

# 7 Innovation and mediation: the case of Egypt

*Malak Zaalouk*

In recent decades, development policy makers have made a stronger commitment to the concept of partnerships and various forms of participation. This commitment stems from certain theoretical and philosophical positions, as well as practical political stances.

In terms of education theory, it has become evident that individual learners have complex needs, and that, in order to achieve high-quality learning, those needs, and the complex nature of the context in which learning takes place, must be addressed. Consequently, there is a growing recognition of the need for multi-sector approaches to education. On a more philosophical level, post-modernist thinking suggests that, in an increasingly uncertain world, planning and management must be adaptive. There is a need for leadership styles and methods which can forge partnerships, delegate power and authority for greater flexibility, and mobilise and catalyse a wide array of partners to reach desired objectives. On the political level, most governments in developing countries have accepted that the model of a strong welfare state is gradually withering away. Nevertheless, states with weakened structures and limited means have pledged themselves to attain global development goals. They have therefore welcomed the idea of engaging in wide-ranging partnerships to achieve their national goals and objectives.

While the invitation to engage in partnerships may be viewed as a pragmatic solution to persistent social and economic developmental constraints and failures, it has nonetheless allowed a certain degree of empowerment both to civil society and to communities at large. It is helping to foster the genesis of a new era of potential democracy and public accountability, one in which partnerships can be authentic. Engaging in public affairs is no longer limited to narrowly specified domains; nor can it, in the long run, be treated as an optional activity. This is creating a dynamic which might indeed change the configuration of existing power relations, on both the national and the international scenes.

## **A global movement for girls' education**

A global movement for girls' education is manifesting itself through increased attention to gender issues, which could lead to significant social and political changes. It is a movement which aims to transform power relationships – not only between male and female, but also between learner and teacher, and between communities and official government structures. It is a movement which brings to the fore a new paradigm for learning and a new positioning of communities in the management of their lives and their children's learning. It is, moreover, a movement which fosters growing partnerships.

This chapter will trace the development of the modern movement for girls' education in Egypt within the context of the global movement for girls' education in the 1990s. It will focus on the role of community schools in initiating a movement for good-quality education for girls in Egypt. It will describe the processes through which – almost a decade later – the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI) found fertile ground in Egypt and resulted in the Egypt Girls' Education Movement (EGEI). Inspired by the community-school model at the national level and UNGEI at the international level, the Egypt Girls' Education Initiative seeks to develop partnerships through which government and communities can work together.

This chapter will explore in particular how such partnerships between local communities, non-government organisations (NGOs), and government have been fostered to promote girls' education through the mediation of UNICEF. UNICEF's role in the community schools initiative is seen as that of a catalyst and mediator between government and communities, a role that it continues to play in the Egypt Girls' Education Initiative. This chapter will examine the nature of the partnerships formed in each instance, with a focus on the roles of each partner. It will also attempt to offer an analytical assessment of such partnerships, and the mediation role played by UNICEF within the context of current efforts to scale up the achievements of the girls' education movement.

## **The context of girls' education in Egypt**

Concern for girls' education has had a long history in Egypt, beginning more than a century ago with the establishment of separate schools for girls. Civil society was a partner in the reform of education during the nationalist struggle against colonialism: the first university – Cairo University – was in fact founded by community members, with opportunities open to women. Schools grew up rapidly during the 1950s and 1960s under a policy of compulsory and free basic education for all, with gender equity in enrolments guaranteed in the

Constitution. But economic setbacks in the 1970s and 1980s resulted in limited investments in education, deteriorating infrastructure, and significant gaps between opportunities provided to boys and opportunities offered to girls.

Significant progress in girls' education was registered in the 1990s: concerted efforts resulted in a reduction in the gender gap in gross primary enrolment rates from 12 percentage points in 1990 to 3 percentage points by 2001/2002. A gender gap of just 3 percentage points also characterises gross enrolment rates at preparatory and secondary levels. Such national averages, however, mask significant regional disparities, particularly in the governorates of Upper Egypt in the south, where overall enrolments remain lower, and gender gaps in primary net enrolments range up to 15.7 percentage points. Table 1 shows the gender gaps in some governorates with the widest gaps.

