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THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY IN CAIRO

GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

The Effects of Culturally Relevant Early Childhood Development

(ECD) on Gender Relations and Women Empowerment

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate School of Education in partial fulfillment of the

Requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Comparative and International Education

By

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Acknowledgments

My work on this thesis was always interrupted by events of our Egyptian Revolution. I wrote many of these lines listening to revolutionary chants from my bedroom's window, fighting the urge to join demonstrations. I dedicate this work to the martyrs of the January 25th revolution. I dedicate this to Mina Danial and Khaled Said without whom our freedom would not have been achieved. I also dedicate this research to brave Egyptian women, who fought side by side Egyptian men to achieve dignity and freedom and are still fighting for gender equality and their full rights.

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Abstract

Early Childhood Development has a significant impact on populations and societies. It contributes to the social transformation of communities, affecting both children and adults. Grassroots movements enabling community members' participation in such programs are replicable successful models for societal change. Early childhood development's multiple components of health, nutrition and hygiene affect child rearing practices of parents and various community members who are usually reached through the program's parental courses, training and community meetings. Early childhood development culturally appropriate, comprehensive programs have an impact on women that is hardly recognized. It contributes to participating women's knowledge, awareness and empowerment. This study is concerned with the effect of culturally appropriate early childhood development on women empowerment and gender relations. The study adopts a qualitative research approach where data were collected through focus group discussions, interviews, observations and case studies. Findings of the study indicate a significant impact of early childhood education on women empowerment and gender relations. Furthermore, findings show that the success of the program heavily relied on its cultural contextualization, engagement and collaboration of community members.

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Chapter 1
Introduction

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECD) is the starting point for lifelong learning, gender identification, learning for change and establishing community networks and arenas. Children are potential agents for change affecting their parents' thinking and practices to be more sustainable through inter-generational learning (Daries, Engdahl, Otieno, Pramling-Samuelson, Siraj-Blatchford, & Vallabh, 2009). For John Dewey, in the beginning of the 20th century, the main purpose of education was to have an impact on the society as a whole by raising democratic citizens through teaching democratic practices (Dewey, 1916)**.**

Paulo Freire believed in a liberation pedagogy that has a purpose of educating for freedom and equality (Purpose-of-Education, 2012). Freire states that education is not neutral; it reinforces the status quo or challenges it. When education challenges accepted norms, values and practices, it produces learners who are active participants in the process of societal transformation and change. In order for citizens to have a sense of unity, share common purposes and actively participate in their community, democratic practices promoting social justice must be at the heart of education (Barber, 1984), (Zaalouk, 2006).

There is a global need for minimizing social inequalities through education. Preparing students of different cultural backgrounds to live in a world where some groups have larger social benefits than others based on their gender or class is challenging for educators (Boutte, 2008). "The Global Agenda for Children: Learning" adds the notion of "learning to transform oneself and one's society" to the four pillars of learning mentioned in Delors et al. report, of the international commission on education for the twenty first century; learning to know,

learning to do, learning to work together and learning to be. The fifth pillar aims at ensuring equity and participation through a rights movement in education (Zaalouk, 2006)

For ECD programs to be successful, they should be designed and implemented within the cultural context in a way that promotes community involvement. A need for training and capacity building for practitioners and other community members including parents is essential for the sustainability of ECD programs (Daries, et al., 2009). Involving community members in ECD programs is specifically important as adults' behaviours immensely affect how children learn and act. Regardless of educators' efforts to teach certain values, adults' observed actions by children have the most powerful effect on their learning (Boutte, 2008). Culturally responsive practices include: promoting the cultural heritage of students and developing connections between home and school experiences (Gay, 2000). Children coming from varied home cultures and backgrounds view things differently and have different learning experiences. These diverse home backgrounds affect children's learning but schools play a crucial role socializing children (Durkheim, 1956). Schools and teachers transmit culture, values and beliefs. This shows that teachers should be aware of their own culture and take the time to reflect on their identity, values and beliefs (Strouse, 2001). Equity in all its manifestations, including gender equality, is an important component of identity, values and beliefs in any given society.

Statement of the problem

The notion of gender parity is to ensure that equal numbers of girls and boys are in schools. This however, does not ensure that gender equality is taking place. Gender equality is concerned with a number of issues mostly related to preconceived societal and cultural roles like; accepting women to study specific disciplines such as social sciences and humanities and discouraging their choice of study of other disciplines that are culturally

perceived as male appropriate, women in some countries needing higher qualification regardless of their educational overachievement in comparison to their male counterparts, to be able to compete for jobs of equal pay and better positions. Sexual violence and harassment existing in schools or in the streets leading to schools, in some countries, teaching materials and teachers' awareness encouraging gender typing, are all forms of gender inequality (UNESCO, 2007).

Different forms of gender inequality are taking place in Egypt. Egypt is ranked 65 out of 86 in the 2012 Social Institutions and Gender Index, after being ranked 82 out of 102 in the 2009 Social Institutions and Gender Index (Social Institutions and Gender Index, 2012). According to data from the 2008 Demographic and Household Survey, 13.5% of girls between 15 and 19 years of age were married, divorced or widowed. Although the government exerted big efforts to eradicate female genital mutilation (FGM), the Demographic and Household Survey shows that 95.8% of women aged 15-49 in Egypt have undergone the procedure. In rural areas, women's day-to-day freedom of movement can be restricted, and widespread sexual harassment in urban areas also inhibits freedom of movement (Tadros 2010, p.99-100).

The Egyptian media mostly portrays women in gender-stereotyped roles (Tadros, 2010, p.112, 114). Although gender discrimination in employment is banned in Egypt; however women are prohibited from working in certain occupations that could damage their health or morals (Tadros 2010, p.104) which limits their economic opportunities. Women face discrimination in the labor market in both public and private sectors, and consistently earn less than men in Egypt; the pay gap is wider in the private sector than in the public sector (Freedom House, 2010; UNECA, 2009, p.134, 145). In rural areas, many women working seasonally in agriculture appear to receive no remuneration for their labor, as they are considered to be assisting their husband or other family members (UNECA, 2009, p.133).

In regards to the cultural aspect of ECD, most developing countries still use ECD programs that are highly influenced by practices during the 19th century in Europe (UNESCO, 2007). Multilateral organizations and international NGOs sometimes transmit these models that portray the parental practices of the western middle class families in Europe regardless of their class or cultural relevance. Benchmarks and standards for ECD programs are also borrowed in many cases which could jeopardize the relevance, hence success of such models (UNESCO, 2007). Models of early child rearing also include their own cultural cues of gender identities and relationships.

Purpose of the study

This study aims to investigate the effect of ECD on gender inequalities in Minya and Assiut. Save the Children's Early Childhood Development (ECD) program will be studied in relation to the programs' outcomes and process. The study is mainly concerned with the impact of the program on gender relations and women empowerment. The extent of which the program is culturally contextualized and incorporates community member's collaboration will be observed throughout the study. For the study, I propose the following research question:

What is the impact of Save the Children's ECD program on gender relations and women empowerment, if the program is culturally contextualized and incorporates community member's collaboration.

Through ECD programs, with community participation and involvement at the grassroots, social transformations that can reduce gender inequalities can take place. Societies are reformed when society members are enabled to identify their needs, and available resources are mobilized to meet those needs through collaborative efforts. The availability of ECD

programs can spread awareness to society's needs, mobilize resources (community members and their community resources) to collaborate together to achieve this need (Zaalouk, 2006).

Societal transformations will take place only when existing relationships are challenged and society members share new understandings of social issues. If ECD is proved to have a positive effect on societies, ECD can play a major role in the change of pre-conceived images concerning power and gender relationships across communities. It may result in the questioning of old understandings in the light of new discoveries and awareness that leads first to changes in individuals and policy makers, and ultimately societal and cultural change (Zaalouk, 2006).

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Benefits of ECD

Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD), also known as Early Childhood Development (ECD), focuses on young children's developmental aspects and encompasses early childhood education (ECE) and early childhood care and education (ECD) (The Consultative Group of Early Childhood Care and Education, 2012). ECD is a broad term that is concerned with children's survival, growth, development and learning. Survival and growth encompasses health, nutrition and hygiene while development entails cognitive, social, emotional and physical development. ECD involves children from birth to entry into primary school in formal, informal or non-formal settings (UNESCO 2007). The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, 1989) recognized ECD as a basic child's right. A child's right is not respected if it lacks access to ECD that offers appropriate services and special protection.

In addition to ECD being a right in itself, early childhood is a critical time for brain development that builds the foundation for later learning. Studies proved that neuro-connections in the brain begins at birth and peek by the age of three. This is the period where appropriate sensory and language stimulation should take place to ensure proper development (Center for Early Education and Development, 2002; Mustard, 2002, 2005). Milestones of development take place from early infancy to primary years, the transformation and progress achieved through out the early years affect children's later capacities, communication skills, creativity, and skills acquisition. Emotional stability starts from early childhood. For children to grow up to be securely attached individuals, caring, responsive relationships with caregivers must be established at a young age.

The EFA goal one is primarily concerned with expanding and improving ECD for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children (UNESCO 2007, p. 17). ECD promotes equity through quality programs targeting disadvantaged populations. This will have a positive effect on the society through offering equitable chances, promoting social justice and achieving rights. It is recommended by OECD countries that ECD become the best way to tackle social inequalities and give socially endangered children equal opportunities in the society. The Nordic model of ECD is based on the notion of "the good childhood", which means that preschoolers have to practice democracy and children have to have a voice in their own everyday life (committee of the Rights of the Child 1989). The curricula in Nordic countries include learning objectives having to do directly with social equality (Jensen, 2009).

ECD increases access and retention in formal schooling. Studies show that children who attended ECD programs are more likely to attend primary schooling and remain in formal education. In Nepal, 95% of children who attended ECD programs transitioned to primary education in contrast to 75% who hadn't attended ECD programs. On the other hand, mothers who take part in ECD programs are more likely to keep their children in schools. In Turkey, mothers who participated in ECD programs that offered parental training as part of the program in poor areas ensured their children remained in schools seven years after the programs. In this sense, ECD facilitates the realization of EFA goal two that has to do with improving primary education. Nevertheless, ECD can improve adult learning and skills through parental training and support programs offered as part of the program. EFA goal five has to do with promoting gender parity; ECD reduces gender inequalities through allowing older sisters to attend schools rather than stay home to care for young children. It allows mothers to go to work and participate in the labor work force. It creates an opportunity to

reduce gender discrimination and eradicate stereotypes that has to do with traditional gender roles through well designed programs that foster gender equality at an early age.

Since ECD is not only concerned with education and development but also with care, health, hygiene and nutrition, ECD can reduce poverty, hunger, child mortality and help fight diseases like HIV/AIDS and Malaria. ECD yields a high return on investment from the economic perspective. Considering its positive effect on health, nutrition and education outcomes, investing in ECD can be considered as an investment in human capital. Studies by Nobel winning economist show that investment in ECD results in returns that stay longer than returns from investments in any other educational intervention (Heckman & Carneiro, 2003)

ECD programs benefit the society as a whole, in her article "How Early Childhood interventions reduce inequalities", Ruthanne Deutsch categorized benefits of Early Childhood Interventions (ECI) into two broad categories: short term/immediate benefits and long term benefits. The immediate benefits are divided into direct benefits; health, nutrition and developmental progress of participating children as measured by their nutritional, health, cognitive and emotional indicators and indirect benefits for non program participants; increase in earnings of parents (usually mothers) of children following the program as well as mothers' rates of labor force participation and increasing schooling of older siblings in the families. On the other hand, the long term benefits are: improved school performance, better earnings in later years and lower probability of involvement in criminal acts.

Mayers presents a broader perspective and listed benefits of ECD programs by various beneficiary groups. Children are a beneficiary group in which ECD programs help them develop psychosocially through improved cognitive, social, emotional development and language skills. They improve their hygiene, health and nutrition as well as performance in primary school, through a higher chance of timely enrollment for children and their siblings

and a lower chance of grade level retention. Adults within the community are the second beneficiary group in which, program staff, parents and older children benefit from ECD programs through, a change in their general knowledge and attitudes, acquired leadership practices, improved self esteem, and a sense of empowerment. Another important benefit stated by Mayer, is the change in relationships within the family; between husband/wife, parents-/older children and among children. Caregivers can improve their employment since the burden of taking care of the children has been lifted off their shoulders. Moreover new employment opportunities are created by the ECD program. The third beneficiary group is the community at large. Changes in their physical environment by developing sanitation, spaces for play; new multipurpose facilities and increased social capital, greater social participation and improved solidarity as well as community projects benefiting all. The forth beneficiary group is institutions; ECD has an impact on institutions through improved efficiency by improving health attention through changed user practices as well as reduced repetition and dropout rates in schools, improved effectiveness through greater coverage, improved capacity though changes in ability/confidence or organization, improved practice though better methods and curriculum content. Finally an effect on the society as a whole by having a healthier population which will reduce days lost to sickness, having a more literate society which will increase the tax base, and having an educated population with lower rates of crime and violence (Deutsch, 1998, p. 2,3)

Different approaches to ECD

ECD programs can take different forms in different settings and arrangements; parenting programs, community based, centre based or formal pre-school education.
ECD programs generally cater to children from 0 to 8 years of age which can be divided into two age groups; children under 3 and children from 3 to primary age that is approximately age 6and sometimes till 8 years of age. Following the release of the 2007 EFA, Global

Monitoring Report, the Consultative Group in Early Childhood Education participants, developed four cornerstones for Early Childhood Education, in a special session in the 2006 Annual Consultation. The four cornerstones provide the developmental spectrum of early childhood from prenatal to early primary age. The cornerstones are flexible and may be adapted in relation to countries' needs. Cornerstone one is concerned with children from 0-3 years of age and focuses on producing evidence-based reviews on the effect of ECD on the development of children holistically. Cornerstone 2: targets children from 3-6 years of age with a focus on the quality of early learning programs. Cornerstone 3, children of ages 6-8 is concerned with school transitions and quality in early primary years and Cornerstone four focuses on the development of policy.

