

EVALUATING THE LEGAL RIGHTS SUPPORT PROGRAM FOR EDUCATION IN EGYPT: A CASE STUDY

Mahmoud Abbas Abdeen

ABSTRACT

The Legal Rights Support Program (LRSP) is a ten-week project funded by the National Council for Negro Women (NCNW). The project was implemented by AMIDEAST in collaboration with the Salama Moussa Organization (SMO) in the Spring 1999. Its main aims were: (a) to develop the skills, knowledge, and resources of 11 civil society organizations (CSOs), working in one of the provinces of Upper Egypt (Minya), (b) to qualify the CSOs to raise community awareness of children's legal rights in the field of education, and (c) to increase and facilitate community access to its legal rights. In order to achieve these aims, three workshops were conducted on children's rights for education, which were preceded by extensive preliminary work. The research methods adopted in this study were action research, and the descriptive, qualitative method. After analyzing various documents of the project, conducting field visits, interviewing all those in charge, and evaluating the project results and outputs, it was concluded that the project succeeded in attaining its aims with evaluations between good and very good. Nineteen evidences and two case studies were provided to justify the conclusion reached. In order to enhance the positive aspects of the project and redress any deficiencies, some recommendations for future plans were provided.

INTRODUCTION

The Legal Rights Support Program (LRSP) is a ten-week project funded by the National Council for Negro Women (NCNW). The project was implemented by AMIDEAST in collaboration with the Salama Moussa Organization (SMO). It started in April 1999, and ended by the end of June the same year.

The main aim of this project was double fold: (a) to develop the skills, knowledge, and resources of 11 Civil Society Organizations (henceforth CSOs) (See Appendix 1) in Minya, which is considered one of the most important and largest governorates in Upper Egypt. This goal included raising awareness of the legal rights, particularly those of children in the field of education, among their beneficiary communities, and (b) to increase the access of these communities to their legal rights. These CSOs represent an important link in transmitting legal rights awareness to the communities with which they work. Legal rights awareness includes critical awareness of laws relevant to citizens in the enjoyment of a productive, meaningful, safe, and happy life and knowledge of the individuals and bodies responsible for guaranteeing that those laws are respected. Legal rights awareness will empower these communities to identify problems affecting them and know how and where to act to solve these problems.

In order to achieve the main aim, the AMIDEAST and SMO conducted three workshops on the child's rights for education, which were preceded by extensive preliminary work. In order to make evaluation more operationally-oriented, a meeting was held with representatives from AMIDEAST and SMO in the AMIDEAST Office in Cairo in April 1999. The main reasons for holding such a meeting were to:

1. Determine accurately the output and results of the project;
2. Set the project's plan and schedule for task implementation; and,
3. Determine the roles and responsibilities and the way of distributing them.

The anticipated outputs and results (See Appendix 2, Documents No. 3), as put forward by the representative of the two organizations, are as follows:

1. Issuing a Training Kit Model supporting the child's right to education;
2. Providing training on the computer and Internet; and,
3. Issuing a booklet showing the main guidelines of training in the field of the right of a child to an education.

These anticipated results will be dealt with as merely operational objectives. They will be of help in evaluating the project objectively.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of this evaluative study included the following:

1. Analyzing the main aim of the project into some subsidiary objectives and identifying the

means used for achieving those objectives. This made the evaluation process more objective and scientific.

2. Evaluating each of these objectives and their means.
3. Providing suggestions for reinforcing the positive results and remedying the negative ones. This would enable these 11 CSOs in the future to work effectively and properly for raising awareness of the legal rights of children to education.

EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

The main research method adopted for this study was action research (Roberston, 2000; Arthar & Buck, 2000; Atkinson, 1994), in addition to the descriptive and qualitative method (Maxwell, 2004; Hostetler, 2005; Howitt & Cramer, 2005; Shaughnessy, et.al., 2006; Miles & Huberman, 1994). A variety of tools were used in the process of evaluating this project. These tools included:

1. Examining eight documents of the project (See Appendix 2);
2. Visiting the governorate in which the project was conducted (Minya) on October 24th to 25th, 1999, and conducting 11 interviews (See Appendix 3) with all stakeholders in the project, including a sample of children who participated in the project. This was guided by scientific methods in this field (Desimone & Le Floch, 2004; Clark & Schober, 1992);
3. Examining the project outputs, which included the following:
 - (1) The Training Kit;
 - (2) A computer-training workshop on the Internet; and,
 - (3) The training guideline booklet on the legal rights of children to education, based on experiences of 11 CSOs in Minya.