**Table 1: Primary education in Egypt – the gender gap per governorate**

Governorate	Gender gap
Bani Soueif	15.7%
Assiut	14.2%
El-Minya	13.4%
Fayoum	12.6%
Sohag	11%
El Beheira	3.2%
El Guiza	2.5%

Analyses conducted in the seven governorates featured in Table 1 indicated clearly that poverty was the main reason for families' failure to send their daughters to school. Most families were not able to pay the direct costs of schooling. If they did send their girls to school, the opportunity costs were great: girls performed valuable household chores and were often able to earn more income for the family than boys were. This was particularly true in the fishing industry, where the 'nimble fingers' of girls were much in demand for cleaning and peeling sardines and shrimp. High overall unemployment and limited prospects for either school or college graduates further discouraged parental investment in education, as did the very scarcity and poor quality of schools in remote communities. Concerns about safety and security were an issue in some areas, and practices of early marriage constituted an additional factor that restricted education for girls, which was seen as a potential threat to male and parental authority.

Taken together, these factors added up to limited educational opportunities for girls – a problem that the community schools were set up to address.

## **The community school initiative**

The community schools programme was established in 1992 through a partnership between the Ministry of Education, UNICEF, and local communities. The programme aimed to reach girls in deprived rural areas where the gender gap was high: in governorates of Upper Egypt such as Assiut, Sohag, and Qena. It targeted children in hard-to-reach hamlets who had never been to school. It was designed to provide formal primary education through high-quality learning in child-friendly (and especially girl-friendly) schools, relying heavily on community participation and innovative methods in so doing. This marked the genesis of the girls' education initiative in Egypt.

The first four schools were established in Assiut governorate in the district of Manfalout in the villages of Bani Shokeir, Om al Kossour, and Bani Rafei. After a few years, schools were established in various districts in the governorates of Sohag and Qena, and a new district in Assiut called Abou Teeg. From the beginning, the communities were considered the main partners in the initiative. They were to be responsible for providing safe and child-friendly learning spaces for girls within the community, and would also be responsible for sustaining, maintaining, and running those schools. Communities in addition nominated facilitators/teachers, mostly young women from the villages who had completed an intermediate-level education. The Ministry of Education would participate in the selection of facilitators and pay their salaries. The ministry would ensure that schoolbooks and school meals were supplied to those hard-to-reach areas, and it would act in partnership with NGOs to supervise the schools. UNICEF was responsible for designing the initiative, conducting training, providing furniture, equipment, and stationery, and (with other partners) supervising, monitoring, and evaluating the schools.

### ***Diffusion of the community education model***

From the four initial schools established during the pilot stage, community schools blossomed during the course of the decade, numbering 202 by 2000 and reaching 8,000 children – 70 per cent of them girls. Moreover, community schools provided a diffusive model which was taken up and applied by others, such that by the end of the 1990s there were more than 3,500 similar schools, reaching close to 80,000 children, 80 per cent of them girls.

In 1993, in the first step towards scaling up the community-school initiative, the Ministry of Education established an associated programme, known as the

One-Room School Initiative, which targeted girls who had dropped out of school. It focused on vocational training, in addition to offering formal primary education. From an initial total of 213 one-room schools in 1993/1994, the programme expanded to 2,649 such schools in 2001/2002.

In 1994, with training from UNICEF, the Social Fund for Development (SFD) established another 150 community schools through partnerships with NGOs. The SFD community schools continue to expand to date. Several NGOs established the model in a number of governorates. Meanwhile, in 1997, USAID, in partnership with the Ministry of Education, set up the New School programme in three governorates of Upper Egypt, basing it on the model of community schools. By 2002, such new schools numbered 45. At almost the same time, the World Bank and the European Union, through a Planning Programme Monitoring Unit (PPMU), engaged in a similar initiative for what they called 'Second Chance' education through community mobilisation.

Each phase of the programme – pilot, development, and expansion – attracted more and more partners. NGOs, local universities, and specialised institutions joined the partnership, with a particular concern to support training programmes and curriculum development. Moreover, other donor agencies offered support; the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), for example, became a strong partner. Private individuals and the private sector proper also joined the partnership and provided financial support.

