



FAITH AND POSITIVE **CHANGE** FOR CHILDREN

GLOBAL INITIATIVE ON
SOCIAL AND BEHAVIOUR CHANGE

Case Study

UNICEF Egypt

*Multi-level, Multi-theme
and Multi-platform
Inter-faith engagement*

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Young girls smile at Primary Health Centre in Damietta Governorate

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OVERVIEW

- Led by the University of Al-Azhar with UNICEF support, there is long-standing faith engagement to capacitate religious leaders to communicate on child issues through a two-pronged approach through the Ministry of Religion, on the one hand, and associated Imams and the students at the university, on the other hand. This program is now expanding to Coptic Orthodox church leaders.
- The University acts as a conduit through which to reach out to varying levels of religious leaders as change agents. While this initially began with focus on support to child protection and care it is now expanding to a broader integrated approach to include other thematic areas.
- The engagement comprises a continuum of approaches from delivery of edutainment media to role modelling among peers in order to better communicate information on protecting child wellbeing. A guide on Peace, Love, and Tolerance¹ to protect children from violence has been developed from Muslim and Christian perspectives and translated into English and Arabic.

¹ "Peace. Love. Tolerance." UNICEF Egypt, September 2016. <https://www.unicef.org/egypt/reports/peace-love-tolerance>.

BACKGROUND

With a population of approximately 98.8 million², Egypt has the third largest population after Nigeria and Ethiopia in Africa. However, with 62% of its population below the age of 29, Egypt is currently in the demographic phase called the “youth bulge” – the largest cohort of young people in its history.³

Egypt is predominantly Muslim at 94.9% of the population, the vast majority of which are Sunni. The remainder of Egyptians, mostly belong to the native Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria, an Oriental Orthodox Christian Church.⁴

At the family, community, and societal levels, prevailing practices and attitudes towards children threaten children’s wellbeing and can prove to be somewhat stagnated and unchangeable. In times of significant social and economic change, social norms and behaviours are under significant pressure to adapt. As individuals, families and communities struggle to manage new socio-economic challenges, some traditional longstanding practices and social norms serve as barriers to advancement for child rights. These include widespread acceptance of violence against children in home, school and society as well as inadequate girls’ empowerment toward greater equity in Egyptian society.

Violent disciplinary practices among children aged 1-14 are extremely high. 93% of children experience violent discipline, 91% experience psychological aggression, 78% experience physical punishment mostly by parents and caregivers of children 3-4, and 43% experience severe physical punishment⁵.

In formal settlements, 30% of children are deprived of access to safe water and over 50% are deprived of safe sanitation. Additionally, 61% of girls aged 15 -17 are subject to FGM/C.⁶ FGM is a harmful social norm practiced by both Muslims and Christians. Families believe this is for girls’ protection and part of their religious tradition.

Child marriage is also prevalent and accounts for more than 15% of all marriages in Egypt. Moreover, and of considerable concern, is that child, early, and forced marriage and teenage childbearing in rural parts of Egypt have increased over the last decade. Early marriage is a very sensitive issue. According to Islam, “there is no specific age of marriage, and guardian of girl can take a decision for her marriage”, and according to Egyptian law, the age of marriage was 16.

Media Context in Egypt

As per EDHS 2014⁷, almost all households in Egypt (98%) own a television set among which 97% are connected to a satellite dish, with most households owning a dish. 31% own a radio with a cassette player, approximately one-third of households own a computer and 92% of households have a phone; most (90%) own cell phones. An analysis of TV viewing habits indicates that Egyptians spend a significant amount of time watching television with 40% of people watching up to 4 hours of television per day. (Arab Media Outlook 2016)⁸.

The religious TV trend in Egypt began in the late 1990s with the launch of Saudi-owned Iqraa (Read). Egypt still has quite a few religious TV channels, which before Mubarak only played religious content. However, these channels often also show content that may be interpreted as hate speech. In the post-revolutionary era, monitoring mechanisms on the content and tone of broadcast have disappeared leading to renewed accusations of increasing infiltration of hate speech. The trend towards increased religious television programming in the country provides a particular access point through which communication for development can be channelled.