MEANS IMPLEMENTED BY AMIDEAST AND SMO

As indicated previously, the AMIDEAST and SMO conducted three workshops on the child's rights to education, which were preceded by extensive preliminary work. The first workshop was conducted in collaboration with partner societies in Minya in the period from the 12th to the 14th of May 1999. It was attended by three representatives of the nine participating societies (organizations) and representatives of government primary schools. The general framework of the workshop was as follows (See Appendix 2, Document No. 4):

1. An overview of the project (aims, planning, training, etc).
2. A study of the status quo to find the possible means for putting the agreement "Child's right in education" into effect.
3. Exploration of the efforts made to support that right.
4. A collection of the experiences of societies in this field.
5. A presentation of some of the activities related to the child's right to education and the problems involved in such activities.

Some top officials from the Department of Education in Minya participated in this workshop to integrate governmental and non-governmental efforts. The procedures of the workshop were conducted side by side with some other teamwork activities. Evaluation was made on a daily bases.

The second workshop was conducted at Ittsa (a small town in Minya) from June 7-9, 1999. As seen in Appendix 2 (Document No. 5), the contents of the second workshop were as follows:

1. A summary of what was done during the first workshop;
2. The projection of some new concepts on the child's right to education;
3. The presentation of the Training Kit; and,
4. The collection of data for issuing the "booklet" on the child's right to education in the light of the two workshops conducted.

This second workshop focused on the Training Kit. Moreover, it covered "The International Agreement on the Child's Right." A debate was held with a professor of sociology at Minya University on "The Changes in the Egyptian family and Their Reflections on the Child's Status and Education." Intermediate and final evaluation was done during the three-day workshop.

The final workshop in this program was conducted by AMIDEAST in Cairo from June 25-27, 1999.

The purpose of the three-day training was to expose representatives of the CSOs to the Internet and to give them a background on how to research educational and legal issues using the vast resources the Internet affords. Fifteen people representing nine of the CSOs attended the workshop. They received training materials and disks with a wide variety of international NGO links (See Appendix 2, Document No. 7).

MAIN FINDINGS

As a result of analyzing the multiple documents of the project, the field visits, interviews of all those in charge, and evaluation of the project's results and outputs, it can be concluded that the project succeeded in attaining its goals with most scores on the evaluations being between good and very good. In order to justify the conclusions reached, 19 evidences and 2 case studies were provided as follows:

1. Encounters with participants in the first and second workshops showed that those workshops caused them to adopt positive views concerning the child's right to education. Participants became more aware of the child's right in selecting the time and style of learning.
2. Encounters with participants also showed a strong belief in the illiterate child's right to learn.
3. Participants acquired considerable benefits, particularly concerning ways of conducting dialogue, producing collective work, and managing groups of people.
4. The meeting held between workshop organizers and participants led to the integration of efforts, which have been previously scattered.
5. The presence of some government officials talking objectively on education instilled a feeling of freedom on tackling any issue. The officials' talk on the rights of children to an education evidenced a desire for more positive work.
6. The presence of a university professor addressing participants brought more objectivity to the discussions. This fact aroused the interest of all those concerned and fostered awareness of the children's rights.
7. The fact that careful and collaborative planning played a major role in making the workshops a success has raised the awareness of participants as to the importance of good preparation and planning.
8. Positive results were further enhanced by connecting the outcomes of both workshops.
9. The presence of representatives from government schools, as well as others from non-governmental institutions, maximized the importance of close cooperation in the field of child's right everywhere, especially in schools, streets, and homes.
10. Reviewing the international and local laws in the field of child's rights shed the light on the wide scope of interest in this issue. Comparing the international codes to the local ones proved most beneficial.
11. The computer-training course given by AMIDEAST to 15 trainees fostered their skills in dealing with new technology.
12. The researcher's encounter with some students in the Egyptian Society for Child's Protection showed a desire by those students to be a part of the dialogue. The students were so open to talking about their school problems. Their main concern, in fact, was to get high grades, rather than looking forward to any other goals. They were very enthusiastic about the Training Kit. The director of the Society and another teacher attended the workshops. They benefited greatly in the fields of computer and the child's rights.
13. Another visit was to El-Fagr Al Gadid (New Dawn) School, which is a UEAED affiliate. The researcher interacted with a group of primary and preparatory school students to probe their problems and to explore their opinions on a future school. This meeting showed an increasing desire by students to pursue higher education, to avoid physical punishment, to use computers, and to stop cheating at exams. They frankly expressed both positive and negative aspects of their school.
14. There was a relative balance in man/women participation in the Minya workshops, as well in computer training courses. Twenty one women attended the first workshop out of a total number of 38 participants. Computer training courses in Cairo were attended by 6 women out of a total participation of 15, which was a very positive ratio given the fact that women had to travel from