'Community Education' was the name given by the Ministry of Education to all the initiatives that adopted the community school model, indicating that such initiatives were not discrete programmes or pilot projects, but part of a movement initiated by the community schools and fully adopted and led by the Ministry of Education. Community schools had been recognised as a leading model for community ownership and quality learning.

## **Partnerships within the community school model**

Through its support for the initial community school model, UNICEF had catalysed and mediated a partnership between local communities, NGOs, and government. The experience was largely successful, because both government and communities trusted UNICEF. After some initial reluctance, the government eventually saw great value in communities' active support for national educational goals of universal primary education. Communities, on the other hand, were eager to be recognised and to acquire formal education for their children. UNICEF worked hard both to negotiate the partnership and to enhance all parties' capacity for participation.

In response to this new and much-needed trend, the Ministry of Education established a directorate to manage and co-ordinate on-going partnerships with NGOs wishing to support schools. The government also showed an interest in mainstreaming the participatory elements in the model, such as the education committees (described below) and the selection and recruitment of female facilitators from the local community.

### ***Community education committees***

The most significant partner in the community school model is the education committee, which is broadly representative of the communities in each of the sites. In earlier initiatives, communities had typically been invited to donate land and money for schools and other services. This time, however, while communities were still invited to make contributions in cash and kind, they were also encouraged to plan for and manage the schools.

In Assiut, Sohag, and Qena, the three governorates of Upper Egypt where the initiative took root, education committees were carefully groomed by UNICEF staff, in partnership with NGOs. A lengthy process of dialogue helped to create a spirit of trust and rapport over the months and years. With UNICEF working as mediator through NGOs, the committees were able to network and connect with responsible government officials at the village and district levels. The ensuing partnerships have been largely harmonious and collaborative.

Education committees make major decisions concerning the selection of sites for schools, the selection of teachers/facilitators, and the shape of the school schedule. They have enriched the curricula and solved problems related to the school and local communities. More importantly, they organise and govern themselves and the communities in which the schools were established. As a result of their work with community schools, education committees have attained a better position to claim other services for their hamlets, such as roads, electricity, and safe drinking water.

The men, women, and young people who comprise the education committees are largely agricultural workers and small farmers from very poor and deprived backgrounds. Some are the parents of the would-be pupils. Others are simply active and concerned members of the community. They are mostly illiterate, especially the women, and have never participated in public life before. Through the initiative they have been intensively trained, sensitised, and consequently empowered.

Women are important members of the education committees, making up 30 per cent of the membership. They have been selected and engaged through assertive action by the UNICEF teams. At times, when necessary, they meet separately

from men, but in most situations they participate with the men in making critical decisions about their communities. Participation in the education committees has enabled them to become active and mobile. At last, after being silent and invisible for so long, their voices are being heard, and they have been able to move into the public domain.

Overall, this remarkably effective partnership with communities has shown policy makers what people can do: they can indeed participate in setting up schools of the highest standard in hard-to-reach areas where government is not easily able to penetrate. They are saving government funds, but they are slowly growing more and more autonomous and are very gradually moving from a marginal position to one of empowerment. During an evaluation of the initiative, the communities were clearly quite conscious of the role that they were playing, and confident that if need be they would find ways of sustaining their schools without external assistance.<sup>1</sup>

### ***Teachers/facilitators and supervisors***

Other important partners in the initiative are the facilitators/teachers, who are drawn from the local communities, and the teams of supervisors who represent NGOs. The facilitators are essentially young women – largely unemployed – who have completed intermediate education and are intensively trained through the initiative to become primary-school teachers, with salaries paid by the Ministry of Education. The supervisors, also young women from the three governorates of Assiut, Sohag, and Qena, have obtained higher education and are leaders in the initiative. Both facilitators and supervisors have been instrumental in developing the initiative. They have furthermore been able to negotiate certain benefits for themselves and the children from a position of power. Recently, for example, the facilitators have explored the possibility of establishing a professional association to safeguard their rights.