2 “Country Background.” UNICEF Egypt, www.unicef.org/egypt/country-background.

3 Michaelson, Ruth. “Experts Urge Egypt to Rethink Two-Child Population Strategy.” The Guardian, Guardian News and Media, 3 Jan. 2019, www.theguardian.com/global-development/2019/jan/03/experts-urge-egypt-to-rethink-two-is-enough-population-strategy.

4 Pariona, Amber. “Religious Beliefs In Egypt.” WorldAtlas, 16 Sept. 2016, www.worldatlas.com/articles/religious-beliefs-in-egypt.html.

5 UNICEF (2016) The extent of violent practices for child discipline in Egypt. Retrieved October 2016 from https://www.unicef.org/egypt/eg_ECO_SIF_Child_Discipline_May_2015.pdf

6 Egypt Demographic and Health Survey 2014

7 Egypt Demographic and Health Survey 2014 [FR302] 463 <https://egypt.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/0e0409a0-7af6-46d5-a346-7a7d9aeb12c6.pdf>

8 (Arab Media Outlook, 4th Edition, 2016) - <http://stmjo.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Arab-Media-Outlook-2011-2015.pdf>

What is the central intersection of child wellbeing and religion that requires a C4D approach?

With the youth bulge, Egypt's religious context and social norms justify a heightened urgency for action. The prevalence of violent disciplinary measures against children and inequity in girls' wellbeing remain primary concerns. Increased interreligious violence means that there is also a pressing need for faith-based peacebuilding efforts while recognising that religious leaders are influential members of Egyptian society who can help replace negative social norms with positive ones. In order for change to occur, programs must reach beyond awareness and include new cross-cutting multi-sector social norms-focused Communication for Development (C4D) programming including more systematic evidence and knowledge generation and the promotion of more participatory and dialogic approaches to community engagement. In Egypt UNICEF adopted a multi-faceted approach to advocating for the wellbeing of children with Al-Azhar.

C4D OUTCOMES

UNICEF's Global C4D Outcomes

Outcome 1: Increasing Knowledge and Demand for Services

Outcome 2: Improving Caregiving Practices

Outcome 3: Addressing Social Norms, Attitudes and Public Opinions

Outcome 4: Improving Community Engagement and Social Mobilization in Humanitarian and Development Settings

UNICEF Egypt's faith engagement is formally linked to the two main pillars of the Country Programme: early childhood development and girls empowerment.

Overarching outcomes for child wellbeing include

- By 2022, increased number of children aged 0 to 6 have improved survival and improved early childhood development.
- Increased number of parents and caregivers in targeted areas have enhanced skills and social support needed to provide nurturing care and positive discipline to their children.
- Quality and coverage of child protection services and programmes to prevent violence against children are strengthened and supported by national policies and budgets.
- Social perceptions and attitudes towards violence against children and harmful gender-based practices are improved in targeted areas.

C4D STRATEGIES AND APPROACHES

Institutional and Partner Context

UNICEF Egypt's primary government partner for faith engagement is the Ministry of Awqaf (Ministry of Religious Endowment, Advocacy and Training Sector). Primary FBO partners include the Al-Azhar University's International Islamic Center for Population Studies and Research (IICPSR), the Coptic Orthodox Church of Egypt - Bishopric of Public, Ecumenical & Social Service sector (BLESS), and the National Council for Childhood & Motherhood (NCCM). NCCM hosts a national task force of religious leaders in Egypt, the Ending Violence Against Children (EVAC) task force, which is the main national coordination and monitoring mechanism on EVAC. Both Al-Azhar and the Coptic Church are members of this task force.

Participant Groups

UNICEF Egypt's C4D programme engages religious leaders through individual, interpersonal, family, community, institutional and system levels to influence faith actors' knowledge, attitudes and perceptions on issues affecting children and unpacking their understanding of religious positions as well as their behaviours in relation to these issues. At the outset, religious leaders are both themselves the subject of behaviour change efforts as well as role models for their communities. The program aims to enhance this positive behaviour change process in a more systematic and sustainable manner.