The prenatal -3 years of age period has a focus on survival, immediate and future growth and development. Since this is the time of rapid brain development and neural connections, nurturing from at least one consistent care giver should be provided. Language stimulation, exploration opportunities, proper feeding and a clean safe environment are important for children of this age. Children brought up in difficult situations of poverty, war and diseases or are subject to abusive treatments, require special attention. The emphasis should be on quality adult-child interaction at this critical period. The following period 3-6 years, often referred to as the pre-schools phase, involves more learning through play, encouragement of exploration and development in safe stimulating environments. This can take place in the home, community based services, or in formal preschool settings. This period aims at the development of confident learners through enabling teaching pedagogies. Forming partnerships with parents or caregivers is essential. The last period is that of children from 6-8 in which the majority of children would transition to school. This period is concerned with school readiness and easy transition. It encourages building relationships with schools to cater to children's developmental needs and their sustainability. Parental readiness is a

concern of this phase (The Consultative Group of Early Childhood Care and Development, 2012).

Programs in ECD vary between ones that provide parental support through programs offering; pre/post natal care and education, parenting information, developmentally appropriate child care for working parents, supporting six month of breast feeding, ensuring birth registration and promoting opportunities for women's development. Some ECD programs are community based services concerned with the environment and focus on food, healthcare, clean water and basic sanitation. Others are community based and focus on health service provisions, disease prevention and health promotion with a focus on pre/post natal care, growth and immunizations. In addition to community based programs, some ECD are centre based. Centre-based programs are structured aiming at providing safe, nurturing, learning environments. The programs take place either in homes, schools, communities or even emergency shelters. Regardless of the place, these ECD programs focus on bringing a group of children together and providing a sound learning environment created by a nurturing staff of care givers. The Early Years Primary Education initiatives focus on working with governmental and non-governmental primary schools to promote the implementation of sound child development practices in schools.

Very few countries have developed national policies to govern ECD. Governments play no significant role in ECD of children ages (0-3); in 53% of the world's countries there is, at least, one formal ECD program before pre-primary education (0-1 years). For ages 3-6 years, governments are more involved; in 60% of 172 countries, national ministries are primarily responsible for ECD programs of this age while, in 30% of the countries responsibility is shared with another official body and the remaining 10% of countries, non governmental organizations, sub-national government entities or sociopolitical bodies are responsible. Countries with at least one ministry supervising and coordinating ECD are 85 % of 154. In

the rest of the countries, ECD is governed by more than one ministry mostly dealing with women, gender, family, children and youth affairs, social affairs or social welfare and health. Ministries of labor, development, planning or local government are responsible for ECD in a few countries.

A holistic approach to ECD is recommended by UNESCO, UNICEF and The Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA). Countries are encouraged to develop ECD policies that address development and care equally. It was revealed by a review of major policy documents (UNESCO-IIEP, 2006) that most of countries give attention to one aspect and neglect the other.

ECD policies shouldn't be developed in isolation, engagement with other sectors such as the social and health sector, through a broad national vision statement based on the rights of children is strongly encouraged. Having legislation covering aspects of ECD is also important but legislation and policies do not necessarily ensure sound implementation. However, involvement of more than one sector in ECD can be problematic. A conflict of approaches and priorities may appear. Recognizing that, a small number of countries have shifted to the one ministry approach to avoid conflicts, the Nordic model 'educare' give the ministry of social affairs full responsibility of ECD in countries like Denmark. In Finland, ECD is s shared responsibility between the ministry of social affairs and the ministry of health. Assigning the ministry of education the responsibility highlights the importance of ECD; however, it may result in ECD becoming more formal. Coordination between various stakeholders in the form of councils, committees or commissions is important.

Taking the Latin America's successful model in Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba and Mexico, a number of elements made ECD successful; a recognition of children's rights, a shared vision of comprehensive ECD was developed, a political will that existed and sustained, a conscious, joint national decision making and full civil, community, and family

participation and involvement was established (UNESCO, 2006, p. 175). In Jordan, ECD is carefully divided between the ministry of social development that is responsible for parenting programs and centre-based child care services with the partnership of the ministry of health and the ministry of education supervising all pre-schools and providing kindergartens. A national strategy that adopts a holistic approach to development of children was developed through collaborative work of various stakeholders. Specific goals of increasing enrollment from 28% to 35% in 2008, then 50% in 2012 were named. The Jordanian initiative adopts a sound parenting program that aims at reaching 70,000 families in 200 centers.

A decentralized approach to ECD can increase inequalities between wealthier urban and poorer rural areas or across different socioeconomic classes. This was evidenced in China, Romania, Armenia and the Russian Federation of Ukraine. Non public sector, NGOs, community based organizations and religious group share ECD responsibility in countries in the Arab states, Sub-Saharan Africa, the Caribbean and East Asia. To ensure equity in ECD between socioeconomic classes, government regulations must exist.

Ensuring quality of ECD requires assessment and regulation. A number of developing countries have created quality standards for ECD such as five countries in Latin American and seven in the Caribbean. These standards have to do with: structural quality; size, ratio, materials, staff and training and process quality; and relations with family, interactions with children, warm environment and cultural diversity. These standards are often developed through collaboration with NGOs and multilateral foundations. A new trend that focuses on children's outcomes rather than the programs' overall quality was encouraged by a number of international organizations. The learning outcomes approach may neglect cultural diversity if borrowed standards were used with no adaptation. It may also reduce the quality of ECD if it was misused to harm children by labeling them as failures or pushing them hard to achieve the desired outcomes. A number of international assessments developed by different

international organizations, for measuring ECD quality exist. Different ECD quality

assessment instruments are adopted and used by different countries.

ECD in Egypt

Child Law No 12, 1996 and its bylaws constitute the national framework for all bodies in

charge of early childhood in Egypt. The official bodies in charge of ECD supervision and

coordination are the Ministry of Education (MOE), Ministry of Insurance and Social Affairs

(MISA), Ministry of Health (MOH), National Council for Childhood and Motherhood

(NCCM) and the Ministry of International Cooperation (MIC). A committee at the

Governorate level (under the umbrella of NCCM) monitors provision of ECD and submits

evaluation reports to the Governorate (UNESCO 2006).

ECD in Egypt is divided into KG programs 4-5 years of age that are managed by MOE

and MISA for the public sector and a number of groups like NGOs and religious groups for

the private sector. Children under age of four attend nurseries managed by MISA. The total

number of nurseries supervised by MISA was 10,434 (June 2004) catering for children of

ages 2-4 years of age. However, a large number of 4-5 year olds are still in nurseries and not

in KG classes. The NGO sector operates 55%, of the nurseries, the private sector 42% and the

remaining 3% is run by local government units, youth centers, companies and universities.

Staff involved in ECD programs are MOE specialized staff with at, least, a bachelor degree

from faculties of education or faculties of KGs graduates and Non- Governmental

Organizations (NGO) staff of high school or university graduates. Around, 15,000 teachers

teach KG students in 11,400 classes. Almost 8000 of them teach in public KG schools and

7000 teach in private schools. Faculties of Education are working on the development of pre-

service training for non-specialized KG teachers and university faculties are producing in-

service packages. Unfortunately these positive training initiatives are not coordinated with

MISA training services (World Bank, 2002)

Egypt is committed to a number of initiatives and declarations like EFA and Millennium

Development Goals (MDG) as well as the Convention on the Right of the Child (CRC), that

promote the development of ECD. In 1999 the NCCM created a framework for the

development of the Egyptian child: *Towards a Strategic Outlook for the Development of*

Childhood and Motherhood. The framework followed an integrated approach that is

concerned with education, health, social and cultural welfare of children. It aimed at

developing programs and policies in a more comprehensive manner. In 2001, a national goal

to improve children's health and education by increasing enrollment rates for KG programs

was declared. The government announced specific aims to be achieved; providing a place for

every child in a preschool, adding preschool to the compulsory education system for the age

group 4-5 and increasing the percentage of children in preschool from 13 to 60 percent

(World Bank, 2002)

A number of initiatives were taken by the government to expand and improve ECD in

Egypt such as: The Early Childhood Education (ECE) component of the Education Reform

Program (ERP) funded by USAID covering seven governorates; The Nursery Improvement

Program, funded by MISA to upgrade existing facilities; The ECD project, supporting 32

NGOs in ten governorates to provide healthy environment for children through the

dissemination of best practices in ECD; An exchange program between GOE and JICA in

which Egypt receives Japanese volunteers specialized in ECD to work in Egyptian Nurseries

in 8 governorates to enhance capacities, an ECD Center, established by GOE, AGFUND and

UNESCO that provides model KG classrooms and training for teachers and supervisors; A

Sustainable Development Project, funded by GOE and Italian Government (dept swap

program) and Community Day care Centers established in Upper Egypt Governorates jointly

between MISA and UNICEF as well as a number of international NGOs and other donors

such as Save the Children and the Italian Cooperation. In addition to that the following

initiatives were taken by the government targeting vulnerable disadvantaged children. The national program Early Childhood Education Enhancement Program–ECEEP funded by the Government of Egypt, WB, CIDA and WFP is targeting the most disadvantaged children in 152 administrative districts from eighteen governorates; A joint project between MISA and CARITAS aiming at the inclusion of children with special needs in nurseries in addition to a number of feeding programs; The Shelter nurseries and Social Assurance Program (exemption of fees) and the Rural Child project, target the poorest and the most disadvantaged children in twenty one governorates (UNESCO 2006).

A number of parenting programs targeting adults' awareness of ECD issues were launched to promote ECD development in Egypt: UNICEF has been implementing a parenting education program since the nineties in six districts in Upper Egypt. The National Institute for Nutrition conducts awareness programs targeting nurseries and parents. Literacy programs for women include topics on maternal and childcare. MISA established specialized centers to provide guidance and consultations to parents on family affairs including child care. MISA also runs seminars on child care for parents through a number of its projects, e.g. Rural Child project. The National Campaign on dental care included messages for children and parents (UNESCO 2006).

MOE provides teachers with a collection of twenty three books that cover the following topics: personality development; child behavior development; music education; and subject guides for the promotion of skills in language, art, math, story telling, and writing, in addition to workbooks for KG children, five each for KG1 and KG2. The MOE, in collaboration with UNESCO, is currently developing a new KG curriculum for students aged 4-5 years. The MISA developed curricula for children below four years of age based on Frobel (learning through playing, Portage Kit and Montessori) (UNESCO 2006).

Gross enrollment rates for KG have increased to reach 13 % in the 2000/01 academic year (12% for girls and 13% for boys). The enrollment rates did not only increase in major urban governorates: Cairo, Giza and Alexandria, but also in other governorates. Enrollment rates of the three major governorates represented only 49% of the total KGs enrollment rate in 2001 after being 66% in 1999 (World Bank, 2002)

Despite government efforts to increase enrollment rates in KGs, many of the poor children are left behind and still don't have access to ECD. Studies indicate a direct relation between gross domestic product (GDP) per capita and gross enrollment in KG in Egypt. Fees for KGs are too high for the poor compared to primary and preparatory education costs. The lack of healthcare results in disadvantaged children admitted late to schools due to health problems having to do with skipping immunization or malnutrition. Poor children usually have illiterate caregivers which affect their learning by lacking adequate educational support at home as well as awareness of the value of education (World Bank, 2002). Studies in Egypt showed that investment in KGs yields a high return; a 2.3 or higher benefit to cost ratio can be expected and even higher in poor governorates and deprived areas. Egypt is aiming at improving the quality of KGs through the establishment of an official KG curriculum and materials, offering pre-service and in-service training, integrating health, nutrition services to improve learning and involving stakeholders in quality improvement.

Cultural Identity

Strouse defined culture to be "ideas, values, beliefs and assumptions of a particular group or society". One's own culture is most difficult to understand as it is embedded in everything we do and is taken for granted (Strouse, 2001). Cultural identity can be defined as "self-perception of one's position in different dimensions of life, such as race, social class, gender, religion, age, sexual orientation and physical and mental ability" (Tatum, 1997, p.22). Good

citizens with a positive self esteem are those with a positive sense of identity, while a negative sense of identity affects both the individual and the society (Hsuen, 2005, p.2). Identity entails many aspects like religion, nationality, ethnic group, language, family, work, education and an organization of a certain social milieu. Some of these aspects are more important than the others and, therefore, are placed high up in the whole identity hierarchy (Vandenbroeck, 2000). Educators, family and community members, must be aware of their roles as agents of change.

Ladson-Billings' (1994) research entails that when students are taught through practices that encourage both academic and cultural excellence, students behave like members of an extended family, assisting, supporting, and encouraging each other. This satisfies students' need for a sense of belonging, honours their human dignity, and promotes their individual self-concepts (Gay, 2000).

