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EGYPT

CASE STUDY

Spiritual Leaders Speak Out on Lead

Churches, mosques share knowledge on effects of lead pollution



Photo: LIFE-Lead Project/Fady Nessim

Priests and sheikhs identified activities they can undertake to encourage Shoubra El Kheima residents to protect themselves from lead pollution.

“We did not know that such serious pollution problems exist in our area. We intend to serve our community to help the residents of the area and raise their awareness of how to protect themselves and their families,” said Father Dumadieu, of Amir Tadrus Church.

Telling Our Story
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Challenge

The Shoubra El Kheima area north of Cairo is severely polluted due to decades of hazardous emissions from metal smelters and foundries, including lead, arsenic, and mercury. Before

USAID’s involvement, these industries produced more than 30 times the international limits, threatening the health of the local population. Yet surveys showed that most residents were unaware of the dangers, especially from lead, a powerful neurotoxin that is particularly harmful to children.

Initiative

A USAID-funded project has been cleaning up polluted sites in the heavily populated industrial areas of Qalyoubia, the governorate where Shoubra El Kheima is located. As surveys revealed that religious leaders were highly trusted by the community, the project enlisted their support to raise awareness about environmental issues. Through a series of four workshops, 41 Muslim and Christian leaders learned about the severity of the problem and worked together to craft and disseminate messages to their followers. The leaders developed community outreach plans and created brochures that address environmental concerns from a religious perspective.

Results

Since their participation in the workshops, leaders of both faiths regularly discuss local environmental issues during religious services and community meetings. By incorporating awareness messages into their weekly sermons, the priests and sheikhs have taught thousands of people about the effects of pollution and how they can protect their families. This approach complements the project’s clean-up work, including the remediation of seven lead smelters, two schools, and a medical center. Thanks to these efforts, Shoubra El Kheima residents now live in cleaner surroundings and are more aware of their environment.