



Family Planning Enlists Imams in Egypt

Bringing New Future to 22-Year Old Minya Mother

One day while riding on a local bus in Minya, Aleya heard a voice over a loudspeaker that changed her life.

A 22-year old Egyptian woman, Aleya had already borne three children and had two miscarriages. The tape-recorded message asked her to think before having another child – and invited her to attend a community meeting with an imam from the local mosque and the village health clinic's female doctor - to learn how family planning could help her.

Aleya had dropped out of school at 12, married at 14, and now was exhausted from caring for her family, working in Egyptian fields, and recovering from her numerous pregnancies. But she was afraid of family planning. Rumors in her village, in the Minya governorate, said it harmed women or that it was against Islam.

Because the meeting was at the local mosque with the imam and the local female doctor would be there, Aleya decided to attend with her sister. There they found other women from the village and it gave them all some comfort in a situation that was new and uncharted for the extremely close-knit and traditional society in which they live.

USAID has helped women with family planning all over the world including Egypt where the population continued to rise over the last 20 years -- from 40 million to 67 million. Many rural areas like Upper Egypt have not adopted family planning. That's one reason Minya was chosen for a demonstration project.

Encouraged if not emboldened by the presence of friends and relatives, the women of Minya began asking about family planning and were told it was perfectly safe and not against Islam. Aleya left the meeting with a pamphlet telling her where the nearest family planning clinic was located and the following day she went there to ask about the best contraceptive method for her.

The percentage of Egyptian women using contraceptives rose from 24 percent in 1980 to 56 percent in 2000. The total fertility rate fell from 5.3 to 3.5 births per woman during those same years.

The pilot program is turning the statistics around in Minya where only 23 percent of women had previously used contraceptives, one of the lowest rates in Egypt. Today it is 48 percent. USAID has invested \$180 million since 1978 to make family planning services, information, counseling, and materials accessible in Egypt.

The results indicate that by giving training and a role to local religious and community leaders, family planning programs have penetrated the veil of suspicion that often blocks new ideas in less developed areas.



Woman at family planning clinic in Egypt.

For more information, please visit stories.usaid.gov



United States Agency for International Development
www.usaid.gov