Strategies and Activities

Articulation of Faith positions in Legislation Re UNICEF Egypt has a long history of faith-based initiatives because of the religious nature of the population and widespread trust in faith leaders.

Initial engagement with the faith community centered around deliberations with the religious scholars and leadership to articulate principles and codes of conduct around a range of child-related issues. This documentation which attempts to go deeply into each issue of child wellbeing was captured in the form of publications, research papers and manuals informed by an **assessment of religious leaders' knowledge, attitudes and communication needs** as well as through the identification and integration of excerpts from sacred texts and finally through fieldtesting with partner organizations.

From early on the partners viewed the UNICEF-FBO engagement from a systems perspective to reach faith networks at all levels including with the Ministry of Awqaf.

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We collaborated with the Ministry of Awqaf to have sessions and training programs for the imams so that we could ensure that the contents of this document would go down to the grass root religious leader in the remote village of Egypt.

Dr Gamal Al-Serour, Al-Azhar University

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On completion of each of the reference documents, UNICEF worked with the relevant FBOs to organize a high level launch to inform the religious and wider community of the existence of the documents and to mobilize their support for the roll-out.

The partnership focus began at an advocacy level, centred around the development of reference and advocacy documents in conjunction with Al-Azhar University Islamic Center for Population Research and Studies (Al-Azhar). Established in 1984, the partnership initially focused on child survival and resulted in the “Childcare in Islam” publication. Later in 2005, the country office collaborated to co-develop a manual “Children in Islam: Their Care Protection and Development” with corresponding research papers that incorporated sacred texts in reference to health, education and child protection.

In 2008, the drafting committee of the Higher House “Shura Council” of Egypt used the tools as one of the strong reference documents on child rights from an Islamic perspective in drafting the child law.

In 2013, UNICEF Egypt began expanding programs with other faith partners to address female genital mutilation (FGM). The partners published the document, “FGM/C: Between the Incorrect use of Science and the Misunderstood Doctrine,” which explains the religious background of FGM in Islam, while also dispelling common misbeliefs.

The partnership between UNICEF Egypt, Al-Azhar and the Coptic Orthodox Church started in 2013 with the goal of building the capacity of religious leaders and disseminating key messages on Ending Violence Against Children. Working with the religious leaders from Christianity and Islam, these messages presented an update of Children in Islam in the publication in 2013, “Peace. Love. Tolerance. Key Messages from Islam and Christianity on Protecting Children from Violence and Harmful Practices” (hereafter referred to as “Peace. Love. Tolerance.”).⁹

⁹ “Peace. Love. Tolerance.” UNICEF Egypt, September 2016. <https://www.unicef.org/egypt/reports/peace-love-tolerance>.

The publication guides target audiences on ending violence against children on prevention and care for children. It specifically provides details about the 11 forms of violence and provides key messages to address them, including child and forced marriage; female genital mutilation/cutting; discrimination among children; child labor; sexual abuse of children; absence of family care and homelessness; domestic violence against children; violence in schools and education institutions; children in armed conflicts; trafficking of children; and violence against children on television and the internet.

Capacity Building for Religious Leaders

Since the first training sessions in 2005 on Children in Islam, the partnership has used a cascade approach to training religious leaders. With the release of additional manuals, the program has continuously improved the training for wider audiences and topics. Originally organized as a one-day workshop, the programme is currently comprised of a five-day training of trainers to fully equip the trainers in partnership with the Ministry of Awqaf, which has an average of 100,000 Imams registered at a time. These trainers then train imams to host community awareness and dialogue sessions and events on positive discipline and parenting to EVAC in churches and other religious institutions.

The current program established since 2016 with UNICEF, Al-Azhar and the Coptic Church, the training program **expanded to include priests in five governorates**, Great Cairo (which includes three governorates, Cairo, Giza and Kalubia), Alexandria, and Asyut with the highest prevalence of violence.¹⁰ This program reflects the same structure as the one with imams in which UNICEF Egypt, Al-Azhar University and the Coptic Church training priests and some leading church leaders on child protection issues for approximately 3000 churches. The training includes a Christian perspective on how to prevent violence against children and develop positive, alternative practices. The Pope of Alexandria and Grand Imam of Al-Azhar launched the program to show approval from high-level religious leaders in the country.