Knowledge is socially constructed and is situated in culture. Learning occurs as a result of a person's interaction with society within a particular cultural context. Vygotsky's social learning theory highlights the importance of understanding the child's social context. In order to effectively scaffold students to learn new things, education programs must appreciate and value students' knowledge and views of the world and consider these experiences as resources for learning, rather than problems that have to be solved or changed (Dodge, Colker, & Heroman 2002; Kroeger & Bauer, 2004).

Culturally relevant ECD practices

Most of the best known beliefs of ECCD are culturally constructed (Woodhead, 1996: 6, 8). International research on child development may not be true for all children as some of it is sometimes affected by a specific culture. Despite international interventions in developing countries, many children are still lagging behind and are not reaching their full potential. It is

not always an issue of access but rather of quality. "Quality" has different definitions from different perspectives. Quality is generally associated with the modern world and western child development theories. The discipline of "westernized psychology", offers a western construction on childhood that is exported to the majority world (underdeveloped/developing countries) through developmental agencies (Dahlberg, Peter, & Alan, 1999). In other words, third world's developmental efforts of the minority world need adjustments to be relevant and of use in the majority world (Zaalouk, 2006).

Andrea Rugh highlights the importance of culture in development in her book, International Development in Practice, Education Assistance in Egypt, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. Rugh raises some concerns about development in the majority world: She questions the "vocabulary of development" by asking questions like: "What makes a country developing?" and "What is the criterion for becoming developed?" She wonders whether the minority world's model of development is the only accepted one. She also questions the engagement of developed countries (minority world) in development projects in the majority world and if development/reform takes place for political reasons, if the developed wants to promote personal interests or if it is of pure altruistic concerns. In colonization, the terms of the colonizer; practices, values and beliefs are adopted by the colonized and absorbed into their lifestyle resulting in a fusion/confusion of identities. The notion of dependency remains after colonization ends in which the previously colonized remains dependent on their former colonizer (Dahlberg, Peter, & Alan, 1999).

Rugh talks about how in development, it is important to understand the culture of the other, through mixing with people at the grassroots level and considering them reliable informants rather than seeking information from elites who are more likely to share the developer's ideas. A classic example is when elites sign the documents for human rights yet members of local communities may have different principles and beliefs. She criticizes the

notion that western models of education are regarded as the best and that any other model will be viewed as backward, ineffective and not sufficient to children's global needs. The needed support and development stages are often determined and designed by the developed.

Unlike modernists who value universals and best practices that are mostly influenced by the minority world (the west) and consider them criteria for quality, postmodern perspectives recognize and value diversity. Postmodern perspectives are aware that western culture is no longer the unquestionable or the most dominant in the world. It adopts the possibility of many different subjective practices for ECD programs that may not be universal. In that sense, universal practices can be only used to replace negative practices of the local culture. The focus should be on the positive elements in each culture that can be built upon rather than what the community lacks (Dahlberg, Peter, & Alan, 1999. p.170).

ECD programs must adopt a cultural context of the community in order to succeed. Instructions and curriculum design should depend on children's needs and experiences which would guide teaching about social justice and equality. An intercultural understanding is necessary for the establishment of culturally aware ECD programs. Local collaboration in which community contributions are encouraged and cultural heritage is promoted, is essential to the success and sustainability of ECD programs (Daries et al., 2009). In developing countries, quality education depends upon cultural relevance, family involvement, the sense of ownership, appropriate guidance, and maximum use of local resources (Paralta 2008). Differences in the social construction of childhood depend on educators' personal childhood experiences. When aiming at development, the developers have to be aware of their position as strangers, as not to compare what is familiar with what is unknown (Mcgillivary, 2009).

Collectivist societies differ from individualistic societies which also has an effect on a country's general approach to children's rights. In Tanzania, The Global Fund for Children initiated an ECD program in a Nomadic cattle and sheep herders' Maasai community who

worried about losing their traditional lifestyle and greatly opposed modernity. Consequently, the Monduli Pastoralist Development Initiative (MPDI) worked on maintaining traditional customs while ensuring children were receiving modern education. The program worked on building children's confidence through teaching within their culture (GFC 2008). MPID established thirty six culturally appropriate community based ECD centers serving over 2000 children in Tanzania. The setting resembles that of a traditional Maasai home, and the program integrates traditional songs, dances and stories to preserve their culture. Teachers use Maasai beads for counting and folk legends, songs and verses for teaching language. Integrating culture in teaching establishes a sense of trust with parents and eases their worries. Teachers are chosen and resources are created by the community. The elderly are regarded as sources of knowledge and wisdom and their input is appreciated and encouraged (Modica, Ajmera, & Dunning, 2010)

A Canadian program for training early childhood practitioners was initiated by First Nations Tribal Council. It involved work between a group of communities, university faculty and staff from the majority population. All stakeholders agreed on six major principles guiding the development process: supporting community initiative in a community based setting; maintaining multi cultural respect; identifying community strength as a basis for the initiative; awareness of the child as part of the family and community; providing education for students with credit for future study or practice; and creating awareness. Despite the direct focus on early childhood, this training also targeted youth, family and community. The program was conducted based on an understanding of the words of elders (Dahlberg, Peter, & Alan, 1999).

Another successful community based ECD foundation is The Mother Child Education Foundation (ACEV) in Istanbul, Turkey Founded in 1993, the foundation produces research, develops and implements free of charge programs and offers advocacy experiences in early

childhood, parent education and women empowerment. They have trained 7,881 trainers and have served 670,110 people. It has reached 7,500,000 viewers through television programs and an estimated 40,000,000 people through publications, research, and mass-media public awareness advocacy activities. ACEV support existing center-based ECE models within communities by offering programs and campaigns which aim to promote family involvement.

Defining Empowerment

In development, gender empowerment is considered an objective in itself and the means to achieve other development objectives such as economic growth, poverty reduction and reaching better governance. According to the World Bank's published report "Endangering Development", gender inequalities delay growth and retard development. Empowerment has several definitions that include the following aspects: options, choice, control and power. It encompasses the notion of making decisions and having control over resources and personal well being (Malhotra, Schuler & Boender, 2002). Women empowerment is defined by G. Sen (1993) as "altering relations of power…which constrain women's options and autonomy and adversely affect health and well-being". Zoe Oxaal (1997) defines it to be "the process in which women gain awareness, individually and collectively, of the manner in which power relations impact their lives, and win confidence in themselves and the strength to challenge gender inequalities." It encompasses giving the tools for challenging and changing power relations rather than giving power in itself (Hainard & Verschuur , 2003)

Empowerment focuses on women's ability to organize themselves in a way that increases their self-reliance, assert their right for choice making and control over resources, which will help to challenge and eliminate their subordination (Keller & Mbwewe 1991). Another concept that is frequently associated with empowerment is the concept of self efficacy which is often used in fields of human rights and feminist studies. Self efficacy is the change in one's perception of one's own capabilities that enables a person to actually change. This inner

transformation makes one believe that he/she is entitled to choice and control over their life (Malhotra, Schuler & Boender, 2002).

Gender in equalities

In social settings where gender inequality is considered natural, women tend to feel of lower value than their subordinates. Their choice in this case may result in their further inequality. Awareness of one's conditions of subordination and inequality, as well as the need for making choices that may violate cultural or and social norms, is a first step in achieving empowerment (Freire, 1994).

Women create different strategies to secure themselves from different forms of male domination. Classic patriarchy is one typology of male domination that is most common in parts of North Africa, the Middle East, and South and East Asia (Kandiyoti 1988). Under classic patriarchy, girls are married at relatively young ages and moved to households usually headed by their fathers-in-law. The new young bride is usually subordinate to the household's men and senior women. The senior women's (mostly mothers-in-law) authority over daughters-in-law eventually replaces the hardships of their early marriage. "Inheriting the authority of senior women" is an expectation that usually encourages women to accept and internalize and maintain this form of classic patriarchy (Kandiyoti 1988, p. 279).

Structural gender inequalities and Egyptian patriarchal laws and institutions encourage a patriarchal kinship to be practiced in Assiut (Ammar 2006). Females receive less schooling, rarely work outside the home after marriage and are less represented in public positions of power, in comparison to their male counterparts (El-Zanaty and Way 2006; Hoodfar 1997; United Nations Development Programme [UNDP] and Institute for National Planning [INP] 2005).

Generally in Arab kin groups, gender, age and relation determine members' rights and obligations (Joseph 1993, 1996). Under Egyptian law, a husband's financial duty towards his

wife is conditioned with obedience of his wife. Obedience, or ta'a, includes a number of duties like living in a husband's chosen home, seeking permission to leave the house if not visiting family, submitting to sexual relations, raising children, and maintaining the house (Bernard-Maugiron and Dupret 2002).

The notion of obedience is encouraged by Egyptian national laws. A woman must obtain a male relative's permission to marry, travel, or open a business (Moghadam 2004). Husbands have the legal right to file "an obedience complaint" if their wives leave home without permission (Sonbol 1996).

Measuring Empowerment

Measuring empowerment is challenging due to a number of reasons: First, empowerment is multidimensional. Malhotra, Schuler & Boender presented the most commonly used dimensions of women empowerment in Table 1. These dimensions are extracted from the frameworks developed by various authors. The frameworks suggest that women empowerment can occur along a number of dimensions: economic, socio-cultural, familial/interpersonal, legal, political, and psychological. Within each of these broad dimensions women may be empowered within a range of sub-domains. Empowerment in one dimension does not necessarily mean empowerment in another; however, some dimensions of empowerment are interlinked and may overlap.

Empowerment indicators can be on the macro level (polity or community) or micro level (household or individual) (Gage 1995; Jejeebhoy and Sather 2001; Kritz et al. 2000; Malhotra et al. 1995). Although women empowerment requires collective action in broader arenas, individual women's behaviors can alter existing inequalities challenging local gender norms on the community level (Kabeer 2001).

Table 1

Commonly Used Dimensions of Empowerment

Dimension	Household	Community	Broader Arenas
Economic	Women's control over income; relative contribution to family support; access to and control of family resources	Women's access to employment; ownership of assets and land; access to credit; involvement and/or representation in local trade associations; access to markets	Women's representation in high paying jobs; women CEO's; representation of women's economic interests in macro-economic policies, state and federal budgets
Socio-Cultural	Women's freedom of movement; lack of discrimination against daughters; commitment to educating daughters	Women's visibility in and access to social spaces; access to modern transportation; participation in extra-familial groups and social networks; shift in patriarchal norms (such as son preference); symbolic representation of the female in myth and ritual	Women's literacy and access to a broad range of educational options; Positive media images of women, their roles and contributions
Familial/ Interpersonal	Participation in domestic decision-making; control over sexual relations; ability to make childbearing decisions, use contraception, access abortion; control over spouse selection and marriage timing; freedom from domestic violence	Shifts in marriage and kinship systems indicating greater value and autonomy for women (e.g. later marriages, self selection of spouses, reduction in the practice of dowry; acceptability of divorce); local campaigns against domestic violence	Regional/national trends in timing of marriage, options for divorce; political, legal, religious support for (or lack of active opposition to) such shifts; systems providing easy access to contraception, safe abortion, reproductive health services
Legal	Knowledge of legal rights; domestic support for exercising rights	Community mobilization for rights; campaigns for rights awareness; effective local enforcement of legal rights	Laws supporting women's rights, access to resources and options; Advocacy for rights and legislation; use of judicial system to redress rights violations

Political	Knowledge of political system and means of access to it; domestic support for political engagement; exercising the right to vote	Women's involvement or mobilization in the local political system/campaigns; support for specific candidates or legislation; representation in local bodies of government	Women's representation in regional and national bodies of government; strength as a voting bloc; representation of women's interests in effective lobbies and interest groups
Psychological	Self-esteem; self-efficacy; psychological well-being	Collective awareness of injustice, potential of mobilization	Women's sense of inclusion and entitlement; systemic acceptance of women's entitlement and inclusion

Reprinted from "Measuring Women's Empowerment as a Variable in International Development," by Malhorta, Schuler, S. R., Boender. (2002), p. 13

In addition to empowerment being multidimensional, a second reason why empowerment is difficult to measure is that the empowerment indicators differ from one context to another. An indicator of empowerment will change from one place to the other in relevance to cultural, historical or geographical context. In this sense, conceptual frameworks that are used to measure empowerment can only be used if they include relevant indicators of the community or the country setting (Schuler et al. 1995a & 1995b).

Third, empowerment is a process rather than a state that can only be measured by following it across at least two points in time. Capturing the process of empowerment through in-depth interviews and case studies that follow the life changes for specific women (and men) through narratives and oral histories, is a common qualitative approach in studies of empowerment. The process of empowerment is qualitative and subjective in nature (G. Sen, 1993) (Kabeer, 1997). Women's own interpretations and self assessment should be considered when measuring empowerment.

ECD's impact on gender

Approaches for ECD differ according to cultures, habits and traditions of different countries. Some traditions limit education for girls especially in rural areas (Dahlberg, 1999;

Nsamenang, 2006; Woodhead, 2006). ECD can increase social equity and promote gender equality by offering a safe start to girls who suffer from gender biases in nutrition, healthcare and education at their homes (Shehadeh, 2008). ECD is the starting point in identifying the essential role of women in education for sustainability. Girls education is a global priority as their engagement in education has sustainable benefits to the society as a whole represented in higher family income, lower fertility and infant mortality rates (Daries et al., 2009)

There are four broad benefits for educating girls: increasing income and productivity for individuals and nations; having smaller, healthier and better educated families; preventing diseases such as HIV/AIDS; and empowering women (Herz & Sperling, 2004). ECD programs have an immediate effect on female labor force participation that is rarely mentioned in ECD previous research. In his research Heckman (1974) highlighted how the availability of government low cost child care services reduces family expenses and affects women's employment decisions. Studies show that women's time and efforts is always divided between child care and labor force participation. Lowering the cost of child care will lower the time women have to spend with children, hence increase the female labor force participation at large as well as their chances of increased earnings. This was proven in a study on poor women in the favelas (slums), of Rio de Janeiro where female labor participation was observed in relation to the availability of low cost child care services. Results indicated a positive relationship. The study also indicated an expansion in mothers' economic opportunities due to the availability of child care facilities (Deutsch, 1998). Further research is still needed for this topic.

