead

The FJP has been an impressive large-scale effort to support access to justice for Egyptian families and to involve civil society organizations in the provision of new and comprehensive services that enhance the new family courts. Promoting issues of gender equality and the changing role of men and women in the family is a slow process in Egypt, but the FJP is planting the seeds for real change to occur for the benefit and health of the whole family unit. A number of challenges going forward, however, are noteworthy:

Establish Clear Relationship between NGOs and the court-annexed Mediation Offices

The FJP NGO component was intended to support the family court-annexed Mediation Offices and there is a need to continue strengthening this very helpful court service with involvement of the Egyptian civil society. Additional NGO events should be held to discuss the appropriate roles of NGO dispute resolution and counseling services as differentiated from the role of the court-annexed Mediation Offices, to dispel existing confusion and alleviate any sense of competition. In addition, protocols should be developed and disseminated along with trainings for NGO counselors and staff on what cases should appropriately be referred to the Mediation Offices. Improving a respect for the rule of law and the role of the courts in protecting the rights of women and children will make the NGOs more effective partners in achieving the goal of improved access to family justice.

Continue to Improve the Professionalism of Social Workers in Egypt

The family counseling and dispute resolution services are the core of the FJP's innovative and progressive agenda, and the NGO social workers are the key to providing an effective service that builds trust and confidence in the community. The field of social work is still developing in Egypt and the level of professional training and opportunities for practical experience are low for new NGO staff members. Additional in-depth training programs need to be conducted for social workers based on international best practices and standards to improve their skills and create new leaders in the Egyptian field of social work. Including social workers from the Ministry of Social Solidarity might increase the sustainability and reach of such a training program.

Develop Better Assessment Tools to Measure Impact of NGO interventions

As the role of NGOs in providing family justice services increases, it will become increasingly necessary to measure and demonstrate the true impact of the services on the lives and perceptions of the target communities. Standardizing indicators (both quantitative and qualitative), conducting unified baseline studies, and compiling comparable information throughout the target regions will allow decision-makers on a national level to have credible and useful information in determining the success and impact of these NGO interventions in supporting the family justice system in Egypt.

Instill Sustainability of the NGO Programs

Sustainability is perhaps one of the largest challenges facing the FJP grantees. There are, however, positive signs that many of the NGO services will continue past the life of the FJP. Those NGOs that have clearly incorporated the family justice services within the core mission of their organization are best positioned to continue the activities. For example, they have raised funds from other sources and incorporated part of the counseling services within other projects. Almost all of the NGOs use volunteers, including board members, to keep the costs down, and have begun to offer the educational programs and seminars using their own staff instead of hiring consultants or experts. One of the most promising sustainability strategies for the program was evidenced by those NGOs working directly with the counseling services of the Ministry of Social Solidarity to ensure their ongoing institutional capacity to provide quality services to the community.

Many NGOs have turned to local businesses for financial support of their services (although during the economic crisis this has been a dwindling resource to draw upon). A central strategy reported by many NGOs was to generate revenues from their job skills programs to support other family justice services. Sale of goods made from NGO skills-training such as embroidered dresses or jewelry, for example, could generate revenue to help support NGO counseling and dispute resolution services. This is a difficult strategy on which to depend, however, as historically these types of small business activities usually do not generate sufficient funds to cover NGO operating expenses plus offer financial support to the trainees who manufacture the products for sale. Other revenue-generating activities, such as charging for use of NGO computers and internet or leasing office space for community events, could be considered.



Family Justice NGO Workers