



## Empowering Women By Changing Attitudes



Photo: USAID/Egypt Adele Abadir

With USAID help, the percentage of young women who have undergone female genital mutilation has steadily declined from 97% in 1995 to 81% in the 2000. Newborn girls in Egypt now have a chance at a new life.

Ms. Shehata from Minya, Egypt recalls her own harrowing experience. She remembers the shame, embarrassment and confusion associated with this time in her life. Her parents, like many families living in her community, hold social traditions sacred and fear the consequences of what will happen to their girls if they do not undergo a procedure known as female genital mutilation.

For the past ten years, USAID has been actively involved with New Horizons, a non-formal education program which addresses literacy, life skills and, in particular, female genital mutilation. In collaboration with other organizations, USAID has developed a highly-successfully model for addressing this prevalent yet highly sensitive topic. Concentrating on the socio-cultural aspects of the practice is more relevant than focusing on the religious or health facts. Giving women the forum to discuss their experience allows New Horizons to more effectively reach women who had undergone this procedure. The program empowers the women with knowledge and helps them decipher social practice against scientific realities.

Additionally, the program identified positive female roles model in the community. These women serve as "positive deviants" and create a constructive alternative to the norm. Since the mid-1990's, the percentage of young women who have undergone the use of this procedure has steadily declined from 97% in 1995 to 81% in 2000. The change is due in large part to changes in people's attitudes.

Photo & Caption