Parents grow to realize how their girls became active learners after they had gone to ECD programs (Arnold, 2004, p.11). They are more encouraged to send their daughters to primary education. Girls who participate in ECD programs are more likely to attend primary education in India and Guatemala. In Nepal, ECD for girls resulted in equal participation in

primary education to that of boys. The curriculum and pedagogy followed in ECD programs affects how gender equality is promoted or discouraged. Student teacher interactions, praise and gender specific messages sent by teachers, children's literature and play that promote gender typing, may result in an inequitable socialization of children (Shehadeh, 2008).

In their article; Creating Gender Egalitarian Societies: Agenda for Reform, Gornik and Meyers (2008), suggested a manual for supporting gender egalitarian care giving through the availability of quality early childhood services. Discussing female employment and gender equality, the authors describe female employment in a majority of OECD countries to be increasing but still lagging behind that of men. Mothers' employment is interrupted by maternity leaves, and child rearing needs which results in reducing their share of total parental earnings to 18% in Germany and 19% in the Netherlands, 34-38% in Nordic countries and 28% in the States. Fathers spend less time with their children than mothers even in egalitarian OECD countries like Sweden, where expenditures in ECD are encouraged and there is a national belief that early interventions constitute a way for fighting social inequalities. Although 95% of all children attend day-care, which has a positive result on female labor force participation (Tiuliundieva, 2006), fathers still spend less time with their children than mothers. Children's healthy development and gender equality can be achieved through quality ECD as it affects mothers' employment decisions. Quality ECD programs with standards for professional training and compensation will ensure that child care practitioners, mostly women, acquire higher status and better pay (Meyers& Gornick, 2008).

A study on the accommodation of children in Kyrgyzstan by the system of education and the problem of gender inequality indicated a clear cut in public expenditures on education in Kyrgyzstan that took place during the transition into a republic. The biggest decline was obvious in preschool education. In rural areas specifically, a decline in the number of girls attending preschools was significant. This affected the increase in gender inequality of

women in the society at large. As a result of the decline in children's accommodation, more women have to spend more time with their children at home and more female siblings have to play the role of a substitute mother and miss out on education opportunities. Women that don't participate in the household expenditures, have less influence in decision making at home. Women who do not work and earn money independently are not empowered to participate in the leadership of a household.

Female siblings missing out on basic education will grow up to be incompetent mothers which will have an influence on the well-being of their children. The solution is to have affordable child care facilities that would enable women and girls within a family to go to work and school. After 1996, a gender problem started for girls attending schools in Kyrgyzstan. Girls from rural areas were used to helping their parents run the household and taking care of their younger siblings; hence, they missed schooling (Tiuliundieva, 2006). Parents in developing countries believe that investing in female education will yield less benefit than investing in males. This belief is common in Middle Eastern societies.

Research in Brazil, Mexico and Guatemala indicate that an older sibling, particularly female, is often kept at home to act like a substitute mother for younger siblings. ECI will then have an effect on older siblings, particularly girls' continuing education. This is known as the 'brother's keeper phenomenon'. The availability of low cost child care services will relieve older siblings from their substitute mother role and allow them to have access to schooling (Deutsch, 1998). Through ECI, mobilization of local mothers by the community to participate in ECD programs will result in a proper adult to child ratio and local programs for children can be generated (UNESCO, 2004)

Upper Egypt and Jordan

In the Parent Education Program in Egypt, Assiut, Sohag and Qena, it was observed how the program had direct effects on some of the mothers. Trained mothers became more confident, more verbal and felt generally proud of themselves and their newly acquired knowledge. This was also indicated in their personal appearance that changed to the better. The trained mothers' households were changed as well: Their houses were cleaner and general hygiene was a higher priority. Health awareness was better exhibited in their homes: They have separated between animals and family members to reduce possible health risks. Trained mothers took better care of their children and acknowledged the importance of cleanliness and hygiene in disease prevention (UNICEF, 2006).

Mothers' relationships with family members changed as well: Several of the women reported the positive impact the training program had on their relationship with their husbands and their children. They stated that the training gave them a better understanding of their children's needs, feelings and behaviors which in turn affected the way they treated their children. One of the mothers told the story of how her husband made tea for both of them after noticing how busy and engaged she was with their children. The mother was making a toy for her children using the skills she learned from the program (UNICEF, 2006).

Interviews with fathers also indicated the positive impact the program had on the households. Fathers noted appreciation of their wives' new methods of home management. Specifically they reflected how mothers related with their children, had calmer moods, and improved the family budget.

Single women facilitators benefited from the program as well. They learned about reproductive health, childcare, and harmful practices like early marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM). They also reported feeling encouraged to leave the house and more comfortable in dealing with people (neighbors and family members) and sharing their new

knowledge with them. They were allowed by family members to travel across villages to attend the training which was against the villagers' conservative traditions (UNICEF, 2006).

Trained mothers learned skills such as sewing. This enabled some of them to have a home profession and earn income of their own. They were also taught how to prepare low cost, healthy meals. This helped in changing their children's bad eating habits that may have had negative effects on their development. They were also taught how to make toys for their children (UNICEF, 2006).

In Jordan's early childhood development initiative, a parenting training program; 'Better Parents' (BP), was developed to facilitate early childhood care and development. It was difficult in the beginning to reach fathers. Only 8% of the participants were male in the year 2000. The fact that fathers were at work at the time courses were given, affected their attendance, but another reality was that males were not culturally accepting to have a role in child rearing. Some of the fathers in Jordan, stated that they don't relate to the children when they are very young and immature. They indicated that they perceived showing emotions as weakness and feminine rather than a male trait (Sultana, 2009).

The ECD Jordanian Initiative believed in the importance of involving fathers. They developed a very successful approach, where they created an Imam Guide to Early Childhood in the year 2003. The guide was to be used for training Imams and khatibs (preachers) in mosques about ECD, since fathers spend time in mosques during Friday prayers or in other occasions. The guide included parts on the importance of childhood in Islam, roles of fathers in young children's lives and how to have happy families in general. They also mentioned the importance of gender equality in raising children. Imams were trained on ECD issues and began using teaching materials such as flash cards, pictures, experiments and role play situations to teach fathers in mosques. The Imams touched on the Prophet's behaviors dealing with his daughters and grand children and emphasized how he was an affectionate loving

father. This had a big influence on Jordanian fathers: Male participation in BP sessions increased to 23%. The impact on the Imam/Mosque training was huge: A number of fathers indicated how the experience changed their attitudes and perceived notions about their roles in their children's upbringing.

In their reflections about their children, one father expressed his regret about beating his children. His new awareness translated in to allowing his daughters to play more, instead of having to serve their brothers. Similar reflections were documented in the parenting education program in Egypt initiative in Asyut, Sohag and Qena. Fathers indicated how their attitudes had changed after attending parenting courses in similar ways (Sultana, 2009).

Chapter 3

Research Design and Methodology

The setting

In the Jomtien, 1990 Education for All (EFA) conference, 155 countries made a commitment to a world declaration on education for all as a basic human right. Access and quality education were the focus of the EFA conference in both Jomtien (1990) and Dakar (2000). The first commitment was with ECD. The Jometien declaration states clearly that "learning begins at birth". All signatories to the declaration promised to adopt quality plans to improve ECD that enhances children's social, physical, cognitive and spiritual development. Although Arab countries were part of such an agreement, ECD is showing slow progress in most developing countries including Arab states. Child care programs and early nurturing environments are still lacking for the majority of children in Arab states (UNESCO, 2006a).

In many Arab states, ECD is not the government responsibility nor is it part of compulsory education. The efforts of international development organizations and NGOs like Save the Children in Upper Egypt in coordination with the government, believe that ECD is a step forward but Egypt still has a long way to go. ECD has been steadily increasing in Egypt with the least access to the most deprived governorates of the highest poverty rates and the lowest teachers' supply (UNESCO, 2007).

Save the Children NGO

Save the Children is a well known independent organization aiming at changing lives of children in need around the world. They target children and their families and guide them to help themselves. They work with other organizations, governments, non-profit organizations and a variety of local partners while maintaining their own independence without a political agenda or religious orientation (Save the Children, 2012).

In Upper Egypt, Save the Children has offered an Early Childhood Development (ECD) program in both governorates of Minya and Assiut. The program aims at providing opportunities that will allow: (1) easy access to targeted families; (2) encouragement of the participation of children; (3) equal access for all children regardless of gender, physical or mental disability; (4) encouragement of community support; and (5) educating parents and mothers. Pilot projects were first implemented in thirteen villages and hamlets in Minya Governorate since the program's launch in 2001. The project grew rapidly by working with 94 child care facilities. A total of 1,310 children were educated by the project during the academic year 2004/2005. During the project's four years, Save the Children worked on collaboration with local community development associations (CDAs) in the establishment of 65 centers equipped and qualified for the development of early childhood. They are highly home based. Save the Children phased out of Minya in 2011 after launching the program in Assiut in 2007.

The Program

The ECD program was launched in the academic year 2001/2002, in two of the villages of the local government units Taha and Shousha, along with eleven villages and hamlets in the surrounding areas which are located within the rural communities of the Directorate of Samalout in Minya Governorate. The village of Taha had approximately 50,040 inhabitants, and 59,620 were in the village of Shusha, Health and education projects reached these two villages since early in 2000. Save the Children implemented a series of pre-service and in-service training sessions for caregivers/facilitators. They provided short-term intensive training courses, through interactive seminars and workshops.

In collaboration with the Community Development Associations (CDAs), officials in ECD program and Egyptian experts from the College of Education at Minya University, Save the Children designed a Multiple Activitiy Package (MAP) that was geared specifically for

children (ages 3 to 6 years) . The package promoted diverse values and positive behaviors such as cleanliness, order, participation, cooperation, honesty, self-esteem, responsibility, stamina and respect for others. The package also addressed the development of a number of specialized skills and abilities of the child, such as the development of vocabulary, movement, scientific, sports and health and sound social practices. Save the Children involved parents in the early stages of the program's implementation. They carried awareness sessions before starting the program for parents within the community to teach about the importance of ECD and to encourage them to take an active control in the early stages of their children's development. In the beginning of classes, parents were encouraged to attend a series of meetings explaining the program, as well as to observe their children in class. Meetings discussions focused on general health and first aid, nutrition and hygiene, child development and gender equality.

The Achievements

In Minya Governorate, Save the Children has succeeded in getting 1310 children between the ages of three to six years of age in programs of ECD. The figure, which began with only 520 children in the first year of the program, was the result of the growing support and recognition from the community of the importance of this program. The number of children reached by the Save the Children ECD program still represents only 16.7% of the total number of children in two villages that are between the ages of three to six years, This is in addition to simple programs offered by local churches and mosques within these communities which attract an additional 6.8% of the children in the two villages. There was an increase in the total enrollment rates of children in the local councils of the two villages from 6.8% in 2001 to 23.5% in 2004.

There is a need for the continuity and the expansion of ECD program and service; around 6,000 children in these communities still don't have access to any parts of the program and

2,000 children are still on Save the Children's waiting list as well as other groups waiting to be added to the list.

Minya and Assiut

The study took place in Upper Egypt, Minya and Asyuit governorates. Assiut governorate is considered the capital of Upper/Southern Egypt. It is located about 375 km south of Cairo. Minya is located about 200 km south of Cairo and extends 80 km along the River Nile. Upper Egyptians use a distinctive Arabic dialect and strongly adhere to traditional forms of kinship. Upper Egyptian women generally marry at a relatively young age (19.4 versus 20.5 in Lower Egypt) and the women are more encouraged to marry a blood relative (41% versus 23% in Lower Egypt) (El-Zanaty and Way 2009).

The government gives Upper Egypt fewer resources than the North. Schooling and income levels are generally lower than in the North (El-Zanaty and Way 2006). Upper Egyptians are often presented in Egyptian popular media as traditional and backward, in comparison to the more enlightened citizens of the north (Abu-Lughod 2005). Upper Egypt and Minya and Assiut governorates in particular, are settings where both the educational system and the labor market are highly patriarchal (Yount, 2005)

The two sites under study in Assiut and Minya respectively were; Kom el Mansoura, Abnoub and El Saliba, Abnoub district. Kom el Mansoura is one of the poorest villages in the Assiut governorate and is located an hour's drive away from Assiut. It has very limited access to resources and had no ECD services of any kind. Education, health and infrastructure services are generally very poor in this area and the community members have contact with health or education government officials. The local CDA visited is clearly developing they have started working with Save the children in 2007. In my second visit, resources were being purchased and stored. The ECD program started in Minya in 2001 and in Assiut in 2007.

In Minya, a local CDA in El Saliba, Taha Village, Samalout district; (Salama Ali Association) was more developed in comparison to the Assiut basic CDA. The CDA started collaborating with Save the Children early in 2001. It was clear from the furniture, facilities and resources that they had been operating for a long time.