The current strategy for developing the capacity of FBOs to address priority issues is using the joint publications as a reference for face-to-face engagement, combined with media to further influence followers and the general public alongside training at different levels.

Community Engagement

UNICEF Egypt engages communities in several ways in order to communicate the concepts of EVAC and other related child well-being issues. This includes sermons in three governorates and Friday Prayers, or administrative divisions. The partners recognize that religious leaders are contributing to changes in behaviour, but the community also need to be responsible. The partners are now working through child protection committees in each of the governorates to include the religious leaders in the referral mechanism and to equip them with the referral knowledge, for example, how to respond in child abuse cases.

Additionally, partners have started capacity building within government institutions including the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Welfare in order to increase capacity for engagement with religious leaders.

Media/Edutainment

UNICEF Egypt employs the C4D “edutainment” strategy, which utilizes media as an important means of information dissemination.

As a quarter of the Egyptian population is illiterate and nearly all households own a television (98.8%), television presents a good opportunity for reaching wide audiences.¹¹

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“We realized that many of our people do lack the communication skills and that’s why we introduced this program - communication skills - focussing on how to relay the knowledge to the masses and how to be effective through the utilization of the various aids, like audio-visual aids, fliers, posters, films, dramas.”

Dr Gamal el Serour, Al-Azhar University

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¹⁰ Based on the UNICEF and the National Council for Childhood Motherhood qualitative study

¹¹ Allam, Rasha. “Egypt.” Media Landscapes, <http://medialandscapes.org/country/egypt>.

Consequently, UNICEF with Al-Azhar and the Coptic Church produced an 11-episode docu-drama video series in Arabic with English subtitles and featuring content on the 11 core messages on Violence Against Children and produced a set of case studies. The videos integrate information from medical and health, religious and social and cultural perspective. The video series has been successfully used in activities, events, and training sessions and the plan is to make them available online.

The program also used radio broadcasts for far-reaching information dissemination. Of particular significance are the programs discussing positive parenting for EVAC on Al Quraan Al Kareem National Radio channel, which has been nationally ranked highest among all radio channels in terms of listenership. The Coptic Church of Egypt is managing 3 satellite channels for religious programs. The program is currently planning how to integrate all mass media use into a comprehensive plan.

Capacity Building of Students

Recognizing that Al-Azhar University is a world-renowned education institution that hosts students from 105 Islamic countries, the program also aimed to improve the knowledge of graduating theology students (pre-service) in parallel with religious leaders already practising in the community (in-service). This two-day training utilizes a peer-to-peer approach between students. It is expected that the original batch of students then speak with other students about the information in the trainings and will eventually finish school and pass on the information to their communities.



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Training of Coptic Church priests in the governorates of Great Cairo, Alexandria, and Asyut. The training includes a Christian perspective on how to stop violence against children and to promote better practices.

PROGRESS AND RESULTS¹²

As a result of the comprehensive, long-term efforts outlined above, UNICEF Egypt is seeing positive results around EVAC, built on work with partners dating back to the 1980s, which is gaining increasing traction with more actors joining the effort. There has been a formal declaration to dissociate religious doctrine from harmful cultural practices with leaders calling for a religious and cultural shift towards dispelling misbeliefs. In 1995, the Ministry of Health issued a declaration to stop FGM with advocacy and partnership efforts of UNICEF. Then, in 2008, FGM became criminalized by the law and in 2016, FGM became a felony. In June 2018, Egypt's Dar al-Iftaa Al-Misriyyah, the nation's semi-official arbiter of Islamic law, issued a Fatwa, stating that there is no religious basis for FGM and calling for a nationwide ban.