- Minya to Cairo (around 250 kilometers one way).
15. The researcher spent some time with students at a literacy class at Catholic Copts School. His attention was drawn to the following points:
 - (1) Literacy classes provided not only principles of literacy and learning but also were extended to some lessons in folklore.
 - (2) Folklore was used to support the concept of a child's right. Children's songs expressed their problems, such as their tiring work in fields and danger of wild animals that might happen to attack them at night.
 - (3) Some drawings made by children were hung on the Salama Moussa Organization's wall. They expressed their rural simple life and their future hopes.
 16. The researcher visited the literacy center (27 girls and 3 boys) in Abougharir village (Abuqurkas), which is a Salama Moussa affiliate. The following was observed:
 - (1) Facilitator- (instructor) student relationships were very strong. Facilitators admitted that they benefited from and applied the knowledge they got from the workshops.
 - (2) Children carried out many activities including drawings, which were many and varied. A drawing showed a girl's rejection of her family's strict orders of housework; another expressed a girl's annoyance at being excluded from school for exceeding the age limit, while a third boasted of being capable of reading a letter.
 - (3) Children were speaking their minds with no restrictions at all. They called for more learning and more activities. Facilitators were democratic enough to tolerate all ideas.
 17. The project played a major role in bringing together both NGOs and government officials, who expressed their readiness for assistance. The Education Department in Minya put its potentials at the disposal of some societies (e.g. Salama Moussa). Salama Moussa committed itself, in return, to transport Nozol Elshorafaa school students to El-Dawoodiya School to allow a good use of recreations available only at the latter school. According to the booklet, some of these societies contributed in building new schools, adding more floors to small schools, and repairing and maintaining other schools.
 18. Concerning improving CSO advocacy skills, the project showed a fairly good success under the limits of time available. The following are some of the evidences:
 - (1) The presence of a large number of representatives from CSOs and public schools was considered a means of advocacy.
 - (2) The fact that representatives belonged to many governmental and non-governmental institutions was a good means of propagating ideas on child's rights.
 - (3) A university professor's participation in one of the workshops and his discussion with participants was bound to widen the scope of propagation.
 - (4) Issuing a guidebook on children's right to education served the purpose of advocacy at large.
 - (5) Children's drawings and dramatic works were essential in raising awareness.
 - (6) Experimenting and distributing the Training Kit to a number of societies widely advertised the principle of child's rights.
 19. Concerning strengthening the CSO organizational bases, it seems clear that the workshops held in Minya and Cairo and the issuing of Training Kits have increased the skills of CSO representatives, particularly regarding problem-solving and problem diagnosis. This was manifested more clearly in small-scale rather than major societies. Old major societies always offered training to their members, unlike the minor societies, which found an opportunity in training only with workshops. The Egyptian Society for Child Protection was an example of minor societies, whereas Salma Moussa, UEAED and KARITAS are examples of major ones. A need was felt to increase the number of beneficiaries from the training. The number of those involved was very limited; only 10 Societies were involved out of a total number of more than 100 in Minya.