Research design

Qualitative research aims at building a holistic, narrative description and an understanding of a social or cultural phenomenon. An initial research plan is designed, but intentionally remains flexible to change as the researcher explores the phenomena. Applying an inductive mode of inquiry, qualitative researchers do not assume hypotheses at the beginning of the research. Instead general research questions are decided on prior to data collection. More specific questions emerge when collecting data that can be extended or deleted when data analysis takes place. This process allows for a comprehensive and accurate description of the phenomena being investigated from the perspective of those who actually experience it (Hale, 2012).

The research design in this study has some features of ethnography where the researcher is only an observer. Rooted in anthropology, ethnography involves the study of an intact group, logically defined, in its natural context for a sustained time interval. The researcher is typically an observer or a participant observer (Creswell, 1994, p. 11). This study took the following sequence and time frame:

Sequence and time frame

Before any visits, all secondary data were studied; content analysis of the program's guide and program evaluation documents were analysed. The program's documents were studied in regard to culture and gender. Several meetings with the ECD manager of Save the Children were held in the summer of 2012 to gather initial information of the ECD program and establish a plan for fieldwork and the visits to Minya and Assiut. Visits for the building of

rapport were conducted in the month of August to get familiarized with the place and establish a relationship with the program participants and the community.

Data was collected during several visits to different sites; local CDAs, home visits, nursery classes, Save the Children offices and the Public Health Institute (where training for participants took place) in Minya and Assiut governorates during the months of October and November 2012. Qualitative data collection tools were used: Focus group discussions and interviews were held with facilitators, mothers, community representatives (CRs), CDA personnel and key informants. Direct observations of sites also took place. Case studies (facilitators, mothers and CDA male personnel) were chosen and more data about their transformation was collected through observations and case studies as well as in-depth interviews with relevant people in their environment, home or work.

The sample was purposefully picked with participants of the same social, cultural and socioeconomic characteristics. Participating and non-participating mothers in Assiut and Minya shared similar levels of education ranging from illiterate to medium education. They resided in villages of similar characteristics with limited resources, rural environment, difficulty in mobility and similar traditional context. Participants shared similar socio-economic characteristics; sources of income, resources and family property. In Minya and Assiut, the CRs and facilitators' levels of education ranged from medium to high education. Their socio-economic backgrounds and cultural characteristics were similar.

Considering that empowerment is a process that needs to be measured at two different points in time (Malhotra, Schuler & Boender 2002), a comparison between participants and non- participants in the program needed to take place to capture the significant impact of the intervention. Non-participating mothers were invited for focus group discussions and some of their households were observed.

Empowerment in this study was measured in relation to a number of indicators extracted from the literature. Some of these indicators are present in global conceptual frameworks, but are carefully chosen in relevance to the community and the cultural setting. Indicators were heavily emphasized by a recent study that took place in the same geographical setting. Malhotra, Schuler & Boender (2002) collected empowerment indicators that are widely used in empirical studies on the individual/household level. These indicators are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Individual/household Level Indicators of Empowerment

Most Frequently Used Indicators
Domestic Decision-Making
Finances, resource allocation, spending, expenditures
Social and domestic matters (e.g. cooking)
Child related issues (e.g. well-being, schooling, health)
Access to or control over resources
Access to, control of cash, household income, assets, unearned income, welfare receipts, household budget, participation in paid employment
Mobility/freedom of movement
Less Frequently Used Indicators
Economic contribution to household
Time use/division of domestic labor
Freedom from violence
Management/knowledge
Farm management
Accounting knowledge

Managerial control of loan

Public space

Political participation (e.g. public protests, political campaigning)

Confidence in community actions

Development of social and economic collective

Marriage/kin/social support

Traditional support networks

Social status of family of origin

Assets brought to marriage

Control over choosing a spouse

Couple interaction

Couple communication

Negotiation and discussion of sex

Appreciation in household

Sense of self worth

Reprinted from "Measuring Women's Empowerment as a Variable in International Development," by Malhorta, Schuler, S. R., Boender. (2002), p. 26.

Analytical questions to unravel the impact of the ECD program on gender relations were asked through open ended unstructured interviews and focus group discussions. The questions were aimed at identifying the ECD program's impact on women. The topics of discussion were as follows:

- women's self perception and others' perception of women

- women's self esteem

- women's self efficacy and internal transformation

- women's public space and social network

- relationships within the family

- decision making, communication and negotiation at home

- child rearing and domestic roles

- gender inequality: Differential treatments and discrimination against girls in education, nutrition habits, expression of affection and favoritism within family

- community's pre-conceived notions or expectations

- positive changes in gender roles

- mobility and freedom of movement

Questions to unravel the program's extent of cultural contextualization were asked through open ended unstructured interviews. Extracted from various literatures, the topics of discussion were as follows:

- Inception phase

- Training and capacity building

- Resources, standards and curriculum

- Community members ' input and cultural sensitivity

- Sustainability plan

Population under study / Participants

The study took place in two different sites: Assiut, where the program was recently introduced in 2007 and is still being launched in new areas. The aim of the fieldwork in Assiut is to measure the extent of the program's cultural contextualization and the degree of community participation through direct observations as well as to measure the impact of the recent program on various women participants. In Minya, where the program was established in 2001 and possible impact on women empowerment and gender relations has taken place. Since Save the Children phased out of Minya in 2011, finding a continuing positive impact

on women will prove the sustainability of the ECD program. Studying two different governorates will increase reliability of the study and allow for comparisons between the impact of an established program and another that has been recently introduced.

Participants were chosen from the areas with the most access to the ECD program. Some of the women program participants were mothers and mothers in laws, facilitators and community representatives (CRs) who were purposefully selected for focus group discussions and unstructured interviews. This decision was based on their previous/current participation in the program. Potential case studies were picked from the focus group discussions and the interviews, to further study their transformation in regards to women empowerment and gender relations. All participants were chosen based on their willingness to participate in the study and anonymity was respected.

Data collection

Campbell and Fiskel (1959) argued that more than one data collection method should be used to ensure that the impact is that of the trait and not of the method used. Using more than one data collection method ". . enhances our belief that the results are valid and not a methodological artifact" (Bouchard, 1976: 268).

To increase validity of the research, the data was triangulated; thus, collected from various sources using a variety of qualitative data collection methods. Data sources of this study were generally oral histories and some written evaluations. Oral histories were collected from focus groups and interview participants (facilitators, CRs and mothers), key informants (ECD program director and CDA personnel) and case studies (mothers, CRs facilitators and CDA personnel). Secondary data was collected from program's evaluation materials.

Data regarding the extent to which the program is culturally contextualized and incorporates community member's collaboration was collected through interviews with the

ECD program manager, CDA personnel, CRs and focus groups discussions with mothers and facilitators. Direct observations of the process (teaching and community involvement) and studying secondary data through curriculum content analysis (materials and resources) were also used to measure the cultural aspect of the program.

Data regarding the effect of the program on gender relations and women empowerment were collected from: secondary data, documents of program evaluations that indicate the increase (if any) in the enrollment of girls in ECD programs and later in primary schools; and a number of qualitative data collection tools; focus group discussions, open ended unstructured interviews, case studies and direct observations. The following section will discuss the data collection methods used in this study in detail.

Focus group discussions

Focus groups are meetings for a specified time period, facilitated by the researcher who acts as the moderator. The objective of the meetings was to exchange perspectives, knowledge, and/or opinions on a particular topic. Group sizes were approximately a dozen participants.

Several focus groups were conducted with different groups of women participants: two focus groups were conducted with participating and non- participating mothers (12 participants in each focus group) as well as with program facilitators (8 facilitators) in both Minya and Assiut governorates. Facilitators and mothers were not grouped together for a single focus group so as to focus on relevant and specific topics of discussion and allow for a freer and deeper expression of feelings. Running separate groups when seeking data from subgroups is generally recommended (Cooper & Schindler, 2001, p. 143).

Interviews

   Informal conversational and guided interviews were used in this study. Informal interviewing was used with case studies, where the questions asked were inspired by the given context. The purpose of these interviews was to explore the participant's transformation. Guided interviews were used with other participants using a checklist of relevant topics of discussion and possible questions. Probing was used to further explore areas of interest. Wenden (1982:39) considers the guided interview approach useful as it 'allows for in-depth probing while permitting the interviewer to keep the interview within the parameters traced out by the aim of the study.'

   Interviews were conducted with participants: Six community representatives (CRs), three Key informants (ECD manager, two CDA personnel in Minya and Assiut). In-depth informal conversational interviews were conducted with relevant case studies (tow mothers – one facilitator, five CRs and two CDA personnel) in Minya and Assiut. Only seven of the case studies were chosen to be included in his study.

Case studies

   In a case study, a single person, program, event, process, institution, organization, social group or phenomenon is investigated within a specified time frame, using a combination of appropriate data collection devices (Creswell, 1994, p. 12). From the focus group discussions and initial interviews, a number of women were selected as potential case studies. Women who exhibited the most indicators for women empowerment, changes in gender roles and significant character transformation were chosen to be deeply studied. Case studies are usually constructed to richly describe, explain, or assess and evaluate a (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996, p. 549).

   Changes in these women's lives before and after their participation in the program were investigated through in-depth personal interviews with the participants in addition to

interviews with relevant people, of close relations with case studies. Natural observation of participants in their workplace also took place.

Naturalistic observations

Observation captures the whole social context in which people work and function by recording relevant events and taking field notes. To increase validity, unstructured observations of the sites and participants were used in this study. An ECD classroom was observed to better understand the program and watch facilitators in their workplace. Two home visits for non-participating families briefly took place. The objectives of these visits were to observe a regular village home without the program's intervention and notice any differences in participants' households and behaviors.

Chapter 4
Findings and Data Analysis

Qualitative research is "primarily an inductive process of organizing data into categories and identifying patterns among categories" (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993, p. 479). A study's "trustworthiness" increases when data analysis and findings are triangulated; subjects' perceptions are identified in systematical and the study's data chain of evidence is established (Gall, Borg, and Gall, 1996).

Data obtained from fieldwork and secondary sources were divided into two main categories:

1) Women empowerment and gender relations; and

2) Cultural contextualization.

Descriptions of behavior, statements, feelings, thoughts, etc. were identified and coded. According to Wiersma (1995, p. 217) data can be coded into three different types of codes: (1) Setting or context codes, describing the setting or context descriptors of the phenomenon under study including codes for specific or regularly occurring characteristics; (2) Perception codes, participants reported perception, understanding, etc. about relevant people, circumstances, or things; and (3) Process codes, used to note event or process evolution and factors which cause or contribute to said evolution. The three types of coding presented by Wiersma were applied to in this study.

The researcher usually decides on a specific coding system as the iterative data analysis and interpretation unfolds. As long as the coding system used by a qualitative researcher is comprehensive, accurate and useful in describing and explaining the phenomenon under study, researchers can modify the coding system to their needs. The data in this study were

analyzed based on respondents' perspectives and the researcher's own interpretations of the data.

A) Women Empowerment and Gender Relations

Data collected from multiple data sources were used to trace gender related transformations. The qualitative data collection methods gave insight for better understanding and interpretation. Data obtained from interviews, focus group discussion, observational notes and case studies were informally classified into setting data, perception data and process. Process data that identified evolution or change in women were coded based on specific pre-determined and emergent women empowerment indicators. Themes were identified and chosen from various indicators and sub-themes were extracted. The following themes and sub-themes were used to analyze data regarding women empowerment and gender relations:

(1) Self -related indicators: these are indicators that present a change in participants' personal character, feelings, perception and role. It encompasses the following sub-themes:

    a. Self perception and perception of others: the way the participants perceive themselves the way others perceive them

    b. Self esteem: the way participants positively feel about themselves

    c. Self efficacy and internal transformation: the way participants believe in themselves, are aware of and acknowledge their rights and abilities.

    d. Their roles as agents of change: participants' role in altering the negative statusquo.

(2) Family-related indicators: these are indicators that present a change in participants' family relations. It encompasses the following sub-themes:

    a. Decision making, communication and negotiation: participation in decision making, improvement in communication and/or negotiation.

    b. Child rearing and domestic roles: changes in home practices or gender roles

    c. Gender inequality: differential treatments and discrimination against girls in education, nutrition habits, expression of affection and favoritism within family.

(3) Community-related indicators: these are indicators that present changes in the local communities. It encompasses the following sub-themes**:**

    a. Pre-conceived notions: changes in community's general ideas about child rearing, health, hygiene, nutrition or gender related topics.

    b. Changes in gender roles: community's common belief about roles of women and men

    c. Mobility and freedom of movement: the ability of women to travel and move with freedom

Analysis will be divided into four categories to simplify interpretation of findings; analysis of data collected from mother in Minya and Assuit, data collected from facilitators and CRs from Minya and Assiut, case studies and secondry data.

Mothers in Minya and Assiut

From the focus group discussions with participating and non-participating mothers in Minya and Assiut, focus groups data was coded and divided into appropriate themes and sub-themes. Notes from the home observation of the non-participating household were analyzed in accordance to the relevant themes. The following findings were included in relation to the empowerment indicators:

Participating and non – participating mothers

(1) Self -related indicators

a. Self perception and perception of others

    "I feel equal to my husband, I can debate matters with him" – a participating mother

Participating mothers generally perceived themselves positively after joining the program. They stated how their home practices had significantly improved after learning about child

rearing, health, nutrition and hygiene which made them better mothers. They stated that they had more time to attend to house matters and personal affairs, which improved their roles as wives. All participants were grateful for the extra time they had after sending their children to the nurseries. A participating mother said that she considerd it healthy to have time for herself; she now has more time to take care of her home and the children are much easier to manage with their acquired daily routine. A couple of participants repeated a story that has been used in their meetings offered by their local CDA to teach women about the importance of having time for oneself as part of the women empowerment meetings.