The Joint Declaration was signed by the most prominent religious leaders, the Grand Imam and Pope, along with line ministries (ministers of: Awqaf, Ministry of Social Solidarity, Ministry of Immigration and Egyptians Abroad and Deputy Minister of Health & Population Head of NCCM). The 2018 Interfaith Intergenerational Dialogue event produced two reference documents issued on child online safety and dignity from Islamic and Christian religious perspective with key tips for community and parent engagement. The leaders issued a Joint Declaration with key Recommendations shared with highest faith authorities to be reflected in the Abu Dhabi Global interfaith dialogue on Child dignity in the online world. To date, the partners convened 15 Advocacy meetings or events to present the joint dissemination plan/partnership.

Grand Imam of Alazhar institution has been conducting a series of foreign missions including the Pope of the Vatican, Eg. Rohingya, promoting the moderate Islam as well as peace and tolerance worldwide as an act towards ending violence and terrorism social cohesion and resilience.

Moreover, the partner's work around reference and advocacy documents have influenced policy at the highest level. In December 2016, the Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi delivered a speech emphasizing the need for inter-faith dialogue to reaffirm values of protection and correct duties of care amongst, families, communities and social services. He also called for development of a five-year roadmap together with the national religious authorities to address misconceptions surrounding faith, religions and the application of their principles.

Tracking Change at Individual and Community Level

Formative research and a baseline on parenting and early childhood development is planned for 2019.

In addition, pre- and post-assessments for trainings have been conducted to measure immediate knowledge and attitudes towards issues related to violence against children, UNICEF Egypt has designed a KAP study to assess recall of knowledge and sustained attitudes 6 months after implementation on a sample of outreached beneficiaries. The initial assessments were conducted in 2018.

The program has 6-month follow up evaluations planned in order to assess three-year cumulative impact. These are designed to measure levels of knowledge and attitudes in relation to core types of violence against children, identify the sources of information on different topics related to violence against children, and identify/ assess what additional communication tools religious leaders need in order to address topics related to violence against children. FBO representatives will be involved at every stage: evaluations were developed in collaboration with FBO leaders to ensure that the wording and phrasing of questions were appropriate, and FBO teams collected the relevant data and were also involved in data entry and data analysis, with technical support from UNICEF. UNICEF plans to conduct a mapping as part of its documentation process for FBO partnership in Egypt and its relation to regional and global FBO networks.

Additionally, there is evidence of progress at the individual level. Of the more than 10,000 individuals reached through outreach efforts, 88% were able to correctly identify issues related to violence against children.

¹² JLI Interview with UNICEF Egypt Country Office Representatives. Bangkok, Thailand, July 11, 2018

Trainings

The program has trained 151 master trainers, and 475 trainers. This initiative has improved the capacity of religious leaders in delivering core EVAC messages from religious perspectives. In two years, the program trained religious leaders, reached and engaged with 16,000 male and female youth for Faith (Al Azhar theology students and Coptic Church Sunday school servants) and 41,290 community member conversations around violence against children and harmful practices.

Within the reporting period over 365 religious leaders have been trained on child protection related issues in three governorates (Greater Cairo, Alexandria and Assiut) resulted in over 41,290 community members engaged on conversations around violence against children and harmful practices. A pre- and post-assessment demonstrated 72% attainment of knowledge in these issues among the trained religious leaders. In addition, amongst a sample of 105 of community members, 88% demonstrated attainment of knowledge in relation to Violence Against Children and harmful practices attributable to their interactions with religious leaders exposed to the capacity building programme supported by UNICEF.

The success with theology students has extended past the 4,604 students reached. Al-Azhar University includes key messages on EVAC in academic curricula. On a national level, discussions are currently in place with the combined training documents to expand the program to primary schools. This proposal is supported by the Supreme Council and Grand Imam of Al-Azhar and, if passed, this will also need the approval of the Pope of the Church of Alexandria.

Al-Azhar University has also started training other interested countries on how to tailor their contexts in order to communicate good practices. Delegates, including religious leaders, politicians and government, from more than 12 countries visited Egypt to learn and train to replicate the program in their country. This is a significant mechanism to consider for scale.