The relationship between the Ministry of Education and the facilitators has been far more complex than that between the ministry and local communities, and it has been characterised by several phases of acceptance and rejection. Although the para-professionals are paid by the ministry in accordance with the agreement negotiated in 1992, officials at the ministry initially found it hard to accept them as the equivalents of graduates from faculties of education and teachers' colleges. Gradually, however, the effectiveness and professionalism of these young women have been demonstrated by the results of several evaluations of the community schools, and also by the level of children's achievement. Facilitators have thus become respected as model teachers by ministry officials.

The most recent evaluation, conducted in 2001, indicated that facilitators of the community schools had acquired the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed for the effective management of classes with high-performing students.<sup>2</sup> Now it is not uncommon for MoE directorates at the governorate levels to seek to employ facilitators of the community schools in official government schools. Currently, the MoE has established a policy of equivalence, to allow the provincial directorates to appoint the community schools facilitators after three years of experience and training.

## **Contribution to educational reform**

The facilitators and supervisors have become strong partners in Egypt's education-reform programme, launched as a follow-up to the Dakar World Education Forum as a means of improving the quality of education. The reform focuses on child-centred, activity-based learning, with the country developing its own standards for the outcomes of learning, teacher performance, school and classroom management, and community participation.

Over the past five years, community school facilitators and supervisors/support mentors have become partners in the development of activity-based curricula, as members of technical teams from the community schools who have been invited to advise the Center for Curriculum and Instructional Materials Development (CCIMD). They are showing the way forward in the creation of attractive materials for multi-ability and multi-grade teaching which take into account diverse styles of learning and stimulate students of differing intellectual abilities. Through their guidance, new materials are being developed. They are able to work with ease as a result of the partnerships fostered with the learners in their own classrooms.

Children are a great source of inspiration to the facilitators. They are partners in the management and discipline of their classrooms. Children and their facilitators agree on some objectives of learning and then they create materials to support the objectives. Rules of behaviour in the school and classroom discipline are governed by a 'social contract' or 'learning contract', and a partnership is sealed which recognises the rights of the children.

The community school teams (facilitators and supervisors) are also partners in training, as they spread their philosophy in the training sessions that they jointly attend with other government teachers and supervisors. They take it upon themselves to spread the philosophy of their schools to other regular schools in nearby districts. They are indeed partners in diffusing their participatory model to other educational institutions.

It is thus through an intricate web of partnerships that community schools carefully ensure the sustainability of the movement. The wider the partnerships, the greater the opportunity for sustainable growth. The partnerships in the movement, and the very strong networks that have been established, have created an unparalleled sense of ownership by communities and a wide demand for high-quality teaching. Recognising this, government and high-level policy makers have adopted the community school model as a source of new ideas, deserving wider diffusion. The model has moreover been selected as the way forward for increasing girls' access to education, achieving greater equity, and ensuring higher quality through the Egypt Girls' Education Initiative.

## **The Egypt Girls' Education Initiative (EGEI)**

### ***The global context***

The United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI) was announced in April 2000 by the Secretary General of the United Nations at the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal. UNICEF was mandated to lead it. The Initiative called for everything that the Community Education movement in Egypt had been promoting, including intensified partnerships to improve girls' education. The Dakar Framework set clear gender-related goals and objectives for Education For All (EFA), which were later adopted as part of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for education. They include eliminating the gender gap in primary and secondary education by 2005, and ensuring that by 2015 all children are in school, with parity and equality for girls and boys.

UNGEI represents a renewed commitment to achieve gender equality and reach the unmet MDG and EFA goals, by assuring girls of full and equal access to, and achievement in, basic education of good quality. It encourages countries to foster partnerships to attain these goals and to tackle gender issues in national plans of action, including sector plans and wider development frameworks. It motivates governments to take strategic action on girls' education, in a collaborative manner which develops known mechanisms and established practices. It calls for the building of flexible structures and – most importantly – strong partnerships which help to strengthen capacity to reach the goals and objectives of the global girls' education movement.

### ***Renewed national commitment***

In Egypt, a United Nations Education Task Force had been established in 2000, comprising UNICEF, UNDP, ILO, UNESCO, UNIFEM, UNFPA, and the World Bank. In October 2000, in a follow-up to the World Education Forum, this task

force, led by UNICEF, brought together high-level policy makers in a national conference for girls' education. The National Council for Childhood and Motherhood (NCCM) was invited to play a prominent role, and the Ministry of Education was a strong partner. The Task Force thus created the conditions for a reinvigorated movement for girls' education in Egypt, continuing what had already been achieved, and responding to the renewed commitments made in Dakar.