Participants perceived themselves as more responsible to take charge of a family and help in home expenditures. One participating mother stated that most of their husbands travel to get money and women often take full responsibility of the home. She stated that after attending the program's frequent meetings, she feels more independent and ready to take charge. With the help of the meetings, some participating mothers mentioned how they were able to start working on a small scale from their homes, sewing clothes, selling grocery and poultry and even opening a small shop.

Many mothers indicated a change in the way they perceive themselves as women. One mother mentioned how she learned that men and women are equal and that women are capable of doing everything men do, sometimes more efficiently. She said that a woman can become a doctor or an engineer just like a man.

Others' perceptions of participating mothers has also changed. Participating mothers stated that their husbands and community members perceive them positively now that they exhibit knowledge about so many topics. Their transformation to become better mothers, wives and women, was observed by everyone in their social circle. One of the participating mothers said that her husband, who was initially sceptical and sarcastic about their weekly meetings to discuss "female issues", has changed his mind. The participant stated proudly that her

husband now perceives her differently after observing the impact of the meetings on her character, knowledge and behaviour.

"Men are men, they provide. Girls eventually marry and never work." - a non-participating
mother.

   On the other hand, non-participating mothers' answers indicated that they perceive themselves to be of a lower status to men. They perceived themselves to be ordinary mothers and wives. Participants talked about how they are always busy at home; they listed their house chores throughout their day that starts as early as dawn; baking, cooking, milking, making cheese, cleaning and washing, in addition to taking care of the children. Participants laughed about the idea of having time for oneself and stated that it was impossible.

b. Self esteem

*"Before, I wouldn't have had the courage to speak to an educated person like you, but now
my confidence stems from my knowledge and awareness of many issues."*

   The positive change in how the participants perceive themselves and how others perceive them affected their self esteem. Participants generally expressed a positive sense of self. They were all proud to share their experiences. They dressed neatly and most of them spoke with confidence. They weren't intimidated by my presence and quickly felt at ease to answer my questions. Their general appearance, use of language, and engagement in the conversation were significantly strong; thus, indicating high self esteem. When asked about the impact the program had on their lives, they stated that their newly acquired knowledge enabled them to become more confident around others. They all said that they were able to make friends from the meetings and that they often shared what was covered in the meetings with those who missed them.

One participating mother stated that she wouldn't have been able to converse with an educated person like myself if she hadn't attended the meetings. She declared that she used to be less confident around strangers and felt intimidated by educated people, fearing that she might make a mistake. She said that now she can speak up knowing that her information is relevant and valid.

Participating mothers stated that they are now more confident around their husbands. Most of them said that they feel stronger and are better recognized by their husbands. They feel better now that they have a bigger role in the family and sometimes help in home expenditures.

Non-participating mothers did not exhibit signs of high self esteem. They did not mention words that indicated self worth or pride. Their general appearance, use of language and general engagement in the conversation were significantly below the level of the participating mothers. Some of the women sat on the floor making room for their mothers-in-law to sit on the couch. They hardly talked in their presence and had very little to say. In general the elderly spoke on behalf of their daughters and their daughters in law.

c. Self efficacy

"In the meetings we learned about women empowerment, which means having a choice and making decisions,"

Participants exhibited identification of their capabilities as women and awareness of their roles. Participating mothers talked about how the discussions held in their meetings made them aware of the importance of having time for themselves, negotiating their rights and sharing in decision making. They listed what they have learned proudly which indicated their full belief in it. Their opinions about women's education, work and mobility represented awareness and understanding of gender equality. One participant stated that when women

lack the extra time for themselves, they lose their passion for child care and house chores and fail to be good wives or mothers. Participants said that they use the "women empowerment" techniques taught in the meetings to demand their rights at home.

"Women marry and have children."

On the other hand, non participating mothers identified themselves as women with very limited possibilities and almost no awareness of possible change. They generally exhibited passiveness and acceptance to their inequality in their answers. They accepted their limited mobility, their daughters' deprivation of education, their mothers' in law control, their husbands' control of decision making and their own limited choices. When they were asked about the ECD program offered by the local CDA, they indicated a very limited understanding of what is offered to children in classes or mothers in meetings: One participant said that she knows that they talk to the women about health issues and disease prevention.

d. Roles as agents of change

"I advised my cousin not to marry off her young daughter and to keep her in school."

Participants considered themselves agents of change who can carry the message of awareness across their social circles. Participating mothers stated that they talk to their family members and neighbors about the things they learn. They said that they frequently implement what they have learned and often try changing others' wrong health, nutrition, and hygiene practices. The participating mothers often talk to other women about the disadvantages of girls' early marriage. They use their communication and negotiation skills to convince other women not to marry off their young daughters, highlighting the danger of young pregnancy and the importance of female education.

Participants generally stated that their neighbors, relatives and community members were encouraged to send their children to the nursery classes when they noticed the positive impact on participants' and their children. More people were further encouraged to offer homes for meetings or launching new classes.

Non-participating mothers showed no signs of becoming agents of change with no awareness of their roles in their communities.

(2) Family related indicators

a. Decision making, communication and negotiation

> *"My husband can never stop me from attending meetings or sending my children to the nursery, as I will always negotiate my rights and eventually convince him."*

Participating mothers indicated awareness and practice of negotiation techniques with their husbands at home. One participating mother mentioned that in meetings they talked to about their relationships with their husbands; birth control, reproductive health and how to deal with their partners. Other participants confirmed the same topic in addition, they were taught about negotiation and communication skills, which had a significant impact on their marriages.

Participating mothers indicated improved communication with their husbands after joining the program. They said that when they shared with their husbands the things they covered in their meetings: child rearing, health, hygiene, nutrition, reproduction health. Their husbands usually allowed them to go to more meetings. With their newly acquired knowledge and information, participants could better communicate with their husbands at home. They discussed their children's affairs together and their husbands have learned to follow their advice.

Participating mothers mentioned that their mothers-in-law often interfere in their choices of sending their children to the nurseries or attending training. They all admitted that the mother-in-law is sometimes more difficult than the "man" (husband) to convince. One of the most active participants in the focus group was a mother-in-law who had attended meetings for mothers-in-law offered by the program. She exhibited a big understanding of women empowerment issues and female education.

"It is for the man to decide if his wife can work or his daughter can go to school."

Non-participating mothers indicated that they had a minor say in decision making and mentioned nothing about negotiating their rights. The mother-in-law influence on decision making was obvious in the meeting. They rarely allowed the younger generation to give opinion. The non-participating mothers mentioned nothing about negotiation or better communication with their husbands.

c. Child rearing and domestic roles

"Fathers should have a role in child rearing. After the program they became more interested in their children."

Participants indicated that their husbands became more involved in child rearing after program attendance. They said that they always share their child rearing information with their husbands which had an impact on the fathers' interest and involvement in their children's lives. One participant stated that after sending her daughter to the nursery class and sharing her child development knowledge with her husband, he allowed their children to play more and will never ask a girl to serve her brothers. Participants stated that the fathers are keen on sending their children to school observing the positive impact on their children.

Participants listed the benefits of ECD that they encountered from their first hand experience with the nursery classes. They talked about the lovely things children learn in

school and most importantly their positive change in their behavior, personal health and hygiene, independence, school readiness and general happiness. When children went to the nursery, participants stated that their houses were quieter and their time is more organized. This had a significant impact on husbands who felt this change in their households and were encouraged to further deal with their children. Participating mothers said that fathers now encourage children to go to the nursery and never allow them to miss a day now.

Participating mothers' domestic obligations were better managed with the knowledge acquired from the meetings. All participants stated that they can better manage their time now that their children were gone and their daily schedule was more organized. Husbands felt the difference and appreciated and recognized their wives' new home management skills

"I spend my day baking, cooking, milking, taking care of the little ones, cleaning and washing. Finding time for myself is impossible."

Non-participating mothers mentioned no involvement of men in child rearing or domestic roles. They listed many things that women have to do in their day, when their husbands go out to work and provide. Child rearing and domestic chores are purely a woman's job.

The mothers-in-law spoke about child rearing methods that they personally teach to their daughters and daughters in law. One mother-in-law referred to her granddaughter, who attended the focus group meeting, saying that she personally sees to her well being. She proudly stated that she taught the girl's mother (her daughter-in law) how to wash and change her when she was a little baby. The participants stated that they often seek the help of the elderly with their children's affairs or child rearing practices.

d. Gender inequality

"When I had to vote in recent elections, I couldn't choose as I understood so little. I felt

that my opinion will not affect my life being so limited, but it can definitely affect my

daughter's life."

Participants expressed their positive feelings about having girls. They declared that they prefer having girls to boys and that only the old generation favored boys. One participant stated that there is no difference between boys and girls nowadays and that they aspire for their daughters to become better then themselves. She said she wants her daughter to finish university and have a decent job. Another participant said that when a woman learns, she can read, better understand and become a good mother to her children.

Another participant expressed how she feels jealous of women who had the opportunity to become educated and were luckier than her. She wants her daughter to achieve what she was not able to achieve herself and not to have her limited life.

Participants expressed their fear of early marriages that their daughters may have to encounter. They indicated that they have already started negotiating with their husbands about their girls pursuing their education before marrying and having children. They stated that now that their girls started education and are showing progress. It might be easier for community members to accept their further education and object to early marriages.

Participants denied favoring boys. They said that they feed their girls well and allow them to play rather than serve males in the homes. They admitted that their personal experiences as young girls were different. One participant stated that as a young girl she used to serve her brothers and father. She avoids doing this with her daughter and stated that her husband is understanding and kind. A participant mentioned how her husband learned in the mosque that being kind to children is important and that he sometimes advises her to be softer with their children.

When asked about their spouse choice, a few participating mothers replied saying they did choose their husbands, but the majority of participants stated that they had little or no choice of their husbands who are mostly their first cousins. It is a tradition in rural Egypt to give cousins the priority to marry girls in the family. One participating mother reflected on her personal experience saying that she was married at fourteen and had no control over her choice of marriage. However they all agreed that they would never force their daughters to marry. They stated that things have changed and that women are now encouraged to chose their husbands.

"Having no sons is sad; a boy grows-up to carry his father's name and inherit his father's house."

On the other hand, non-participating mothers indicated different feelings about girls. The participants indicated that they favor having boys to girls; the elderly said that boys grow up to become men that provide when girls eventually get married and raise children.

One elderly participant stated that her daughter wanted to go to school in a distant village, closer to the city, but she objected to that. She told her daughter that she can only go to school in the nearby village. The women, especially elderly, preferred the school away from the Assiut for protective reasons. She stated that she had to take her girl out of school to get married the following holiday. The participant's daughter that she claimed to be eighteen years old looked much younger than marriage age. Another participant who had her girl (of perfect nursery age) with her in the meeting, said that she took her son to the nursery but will take her daughter later when she is ready. Non participating mothers mentioned nothing about women's right to choose a spouse and the idea of early marriage was generally encouraged.

(3) Community related indicators

a. Preconceived notions

"My general perception about nurseries was positive before joining the program but my

awareness of its importance has maximized after my personal experience."

Participants indicated that many of the community's preconceived notions have changed

after the program. Their own ideas and beliefs have been altered after their training and

experience with the program. Participating mothers stated that at first they were suspicious of

the program and did not fully understand it. But after sending their children to nearby nursery

classes, they immediately noticed the change on their children. They were then encouraged

by CRs to attend weekly meetings that changed a lot of their practices regarding health, child

development, nutrition and hygiene.

One participating mother indicated the change in her previous health beliefs; stating that

she changed the way she prepares food and eats when pregnant, after attending pregnancy

health meetings. Another mother talked about the importance of hygiene and washing

children's hands frequently. They all expressed better knowledge and awareness and agreed

that they had many misconceptions and minimum information previously. Participating

mothers now seek their children's facilitators' advice if they face problems with their

children.

Participants' pre-conceived notions about ECD have changed; participating mothers stated

that they sent their children to the nursery classes, believing that they will teach their children

to talk and help them go to school. They learned that in the nursery the children's various

developmental aspects improve, such as their social skills. They stated that children are

taught to be clean and well behaved. One of the participants mentioned how her young girl

teaches her older siblings to be clean and exhibit good manners.

Besides their own pervious misconception, participants mentioned that some of their community members weren't initially encouraged to send their children to the nursery classes. Their husbands were suspicious of the program's usefulness especially for their wives. Community members changed their ideas about early childhood and women when they observed the impact on women participants and their children. In Minya, the whole village is almost reached at this stage of the program. Pre-conceived notions about ECD have changed; it became common practice to take one's children to the nursery or attend the program's meetings.

"Luckily I now have my daughters in law to take care of the endless house chores that I had to take care of when she I was her age."

Non-participating mothers exhibited the communities' preconceived notions with no change. Beliefs about education, gender roles and child rearing had many misconceptions.

The participants did not send their children to the nurseries thinking that early childhood education was not important. They could not visualize or explain what happens in the nursery classroom. They stated that they will send their children soon, but are waiting for them to grow up and be more ready for school. The participants indicated their notions about women's sole responsibility of child rearing and domestic roles. The elderly clearly projected their subordination on the younger generation. They rejected women's mobility, forbid girls from travelling to school and encouraged early marriage.

b. Changes in gender roles

"I was able to establish a small business, opening a little shop to make money after sending the little ones to the nursery."