CASE STUDIES

The researcher limited himself to two case studies, which were the closest to the project's outputs. They were (a) the Training Kit, and (b) the proposed training guide (Booklet) inferred from some Societies' experiences.

The Training Kit

The *Training Kit* was considered the most prominent output item, which has undergone some steps in preparation, experimentation, modification and application. The researcher followed up on a video of the experimentation procedures of the second workshop in Minya. The Training Kit in its final form consisted of three wood boards (50X70 cm). Each of them was divided into 30 pieces, which when assembled together would read as one of the following principles:

1. We have a right to education to the highest degree.
2. We have a right to freedom of expression.
3. We have a right to avoid physical punishment.

Each of these principles is expressed in words and magnificent caricature. Salama Moussa Organization (SMO) was given permission to reprint UNICEF's book entitled *We have Rights*.

Training Kit Accompanying Tools

1. Little board for training before using the big one;
2. Three pictures, each representing a principle of child's rights;
3. Three (50X70 cm) white sheets of paper for children to draw;
4. Colored cards containing no drawings to be used on the problem tree;
5. Instructions card; and,
6. Twenty cards, each divided into three sections covering the items of the Child's Rights Agreement.

Training Objectives

1. Exploring the concepts of right to education;
2. Student's exercising the right of participation and free expression;
3. Prospecting the problems concerned with the children's right to education; and,
4. Proposing solutions to any problems concerning children, taking into consideration their own views.

The Group Targeted

1. 7-14 year-old children classified in groups incorporating 7 to 10 children each, or literacy class students; and,
2. The game can be done with adults as well (teachers-activators), if questions are adapted.

Having checked the procedures of game experimentation, watched the video tape, observed a group of children using it, and encountered the preparation group on October, 25, 1999, the following was noticed by the researcher:

1. Facilitators were competent enough in stimulating the student's enthusiasm for a collaborative assembling of the game.
2. Students were encouraged to discuss the drawings and the rights they expressed.
3. The idea of a problem tree was a creative one.
4. Students were encouraged to find solutions for problems; however, some of the students' proposals were revolutionary and very extreme.

It is worth mentioning here that the researcher applied the Training Kit to some primary and preparatory students in Ismailia (Researcher's residential place); the Training Kit proved to be excellent, enhanced students' activities, and fostered their desire for a dialogue.

THE FUTURE OF THE KIT

Points for Improvement of the Kit

The researcher proposes the following points to improve the Training Kit:

1. Simplify the words, principles, and statements used.
2. Cut down the number of pieces to 25 instead of 30.
3. Increase the number of boards from three to as many as 15 to encompass some other principles.
4. Use simple standard Arabic rather than colloquial in introducing the child's rights.
5. Exchange the Training Kit with government primary and preparatory schools in Minya and other governorates.
6. Generalize the idea of the Training Kit to cover such other subjects as Algebra.

The Booklet

The 43-page booklet includes the experiences of 10 CSOs and 10 government schools, working in collaboration with three of those CSOs in the area of children's right to education. This booklet is a beneficial result of the project with its three workshops and pre- and post-work. It is divided into three main sections (chapters). Chapter One summarizes the history of the participating CSOs. Chapter Two includes two lectures (studies). The first is by Mr. Salah Nasr, Director of the Education Department in Minya, on *The problems of education and efforts made to solve them*; the second is by Dr. Mohamed Abdel Rashed, Professor of Sociology at Minya University, on *The changes in the Egyptian family and their reflections on a child's status and education*. Chapter Three tackles the expertise of CSOs in dealing with a child's right to an education and raising the awareness of local people toward children's rights.

Revising the contents of the booklet, the following was observed by the researcher:

1. The booklet is a good documentation work of the whole project.
2. Scientific methods were observed in preparing the booklet: data collection and the classification process were accurately done.
3. The cooperation between government institutions and CSOs is an exemplary example and worthy of being copied.

The researcher recommended publishing the booklet. Attention needs to be drawn to two important points: (a) the booklet needs language checking because some misprints were noticed, and (b) the statistics used in Dr. Abdel Rashed's study need to be updated; most statistics date back to as late as 1980.