The conference committed Egypt to the global UNGEI objectives. It reviewed studies which indicated that, while the country was doing well on national averages, wide disparities existed between and within regions, with a number of governorates identified as being at particularly great risk of failure. The conference recommended a focus on good-quality learning for all – marking a strategic shift away from a single focus on access – and also called for greater attention to early childhood care and development. An important series of recommendations focused on the creation of structures which would sustain the effort for girls' education in an integrated fashion. The need for a National Task Force and secretariat for girls' education was made explicit.

### ***The National Task Force***

In its capacity as co-ordinator with responsibility for children's welfare, the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood took on a leadership role at the national level. It set up a series of important advocacy events, attended by the First Lady of Egypt, who in fact presides over the council.

In partnership with UNICEF and the UN family, the council helped to create a national task force of 16 line ministries, several NGOs, and a number of government agencies. The task force was to create and strengthen a partnership between the different sectors and bring to the educational arena a comprehensive array of services to support girls' aspirations for education. Good health and nutrition were important components, identified as the responsibility of the Ministry of Health and Population. Income generation and poverty alleviation would be supported by the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Ministry of Youth, and the Social Fund for Development. The Ministry of Petroleum and the Ministry of Construction would provide roads. The Ministry of Environment was to provide materials and training on relevant issues related to environment and hygiene. Moral education was identified as the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Religious Endowment. The Ministry of Culture proposed offering environment-friendly designs for the building of schools.

The above are just some examples of pledges made by the various partners during meetings of the National Task Force, and during meetings between the

First Lady and the member ministers. The foundation for an integrated approach has been laid.

### ***Local task forces***

A number of geographical areas with wide gaps between access for boys and access for girls had been selected for intensified action in seven governorates with the greatest disparities. Local voluntary task forces were created in these governorates, through a participatory process of rigorous consultations. Communities, parents, and members of civil society volunteered to form local teams/task forces. Girls, both in and out of school, were given the opportunity to participate. They were important members of the local task forces and played a significant role in the consultative processes. Women were also well represented in the voluntary task forces.

The self-selected local task forces, on average 20 in each governorate, were in fact viewed as the basis for community participation and were treated as key partners. Their capacity was gradually built through a series of training workshops on planning generally, and the development of action plans more specifically. As a result, they were able to produce action plans for each of the seven governorates. They were mentored and supported by planning experts, information committees, and budget committees from the ministries of finance, education, and planning. UNICEF supported the process and the finalisation of the plans. With some refinement, the outcomes of their endeavours led the government to earmark a budget of 157 million Egyptian pounds from the country's five-year plan, to be used specifically for girls' education. The actual cost of the initiative was a little more than threefold the amount allocated.

The local task forces were carefully trained in community mobilisation, selection of community leaders, and team building. As their teams are being strengthened, their terms of reference evolve. As the task forces develop into strong effective teams (through the on-going training), they will be the strongest partners of the initiative. They will be in charge of creating liaison officers and leaders at the district and village levels. They will, moreover, oversee the creation of education committees in all the targeted sites, basing them on the community school model.

It is the community partners in the initiative who will be selecting sites, facilitators/teachers, and students, and ultimately establishing girl-friendly schools in partnership with the official agencies responsible for school building. The model is essentially that of the community school, sharing its emphasis on the participation and empowerment of local communities and its characteristic classroom pedagogy and methodology of learning.

The work of the local task forces will be supported by the national task force, which will co-ordinate its efforts to provide the necessary technical assistance and executive resources. All the various ministries have made pledges to the First Lady to provide additional budgets and services to the initiative. Some private-sector entrepreneurs have donated cash and building materials. A significant media campaign accompanies the initiative, and public enthusiasm is high.