Participating mothers indicated a change in their gender roles now that their husbands shared in child rearing practices and women shared in home expenditures and decision making. Their communities learned to accept women travelling to attend meetings, fathers sharing in child rearing and women participating in decision making and home expenditures. Some of the participating mothers mentioned starting a small business, this indicates a change in gender roles, having a job and participating in home expenditures. On the other hand, non-participating mothers exhibited little change in gender roles.

c. Mobility and freedom of movement

"Girls who have to walk long distances to go to school or use public transportation are respectable girls who can travel and take care of themselves."

Participating mothers stated that they moved with freedom now and that they independently take their children to the nearby public clinic. Participants stated that their husbands are generally reluctant to send their children to nurseries or allow their wives to attend meetings if they had to travel a long way on their own. They explained that it is unsafe for the children to travel long distances and generally unacceptable for women to leave their homes and children for a long time. The impact of the program on children and women encouraged men to accept their wives' mobility. Non-participating mothers discouraged women's mobility which clearly affected education decisions for their girls.

Non participant's home visit:

A home visit to one of the only houses, that did not participate in the ECD program in the village in Minya took place. It was difficult to find a family who had not sent their children to

the nursery or attended any of the program's meetings. Unfortunately, both parents had left the house before we arrived and the children were left alone. There were four boys of different school ages and one girl. Obviously, none of the children attended school and the little girl who was of nursery age, didn't go to the very near nursery class. Unlike the other children in the nursery classes, the children were not clean or well dressed, but were very excited to see visitors.

The house was small. As we entered through the door there were breakfast leftovers in a tray on the floor. The children were obviously unsupervised sitting in a small room with a small television screen where a cartoon was playing. There was a cow at the entrance of the house close to where children sat. It was clear that correct health and hygiene practices weren't encouraged in the house.

I learned from the CDA head that they tried many times to convince the parents to send the girl to attend the nursery, but failed. He said that the father didn't believe in education and did not send any of his sons to school. The facilitator said that the little girl comes to the nursery everyday when she plays in the streets to observe the children singing and playing. The ECD manager suggested that the CDA talks to the mother one more time about sending her daughter to attend classes without having to pay the monthly fees. The children were obviously left alone to play in the streets when they could have been in school.

Facilitators and Community Representatives in Minya and Assiut

From the interviews and the focus group discussion conducted with CRs and facilitators, data was coded and divided into appropriate themes and subthemes. The following findings were concluded in relation to the empowerment indicators:

(1) Self -related indicators

a. Self perception and Perception of others

"I have a new character; I now have connections with government officials, local

community associations and most of the people in the village."

Participants generally expressed a positive self perception. After joining the program, they identified themselves as working women, better wives and leading role models for community women. Becoming a better wife was mentioned by all married participants; CRs and facilitators. Being better wives encompasses improvement in home management skills, child rearing practices and relationships with their husbands. All participants thought their home practices had significantly improved after their training which was acknowledged by the majority of their husbands. One CR stated that her child rearing practices had changed to the better now that she had more information about health, nutrition, hygiene and child development. She corrected many of her previous wrong health practices with her children.

As working women, participants indicated the importance of their jobs to themselves and their community members. Single facilitators and CRs are strongly attached to their jobs and most of them refuse to give it up for marriage; one facilitator stated that being a teacher is part of her identity and that she would not give it up upon marriage. Another senior facilitator agreed with her husband before marriage on keeping her job and encouraged others to do so. She stated that besides being a wife she thinks of herself as a teacher with an important role in the community. With their intensive training, participants identified themselves as senior facilitators or community representatives that are able to train others and make positive change in their lives. They all perceive themselves as better communicators with a larger social network.

The way others perceive them has also changed for the better. All married CRs mentioned recognition from their husbands; one participant stated that her husband now perceives her as a knowledgeable person rather than an ordinary wife of limited education and little information. Single facilitators and CRs mentioned their families feeling proud of them now

that they are employed and have a share in their home expenditures. They stated that they make their fathers very proud and encourage sisters to join the program.

All participants mentioned that they became quite popular in their villages. Community members recognize them as leading women and often seek their advice and guidance. Many participants identified themselves as role models to other women of their community.

b. Self esteem

"My work has transformed me in many ways; I am far more confident to speak to strangers, I move with freedom and take my children to the health clinic on my own."

Participants exhibited strong indicators of self confidence. They generally spoke confidently and used words that expressed their current feelings of self worth. All facilitators mentioned how their jobs and training allowed them to meet many people which significantly improved their communication skills. Their public space has expanded which had a huge impact on their characters. Participants spoke enthusiastically about their acquired knowledge from training and working experience. They proudly listed the things they learned about and exhibited excellent awareness of various training topics.

One CR described the huge change in her character after joining the program; she explained how she used to be very shy and generally scared, even of her husband's loud voice. She stated that after her training and work experience she feels more confident and has learned to deal with many people in different situations. Another CR stated that her work has transformed her in many ways; she is far more confident to speak to strangers. Her self reliance and autonomy is more confident and self assured.

Facilitators mentioned that their job is self rewarding and makes them aware of their important role in children's lives. One facilitator stated that it makes her very proud when a

school teacher asks her former students' parents about their nursery teacher, in recognition of her efforts that shows in her students' school performance.

c. Self efficacy

"I am trying to take my full rights as a woman in my community."

Most participants indicated general awareness of their rights, roles and capabilities resulting from their work experience and training. They exhibited an internal transformation that was apparent in their thoughts and ideas about gender roles and women empowerment.

As part of their training, facilitators and CRs attended women empowerment sessions. In these sessions they were taught about women rights and gender roles, negotiation and communication skills as well as gender equality, in a simple manner. After the training, CRs and senior facilitators conduct women empowerment meetings with participating mothers and other facilitators (as part of the ECD program), using the same tools that were introduced to them by specialists. A CR explained that the women empowerment meetings target women between 18 and 45 years of age with special attention to mothers of nursery age children. Facilitators and CRs explain to women during these meetings the importance of early literacy and teach mothers how to negotiate with their husbands and have a say in decision making. She stated that, participating in making simple decisions about food, clothes and general expenditures eventually leads to making bigger decisions about children's education and future.

Senior facilitators who attended women empowerment sessions explained how they were taught about "women empowerment" indirectly using stories and discussion and that the sessions mainly focused on women's feelings of self worth. One facilitator mentioned a story used in the training, that was also mentioned by a participating mother in Assiut "My Mum's New Dress". It is a story about a dedicated mother who bought a new dress to wear but was

discouraged by her husband to wear it. She stored it away and forgot about it. Later she died. The facilitators explained that the moral of the story is to teach women to prioritize their personal needs sometimes over others'; in addition to house chores and child rearing, women are entitled to have time for themselves. Another story that they mentioned and still remembered from their training days is "Mr. Adel". The story focuses on the issue of wives' recognition by their husbands. Facilitators exhibited good understanding of the concepts in these stories. They confirmed that as women they work a lot and are sometimes not well appreciated.

One of the senior facilitators stated that some husbands still put their women down no matter what they do, but said that with her work she still feels rather strong. Although she declared finding it difficult to negotiate with her husband or to participate in decision making at home, she exhibited awareness of her rights and her current unfortunate situation.

d. Roles as agents of change

"My job as a CR allowed me to play a significant role in my community. I feel that I have a

life objective to achieve rather than living with no purpose."

A change takes place due to participant's initiatives; whether it is their impact on children; changing their behavior, health, hygiene and nutrition habits, their influence on mothers; changing their child rearing practices or improving their communication, negotiation and decision making at homes, or their effect on the community as a whole; accepting women working and mobility, sending their children to school.

One CR, clearly aware of her role as an agent of change, stated that by raising awareness of a small group of women, more women can be reached and the whole community is affected. She stated that women hardly resist when they are approached and that she knows that many women in her community needed help but didn't know what to do or whom to

seek. She confirmed that when these women are approached, they always show a positive attitude toward learning and participate willingly and eventually change.

Participants clearly used skills acquired from the training, in changing others' pre-conceived notions and mindsets; a participant said that the training taught her how to communicate with her husband, family and community members. She stated that she uses her communication and negotiation skills to convince other women to send their children to the nursery and attend meetings. Facilitators indicated that they often encounter difficulty in dealing with parents with misconceptions about early childhood and inappropriate child rearing practices. One facilitator mentioned how inappropriate child rearing practices affect children's emotional development. In special training sessions about building home to school connections, facilitators were taught how to deal with resisting parents and how to introduce appropriate child rearing practices and alter wrong practices.

(2) Family-related indicators

a. Decision making, communication and negotiation

"I use one of three ways to approach my husband and negotiate things; logic, religion and emotions. This always works and my husband allows me to do what I want if convinced."

All the participants pointed out how the things they learned about; child rearing and development, health, nutrition and hygiene as well as their time management, improved their home practices significantly. On the personal level, all of them stated that their relationships with their husbands have improved, now that they better manage their homes and families. Moreover, participants mentioned that their communication with their husbands has also improved; their ability to negotiate matters has widely expanded now that they can better communicate.

Participants' paid jobs allowed them to share in domestic expenditures, hence, affect spending decisions and better control home resources. The information they acquired enabled them to make effective decisions that gained their husband's respect and further trust. Their training about women empowerment encouraged them to negotiate their personal right to decision making and take decisions that promote gender equality within their families.

The CRs said that they teach participating mothers communication and negotiation skills to use with their husbands at home. All CRs and facilitators stated that they personally use these skills with their husbands. More than one participant listed different ways of approaching husbands and said that they share this information with community women in the meetings.

One CR described her relationship with her husband to be "transformed". She stated that she shares in the decision making process, now that she can communicate better and negotiate her rights with her husband. She uses skills learned from the training such as choosing the right time and the right words. Another described her relationship with her husband now to have become a partnership in which they share equal responsibilities and decision making equally. One senior facilitator stated that, although she works and has a university degree, she still finds it difficult to negotiate with her husband at home or participate in decision making. She described her husband as being generally "difficult" but stated that she is doing her best applying what she learned in dealing with him. On the other hand, another senior facilitator mentioned how the women empowerment training was of benefit to her as she practices what she was told with her husband and taught her mother to do the same with her father. Participants stated that with their expanded scope of knowledge they can better converse with their husbands at home. One CR stated that she can now carry conversations with her highly educated husband with confidence and pride.

Participants gave examples of issues that they negotiate with their husbands: One CR stated that she used her negotiation techniques in convincing her husband of buying a piece of land. Another stated that she negotiates their children's education and child rearing decisions with her husband and added that with her strong knowledge and communication skills she manages to convince her husband. Others mentioned negotiating their freedom of mobility with their husbands.

Participants expressed their feelings about earning money. They stated that they can independently buy things that they need, without having to rely on their husbands or fathers. Some facilitators stated that it is still culturally encouraged that husbands provide for their families. But the majority of participants declared that they do share in home expenditures and take part in spending decisions. They stated that they use their salaries to buy personal things and buy things for their children. One CR stated that her sharing in home expenditures is highly appreciated by her mother-in-law.

b. Child rearing and domestic roles

"My husband helps with the children when I have work to do. I came to training today without making lunch, I am sure he will understand."

Participants generally stated that their husbands are more accepting of their jobs now that they have observed the improvement in their personal and wife traits. They demonstrate tolerance to their job requirements that encompasses having to take work home or travel to attend training. Some husbands have become more involved in child rearing now that their wives are sometimes occupied. This is also due to husbands' new awareness of appropriate child rearing practices and their roles as fathers. The fathers have been reached by their wives as well as by the regular community meetings hosted by the local CDAs in association with Save the Children. Community men are invited to attend "Dawar Mogtama'y" (community

homes) where discussions about young children's health, hygiene, nutrition and development take place.

The community men reacted to these meetings and started participating in child rearing practices. Men were encouraged to attend these meetings by inviting government officials and decision makers to solve the villages' major problems concerning health, education or infrastructure. In previous meetings, important decisions regarding community needs were rapidly taken, which encouraged community men to further attend these meetings and entrust the local CDA with their wives and children.

One CR stated that her husband now helps with her paper work and report writing. He often attends to the children and helps in their studying, allowing her to work without disturbance. She said that before the program, her husband had very little to do with child rearing. Another CR said that her husband encourages her to work at home and offers help, as long as food is cooked, house is clean and children are alright. Her husband is involved in children's affairs and usually attends "community homes" meetings to discuss topics like child rearing practices, health and nutrition.

c. Gender inequality

"My daughters will go to university to become engineers, doctors or any profession they please. Unlike myself, my daughters will not marry at a young age. I will allow them to choose their husbands."

Participants expressed positive feelings about having girls. They think that girls are generally more appreciated nowadays in their local communities; many local girls are being educated and more girls pursue a career. They personally send their girls to school and aspire for them to become better. They denied that they favor boys, but they generally admitted that

gender inequality does exist in their community. Girls are still married at a young age which prevents them from continuing education.

Reflecting on their personal experiences, one young facilitator stated that although some women do work, men are usually expected to provide which will always give males a higher status than their female counterparts. The facilitator doesn't think that this is the result of the community pressure, she indicated that she personally believes that "this is the way life is". Her answers clearly indicate her own misconceptions about gender roles. Another facilitator stated that in their community, males usually have more privileges than females; they do what they like and move about freely.