PROBLEMS AND DIFFICULTIES

Despite the positive points detected in this project, there were some adverse aspects. These include:

1. In view of the complicated goals to which the researcher aspired, the relatively short time of the project was quite inadequate.
2. The fact that participants belonged to different affiliations and professions sometimes created some discrepancy; yet, that was, at other times, of value to the richness of expertise gained.
3. Achievement follow-up was poor in the period between the first and second workshops in Minya.
4. Some CSO members stated that sometimes projects funded by some different institutions were overlapping and lacking coordination.
5. Time available for dialogue and discussion was sometimes too limited.
6. The timing of the second workshop in Minya was overlapped with the time set for examinations in government schools. The school representatives, therefore, were not able to attend.
7. The actual number of CSOs participating was 10 rather than 11, as was planned. For example, the Save Child Organization missed both the first workshop and the computer workshop and participated in the second, while Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services (CEOSS) missed the second workshop, and participated in the first and the computer session.
8. Channel 7 of the national Egyptian TV almost played no role in covering or raising awareness to the activities made by CSOs in the Minya governorate.
9. Only 10 out of 100 CSOs in Minya participated in the project, which is a poor figure.

SUSTAINABILITY

Despite the substantial efforts made during the workshops held with the Training Kits, sustainability of such work inside these CSOs is not guaranteed due to their poor potentials, especially the small ones. Occasional activation workshops would prove valuable in ensuring sustainability in this important field.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This project emerged from the main aim, which was stated earlier. Some subsidiary objectives and anticipated results sprang out of this main aim.

AMIDEAST ventured to achieve this aim in collaboration with the Salama Moussa Organization (SMO) by conducting workshops, devising the Training Kit, and issuing a useful booklet. In view of checking the projects' documents, making field visits, conducting 11 interviews, and evaluating the projects' output and results, it can be stated that the project attained its goals with a rough evaluation between good and very good.

Overall, the program achieved the objectives set out in the proposal, as well as the following positive aspects not originally called for in the proposal:

1. Linkages were created between the Ministry, the school teachers, and the CSOs, which could provide a basis for further work in this area.
2. The Training Kit was expanded in use outside its original purposes, to include areas like literacy class and schools.

To reinforce and enhance the positive aspects and redress the deficiencies, the researcher recommended the following:

1. Widening the usage scope of the Training Kit to cover additional principles of a child's right to education.
2. Applying the Training Kit to some tough scientific subjects to make learning more interesting. Algebra is one of them.
3. Increasing and enhancing the participation of more CSOs; it is recommended to continue along with the ten CSOs already participating and attempting to include some new members from other CSOs.
4. Issuing and distributing the project's booklet and redressing the relevant defects referred to earlier.
5. Setting up a plan for visit exchanges among the CSOs.
6. Seeking the advice and opinion of CSOs concerning any future plans.
7. Publishing and distributing the International Agreement on Child's Rights and the Egyptian law of the Child's Right, among all CSOs. The Ministry of Education should do the same in all schools.
8. Coordinating the schedules set for all social service projects to avoid distraction and lack of focus.
9. Forming a follow-up team to report to AMIDEAST and NCNW on the project's effects taken by CSOs. It is recommended that the Salama Moussa Organization take charge.
10. Notifying Channel 7 of the Egyptian TV to assume its responsibilities toward the question of a Child's right to an education, as this Channel played a very limited role in circulating ideas. (Notification can be made through the Ministry of Information.)

REFERENCES

- Arhor, J., & Buck, G. (2000). Learning to look through the eyes of our Students: Action research as a tool of inquiry. *Educational Action Research*, 8(2), 327-339.
- Atkinson, S. (1994). Rethinking the principles and practice of action research: The tensions for the teacher-researcher. *Educational Action Research*, 2(2), 383-401.
- Clark, H. H., & Schober, M. F. (1992). Asking questions and influencing answers. In J. M. Tanur (Ed.). *Questions about questions: Inquiries into the cognitive bases of surveys*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