### ***Local action plans***

The action plans developed by the local task forces include programmes and projects on information systems, community mobilisation and advocacy, expansion of girl-friendly schools, and poverty alleviation. The plans aim to use innovative strategies to reach approximately half a million out-of-school girls in seven governorates. Two of the governorates, Assiut and Sohag, have well-developed community schools. Four of the selected governorates have already experimented with replications and variations of the community schools, namely One Classroom Schools and Small Schools. The innovative strategies to be introduced in all seven governorates would be as follows:

- the establishment of 3,000 additional girl-friendly schools;
- improvement of existing school environments;
- and improvements in the physical, social, and economic conditions of families and communities of out-of-school girls through service provision, income generation, and consciousness-raising activities.

Information systems would allow local communities to learn about and assist in collecting, entering, and analysing data. Members of local communities are in the best position to inform data collectors of the existence of communities in hard-to-reach areas which are normally unknown to official census staff. They will also feel empowered by sharing in the creation of information and having access to it. All the various strategies have already been piloted through the community school model.

Monitoring of the programmes would lie in the hands of the volunteer local task forces, under the guidance of the NCCM and in partnership with NGOs. A meticulously developed monitoring and evaluation plan will utilise numerous indicators for outputs, outcomes, and impacts of the activities in each of the projects and programmes. The plan was developed through a series of technical workshops organised by UNICEF. The local task forces will be trained in its use, with the objective of making the initiative accountable to the key stakeholders: the communities.

Training of facilitators and supervisors in the initiative is currently being conducted in accordance with tested pedagogies through the community school

model. UNICEF gives technical support to the training. The approach is holistic, aiming to foster a constructive community of learners with a collective sense of responsibility to each other. The communities will take on leadership roles, and the power of partnerships should set in motion the wheels of a movement that has already registered significant gains (see Box 1).

The movement should ensure that girls will learn in an equitable way, within environments that are friendly and supportive of creativity, understanding, and critical thinking. It should also ensure that communities will learn about responsible participation. The empowerment of women, genuine respect for their latent abilities, and true democracy should also be fostered, as they were through the community schools.

**Box 1: The Egypt Girls' Education Initiative: progress to date**

A comprehensive vision has been developed for the initiative.

A special section for girls' education has been established in the five-year plan.

The sum of 157 million Egyptian pounds (US \$26 million) has been earmarked for the initiative in the five-year plan (and an additional \$80 million sought from the private sector and donors to support the initiative).

Relevant and effective structures have been established at the national level.

The National Task Force and the girls' education secretariat are fully operating at NCCM, with strong technical support from UNICEF and other UN agencies.

Local task forces have been set up as participatory mechanisms in the seven selected governorates; action plans in each of the governorates have been finalised through participatory processes, and information systems have been consolidated.

Capacity building and material support have been provided to local task forces and departments, and teachers and facilitators have been trained.

Several sites have been selected, according to rigorous criteria, for the creation of girl-friendly schools, and facilitators have been selected too.

The foundation stone for the first school was laid by the First Lady of Egypt in May 2003.

450 girl-friendly schools have been established.

On-going documentation of the initiative is underway.

## **Will the dream come true?**

Realities are constructed out of a series of dreams that are made to come true; however, in this case the new realities need to be nurtured as they come into being, and there are many risks to be confronted.

### ***Challenges to address***

- The movement requires strong political commitment and a leadership which believes in the very essence of the development objectives sought. This currently exists in Egypt, as manifested by the leadership at NCCM. But the life of movements is long, and as they move through various phases they require continuous guidance and support. It is critical, therefore, that the political commitment and leadership are maintained over time. The infrastructure of innovation, reform, and democratic decision-making should be strong enough to support such a movement. This is gradually coming about, but will require sustained efforts in terms of mentoring and capacity building.
- For partnerships to be meaningful in any initiative, they need to be perceived as equitable by all the players involved. Historically, however, partnerships between officials and community members and leaders have been rather asymmetrical. Communities are assumed to be apolitical, while expected to contribute economically and socially. Allowing communities to be part of the planning and decision-making processes is an entirely new procedure. To sustain such initiatives and keep up the momentum, there is a need for intensive capacity building, coaching, mentoring, and training.
- Voluntary action has been most popular among the poorest of the poor, or alternatively as a matter for the individual philanthropist. In a political economy where general poverty prevails, it is often hard to sustain voluntary activity. But the local task forces in the Egypt Girls' Education Initiative have worked untiringly since they were established. They have a sense of pride and achievement, and their enthusiasm is growing. If successes continue to multiply, and recognition is strong, social capital should accumulate, enabling people to build strong community-based networks, based on trust.
- Forging partnerships between donors in very large initiatives requires a great deal of work. Fortunately, in Egypt the UN partner agencies have acted from a strong sense of collaboration and harmony. However, as the partnerships of necessity expand, much effort will be needed to ensure that this same spirit continues to prevail.