Religious scholars from almost 150 countries worldwide come to study at Al-Azhar University and many of them have been taking leadership roles in their countries as future religious leaders in Africa.

Challenges

UNICEF Egypt identified several challenges that inhibit its Faith-based engagement on child well-being. While UNICEF Egypt has facilitated major successful partnerships across the country, there remain significant issues around coordination. Coordination among UN agencies and international organizations is somewhat limited, as are the opportunities for coordination mechanisms that could convene FBOs to develop a common strategic approach around the full range of child issues around which UNICEF engages. Instead, most initiatives are led by individuals on a fragmented basis through a project-based approach. The country is still lacking a coherent policy approach to support the implementation of C4D initiatives at both the national and local level.

Additionally, all partners along the way require capacity building in order to continue the program, which takes a long time to reach all necessary partners with trainings.

Despite the good efforts begun on Capacity Development, most key decision-makers in governmental institutions demonstrate a limited understanding of C4D. While they understand the need for communication, they tend to see this in terms of communication for public relations and disseminating information, rather than understanding strategies for behaviour change.

At community level the breadth of developmental and social issues that demand attention from religious leaders and key institutions requires a strategy for how to engage communities around specific content-based issues over time. An additional complexity is the need to extend the scope of focus from children 0-6 to address the full lifecycle.

Assessing the impact on knowledge, attitudes and behaviours remains a challenge. The current program has 6-month follow up evaluations planned in order to see a three-year cumulative impact on violence against children. Formative planning, implementation and evaluation of the program was a collaboration with FBO leaders, and FBO teams collected the relevant data and were also involved in data entry and data analysis, with technical support from UNICEF. However, throughout the partnership, the limited financial and human resources available contributed to inadequate documentation, evaluation and IT implementation overall.

CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

- The partnership between Al-Azhar University and UNICEF Egypt initially started through advocacy in the 1980s. With an enabling government environment, the involvement of the Ministry has shown success in joint advocacy and policy statements in the last few years.
- This advocacy led to trainings developed by Al-Azhar University with UNICEF Egypt and is now integrated as faith leader capacity building in existing religious structures of Egypt through the Ministry of Religions for current Imams and Al-Azhar University for current students. This program has also been adapted and expanded to the Coptic Orthodox Church and government ministries.
- The program's use of edutainment with emphasis on behaviour change communication to address lower literate audiences is a promising approach with great reach.
- The program has only in recent years adopted substantial monitoring and evaluation. With a baseline survey on parenting and caregiving behaviours planned and more robust evaluation, the program hopes to show the impact of the program and changes in behaviour in the following years.

Lessons learned

- Engagement with a religious, academic institution has been particularly fruitful for UNICEF and remains a partnership with an equitable exchange of ideas, underlining that UNICEF can have as much to learn from a faith and academic partner as they have to learn from UNICEF. This is a model of capacity sharing, rather than capacity building or even capacity extraction.
- This long-term partnership also models good practice of committed engagement and development over time.
- In spite of this long-term partnership, and as seen across many of the case studies, monitoring and evaluation is a key issue for UNICEF and its faith partners. M&E with faith partners remains a weakness for many COs.

Strategies for the future include

- Continued monitoring and evaluation are needed, as has already been noted. In addition to monitoring the influence of FBO engagement through community dialogues and other community level strategies, there is need to assess the effectiveness of the edutainment initiative in shifting attitudes and social norms. It will be important to document change as well as lessons learned so that other country offices can learn from this exercise. The use of edutainment for faith and SBCC is noteworthy and can be used as an example for others.
- The program so far has attained high-level buy-in from Ministries, academic institutions, and organizations in the national capital. With an enabling government environment, the involvement of the Ministry has shown success in joint advocacy and statements in the last few years. While this is highly significant, the involvement of local communities should now be a focus, particularly in expanding community-level engagement from the existing three governorates, and working with communities on dialogue around child well-being issues to allow for in-depth scriptural, technical, and heart level discussions about issues of child wellbeing as it relates to their contexts and embedded in the on-going contact between faith actors and communities.

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