- Desimone, L. M., & LeFloch, K. C. (2004). Are we asking the right questions? Using cognitive interviews to improve surveys in educational research. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 26(1), 1-22.
- Hostetler, K. (2005). What is “good” education research? *Educational Researcher*, 34(6), 16-21.
- Howitt, D., & Cramer, D. (2005). *Introduction to research methods in Psychology*. London: Pearson Education Limited.
- Maxwell, J. A. (2004). Causal explanation, qualitative research, and scientific inquiry in education. *Educational Researcher*, 33(2), 3-11.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative analysis* (2nd ed.). Thousands Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Robertson, J. (2000). The three Rs of action research methodology: Reciprocity, reflexivity and reflection-on- reality. *Educational Action Research*, 8(2), 307-326.
- Shaughnessy, J. J., Zenchmeister, E. B., & Zenchmeister, J. S. (2006). *Research Methods in Psychology* (7th ed.). Boston: The McGraw-Hill Companies.

APPENDIX 1

List of 10 CSOs participating in the project*

1. Jesuits & Freres, Minya
2. Coptic Catholic Bishopric, Minya
3. Upper Egypt Association for Education & Development (UEAED), Minya
4. Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services (CEOSS), Minya
5. Association for Women’s leaders for Comprehensive Development, Minya
6. CERITAS, Minya
7. Egyptian Society for Child’s Protection
8. Salama Moussa Organization for Education and Development
9. Prinic Tadrouce Organization
10. Save Child Organization

* The actual number of CSOs participating was 10 rather than 11 as was planned.

APPENDIX 2

List of documents of the project

1. AMIDEAST project proposal description
2. Background papers on AMIDEAST
3. Report on “Staff Workshop” Organized by AMIDEAST and Salama Moussa Representatives, during the period April 27-29, 1999, in the AMIDEAST office, Cairo.
4. Report on the first workshop on *The legal rights of children to education* held in Minya, May 12-14, 1999.
5. Report on the second workshop on *The legal rights of children to education* held in Minya, June 7-9, 1999.
6. Checking up on the videotape concerning the Training Kit experimentation period during the second workshop in Minya.
7. Report on *The workshop of computer training on Internet*, conducted by AMIDEAST in Cairo, June 25-27, 1999.
8. *Evaluation scope of work* written by NCNW.

APPENDIX 3

The Activities of the Field Visit to Minya October 24-25, 1999.

1. Visiting the Egyptian Society for Child’s Protection, meeting with the director (Nadia Barsoum) and teacher (Ahlam), and talking with children to discuss their views. After that the researcher watched children using the Training Kit.
2. Meeting with Mr. Salah Nasr the Director of the Educational Department in Minya and Mrs. Nahed Saber the Financial and Administrative Director.
3. Meeting with Dr. M. Abdel-Rasheed, the Professor of Sociology in Faculty of Arts, Minya University, who has conducted a study entitled *The changes in the Egyptian family and their*

reflections on child's status and education.

4. Multiple meetings with Mr. Emad Tharwat of Salama Moussa Organization.
5. Visits to Salama Moussa Organization on 24th and 25th of October 1999. A special meeting was held with the team that prepared and tried the Training Kit, and another was held with participants in the workshops.
6. A visit to an illiteracy-eradicating center in Abougharir Village in Mansafis, Abuqurkas. A meeting was held with children (27 girls, 3 boys) and two facilitators. Free-expression drawings made by the children were examined.
7. A meeting with Mr. Adel Farouk Sobhy, the Director of CARITAS, Minya
8. A meeting with Mr. Magdy Aziz, the Director of Upper Egypt Association for Education and Development in Minya (UEED).
9. A visit to Catholic Copts School, which is affiliated to U.E.A.E.D in Beni Ebeid. The researcher met with students in one of the literacy classes and attended a lesson on folklore songs. The researcher observed how the children's choral songs expressed their views.
10. A visit to El-Fagr Al Gadid (New Dawn) School, which is also a UEAED affiliate. The researcher encountered a group of primary and preparatory school students to probe their problems and views on a future school. The researcher also met the school's Vice- Principal, Mr. Nady Mossaad, who had attended two workshops.
11. A meeting with Mr. Anna Ghoneim of AMIDEAST, who conducted the Internet workshop in Cairo.