- Partnerships between line ministries that have hitherto often worked in complete isolation from each other will also require a high degree of co-ordination. Fortunately the First Lady in person is leading this process, thus making it hard for ministries to resist. The hope is that this current period of transition might lead to the internalisation of a crucial integrative process, which becomes the measure of success for the future. This will require mechanisms which allow for co-ordinated planning, together with clear responsibility and accountability.
- Another constraint will continue to be the need for sustained fundraising. The development phase of such a grand-scale initiative will require large sums of money. But the effort should pay off in the form of a wide range of long-term impacts. Although the government has financially supported a large part of the cost for the initiative, with contributions both in cash and in kind, an additional 80 million dollars will be needed over the period 2004–2007 to cover the costs. Fund-raising efforts are currently underway, supported by UNICEF.
- Finally, the complex nature of all the partnerships, and the very considerable effort needed to co-ordinate them, may impair the quality of the outcomes.

Despite such potential pitfalls and constraints, the dream is on the way to becoming reality, provided that it is continuously nurtured. This will call for sustained efforts on the part of NCCM, as an innovative government structure, to co-ordinate and lead the way forward in unconventional ways. It will furthermore require UNICEF, with the support of the UN family, to maintain its mediating role and support the cementing of partnerships between communities and government.

### ***A continued role for UNICEF***

From the beginning, UNICEF's role has consistently been that of a catalyst and mediator. It was a catalyst when initiating, designing, and assisting in the mainstreaming of the community school model which essentially established partnerships between various stakeholders so as to create good-quality learning opportunities for girls. It also mediated the relationship between government, communities, and NGOs when the model was scaled up, most notably through EGEl. It has assisted throughout in the formation of partnerships between essentially asymmetrical and often incompatible entities, which required official government institutions and bureaucrats to work alongside community members who were volunteers and aspired to be agents of change.

Such partnerships got off on the right footing when community members and leaders in fact took the lead in developing their own plans of action in the EGEl;

but the involvement of volunteers in such types of partnership requires conscious and sensitive negotiations and constant nurturing; in this, UNICEF has an important role to play in its capacity of mediator – which is a challenge, given its limited resources.

Building and monitoring the various partnerships has required work. Helping government officials to consider unconventional ideas has been no easy matter, especially since they were accustomed to vertical lines of authority, in a context within which each department or ministry worked separately. Moreover, it was no easy task to convince officials at the governorate levels that local task forces were to be recognised as legitimate bearers of girls' rights in their districts and villages; nor was it easy to persuade such officials to support community-based voluntary entities and accept them as equal partners. Finally, supporting volunteers to sustain their initial levels of enthusiasm requires intensive work and on-going communication.

It is important, therefore, that UNICEF and other international agencies understand the intensive demands on human resources that will be entailed if such movements are to be supported while they are scaled up in size and complexity. But the partnerships that are being developed in Egypt, at all the diversified levels of implementation, are helping to ensure that innovations continue to recreate themselves within government, communities, and civil society at large to achieve the best results. This in turn can only come about if international partnerships are fostered to contribute funding, technical assistance, and political support to initiatives such as these, which have the potential for positive social transformation.

*Malak Zaalouk is chief of the education programme at UNICEF Cairo. She was the founder of the Community School movement in Egypt and she has been involved in the work of the UN Egypt Girls' Education Initiative since its inception.*

## Notes

- 1 The Canadian International Development Agency (CID), Project Support Unit (PSU): 'Community Education Project: End of Phase II Evaluation', June 2001.
- 2 National Center for Examination and Educational Evaluation, NCEEE: 'Evaluation of the Community Schools', Cairo, 2000.