Facilitators encounter parents' practices of gender typing, that is often projected on their children when they come to the nursery; they stated that some children, obviously being told by their parents, refuse to sit next to, or play with children of the opposite sex. One facilitator told the stories of a boy in her class, who refused to shake hands with his female class mates. Another recounted a story of a mother hitting her young girl for sitting next to boys in class. The facilitators stated that they usually try to communicate with the parents and encourage them to allow their children to mix with other children of the opposite sex. They said that teaching resources and class activities promote gender equality and discourage gender typing. They usually allow boys to play with dolls or pretend to cook, and allow girls to play with the ball. One senior facilitator stated that her son doesn't like it when his younger sister plays with boys; she is aware that her son's behavior is a result of his father's influence, but discourages it and pushes for her message to get through. Facilitators stated that children's parents can un-do all the learning they provide if not convinced themselves with the messages to the children. They indicated the importance of reaching out to parents, especially mothers in ECD programs. When they offer mothers parenting courses about health, nutrition,

hygiene, child development, child rearing practices and gender equality, mothers sustain what they teach in school.

All participants believed in a girl's right in choosing a husband. Some of the participants have been married young and had limited choice of their spouses; others chose their husbands. One CR stated that her marriage at a young age prevented her from working. Another CR, who is new to the program and attended only part of the training, had to make an agreement with her dad to allow her to work. She promised that she would accept his suggested husband with no resistance. She said that she trusted her dad, who is the sheikh in the mosque, and has good vision. Unlike herself, both her sisters left middle school and decided to get married. She pressured her dad to allow her to continue her education and work.

(3) Community-related indicators

a. Pre- conceived notions

> *"When mothers witnessed how their children reacted to storytelling, games, arts and crafts and the different learning experiences in class, they changed their minds about ECD."*

An apparent change in the community's preconceived notions regarding child rearing, health, hygiene and nutrition was clear from the discussions. Participants mentioned that at the beginning of the program, the community resisted the idea of children learning before primary school age. They argued that children couldn't do much before a certain age and thought that children were only going to the nursery classes to play. The idea of learning through play was difficult for mothers to understand until they were invited to attend a day with their children in class. Participants stated that when the mothers witnessed their children in different learning experiences, they were very pleased. The mothers communicated this

new understanding of ECD to fathers and other community members who were encouraged to send their children to the nursery classes.

b) Changes in gender roles

"My husband and mother-in law accepted me going to work, only when they observed the positive impact on my home and children."

Participants indicated a change in the way the community perceives them as women. They stated how it is rather accepted now days for a girl to finish education and become employed. It has also become more acceptable for women to share in home expenditures and provide for their families. The majority of participants indicated finding it difficult to get their husbands, families and communities to accept their work decision. Many participants' job decision was rejected by their mothers-in law rather than their husbands. One CR stated that her community perceived women's work as culturally/morally unacceptable. She had to convince her husband, who travelled frequently for work, to allow her to join the CDA program. She stated that talking to her husband was easier than convincing her mother-in-law, who found it difficult to accept her work decision. After seeing the positive impact the program had on her home and children, her mother-in-law began to accept having her working. The facilitator stated that she later took her to the mothers-in-law meetings offered by the program.

A CR who comes from a family that encourages female education and work, said that her late father felt very strongly for girl's education but their community criticized the CR and her sister's commitment to higher education and thought that it was odd that they refused getting married to suitors they didn't know. She stated that her community learned to accept their education and jobs now that they accept their work and regard it as important.

c. Mobility and freedom of movement

"Before working, I had no social life and my movement was very limited."

Participants exhibited happy feelings about their new freedom of mobility. They all listed it as one of the main benefits of the program. They expressed how their movement as women in their villages was strictly limited. They mentioned that the difficulty of commuting as women in their villages, always affected their work and education decisions. They said that they hardly left their homes and never travelled out of their villages and had never been to the cities. The community accepted their movement with freedom only after the success of the CDA work. When the community felt a real change in their children and women, they came to believe the value of the program's CRs and facilitators and accepted their further mobility. The CDA facilitates transportation, if needed.

Participants stated that at the beginning of their work, their movement was a problem especially if they had to travel long distances for training or meetings. Things changed when community members and husbands noticed the positive impact of the program and the training on women and children in the community. Husbands witnessed the changes in their children and wives and learned to accept their wives' mobility and frequent travelling.

Case studies

Real names of case studies were changed for protection of anonymity. Pseudo-names were used instead.

1- Om Mohamed – Participating mother – Minya

Om Mohamed was one of the most confident mothers I met in the focus group discussion in Minya. Although she covers her face with a Niqab that she did not remove throughout our meeting of ninety minutes or the following in depth interview, Om Mohamed was outspoken and confident. One of the facilitators knew Om Mohamed and confirmed that she attends

every single meeting held. She is never absent and is one of the most active participants in meetings.

When asked about her life before the program and what made her who she has become, she started remembering her family and childhood:

"I have always felt that my mother was oppressed; the amount of workload and house chores that she had to do every day always made her very tired."

Growing up with four other sisters and two bothers, Om Mohamed suffered inequality in treatment of girls in their family. She stated that girls were constantly serving boys and her brothers were allowed to do whatever they pleased. Her mother always told her, that she had to keep on doing everything she could to please her father to prevent him from taking a second wife that would better serve his needs. Om Mohamed stated that these encounters made her stronger.

When she married she realized that being a woman encompasses doing everything for the household when husbands only provide money. She decided that she didn't want to become her mother and wanted better for herself and her daughter.

The availability of the ECD program and the regular meetings had a strong impact on Om Mohamed's life: She said that she learned many things that she didn't know about which changed her life for the better. The knowledge she acquired from the health, nutrition and hygiene sessions made her a better mother. She stated that her house is now cleaner and the sunlight shines through her windows to kill the germs every morning.

Om Mohamed said that through the program they were offered small loans to start small businesses, although she did not participate. She strongly thinks that money empowers women and allows them to have a say in spending decisions. She has recently started her poultry business at home, selling her home raised birds for income, which enabled her to have extra money and help in home expenditures which makes her feel in control. Om

Mohamed believes that the program increased her freedom of mobility. Now with the meetings held in the CDA, she can leave her house and go to meet with other women to discuss important issues. She believes that now she can travel out of her village to the nearby villages or even to Minya if she wants.

Om Mohamed argues strongly for gender equality and believes that women have to involve men in child rearing and domestic roles. She learned from the meetings that women should not be scared and should approach their husbands using their good communication and negotiation skills instead of holding things in or having to lie. Om Mohamed believes that there is now a national trend to give women their full rights. She stated that the media and legislation are working towards empowering women which she can feel in their distant village. She used the example of her female cousin who recently divorced her husband using the khola'law. Om Mohamed believes that legislation is a tool of empowerment:

"It enables a woman to divorce her husband if she can not live with him. My cousin gave her husband back her dowry and happily divorced him."

On the personal level, Om Mohamed believes that she has changed for the better sending her children to the nursery and attending the meetings offered by the CDA. She said that her children teach her a lot of things and motivate her to learn. She believes that the way she dresses and carries herself around changed for the better now that she meets more people and goes out frequently. She feels more confident than before and stated that my visit to her, as an educated girl coming all the way from Cairo made her feel more proud of herself and of what she had become.

2- Ali – Head of a CDA – Minya

Ali was chosen as one of my key informants to be interviewed about the program's process. I was advised by the ECD manager, who was my main key informant, to consider

Ali as a case study for transformation. She said that when she first knew Ali he was a very hot tempered man. On their first meeting he argued aggressively and wasn't open to their suggestions. He refused their choice of one of the facilitators that is one of the coming case studies, as he didn't approve of her appearance and argued about her eligibility of the position.

Ali, who seemed now like a very pleasant man, quiet and calm started telling me about the man he used to be:

"I used to hate children", he started. *"I thought young children were good for nothing until they reached a certain age, so I treated them with violence."*

Ali expressed his earlier beliefs saying that when he saw men carrying their children he thought that they were weaker than their wives. He believed that taking care of the young children was purely a female's role. He used to tease his male friends who shared young children's responsibility with their wives and accused them of being soft and feminine.

Ali indicated having similar feelings towards women. He declared that his father spoiled him and favored him over his brothers and sisters. He treated his younger sister firmly and used to beat her up on many occasions. He remembers that once his father asked him to leave the house for a week after beating her up.

"It wasn't my father who taught me to be tough, on the contrary he was a kind man. I was just violent and aggressive in nature." Ali explained.

Save the Children approached Salam Ali CDA for the nursery classrooms project and Ali, responsible for the local association, was approached. He was chosen as he comes from an influential and popular family in the village. People trusted Ali's family and their local association. He stated that at first he accepted working in ECD thinking that it would be of benefit to his community and his work. He didn't believe much in ECD at the time. They started with two classes and the community members reacted positively to the service. They

eagerly sent their children to classes that had a long waiting list of those who couldn't make it this time. The successful program expanded and more classes were opened. Ali said that people were in great need for all services in their village.

Ali stated that Save the Children's people made him enthusiastic about ECD. He witnessed how they were eager to promote the concept of ECD in his small village.

"They brought the best people to come and train our facilitators and talk to the parents which made me believe in the benefits of ECD. I attended the training myself and witnessed the program's benefits to everyone."

Ali said that he managed to convince people to donate spaces for classes. He stated that he encouraged an old man to give part of his land to his son, who later used it to establish his own CDA that supports the ECD program and offer classes.

Ali stated that his feelings towards young children have changed with his experience. Unlike what he used to think, he observed young children's progress and realized that children do understand at this young age.

"I sat in the young children's classes and watched them. At first I hated it but then I saw how the children acted, they seemed more confident. They learned many things and they have changed to the better."

Ali stated that when he got married and had children of his own, his love for children grew. He helps his wife in child rearing and shares all the useful information that he learned with her. His wife is a university graduate and school teacher herself. Ali stated that he changed his idea about women after working with so many females in the ECD program. He witnessed how facilitators and coordinators work efficiently and benefit their community in a similar manor to their male counterparts. He witnessed how the meetings were of benefit to the children's mothers as well as their husbands.

"Children learned a lot of things and acted better in their homes. Mothers acquired useful knowledge of child rearing, children's health and safety, which made husbands happier."

A clear transformation of Ali's previous beliefs about women shows in his relationship with his working wife. He allowed his wife to work all through her pregnancy regardless of what the community members believed. He said that he knew that a lot of people will perceive allowing his pregnant wife to work, as a sign of weakness from a man who is able to independently provide for his family. He stated that they shared decision making in the house and that his wife makes most of the expenditures decisions.

Ali now clearly favours his daughter in treatment. He aspires for her to graduate from a university and become a doctor or a police officer one day.

"I will buy my daughter a car as soon as she finishes school and will never accept her marrying before finishing university. I will allow her to choose her husband and my only condition for her marriage will be that her suitor provides a home for her so that my daughter will not have to live with her mother-in-law or her husband's family. They negatively affect marriages."

Ali indicated that he personally feels better after his work with the ECD program. He said that he feels responsible for his community members now that he achieved this success. He obviously feels changed. He learned to control his temper and to be kind. He agreed that his work with children and women promoted his softer side. He stated that he would never beat up children again and if a facilitator is ever harsh with a child he immediately dismisses her.

Ali, who once was a man feared by children and women in his family, talks about his feelings towards the young children saying,

"I feel proud watching the young children perform songs on stage at school events and performances. They grew to become very confident."

3- Sahar - Senior facilitator - Minya

I choose Sahar for a case study based on my two encounters with her. The first encounter was when I first visited the CDA in Minya to establish initial rapport. She looked very presentable and proud of herself. She listened enthusiastically to my explanation of my study and wanted to talk about her experience with the program straight away. She kept nodding when I talked about the impact of the program on women in the community. I remembered Sahar when I saw her the next time and wanted to hear her answers to my questions thinking she could be one of my case studies. In the focus group discussion with the facilitators, Sahar clearly stood out as one of the most confident and outspoken.

When I asked Ali about Sahar, he smiled and said that she had tremendously changed from what she used to be:

"Her appearance was different. She looked less of a teacher and more like a teenager. The makeup she wore indicated that she had a lot of spare time to spend in front of a mirror."

Ali indicated how Sahar changed to become a popular teacher in her community: a role model for many young girls and mothers. Community people usually tell young children that they will take them to Miss Sahar to teach them good things.

Sahar spoke about her life before her work with the ECD program stating that she had almost no social life. She had only one or two friends and hardly went out. The only opportunity for her to leave the house was on the occasion of family weddings.

"There were no work opportunities. I spent most of the day cleaning the house or just keeping busy. I was very shy and almost scared to speak to people especially those I didn't know. I wouldn't dare go anywhere on my own or speak with government officials to issue any personal identification papers or the sort. I was ordinary and not popular at all."

Sahar talks about her family, having nine siblings: four brothers and five sisters. She says that her late father was very kind and understanding. Being his elder child, she was his

favorite. Her grandmother on her father's side, was the opposite of her son. She never believed in girl's education and told her father not to invest in girls as they grow up to leave the house and move to their husbands' homes.

"My grandmother used to say a proverb; girls are like a broken piggy bank, whatever you save inside is never yours. But my father insisted on us going to school instead and resisted our early marriage."

Sahar resisted getting married and was supported by her parents. When her father passed away, she promised him that she would take care of her younger brothers and sisters and would not marry before they all finished their education. Being the eldest daughter, Sahar is clearly responsible for her family's financial needs. She stated that her mother is a simple, uneducated woman and that the job opportunity the CDA offered her filled a great need. Sahar said that she will only get married when she finds the right person.

Sahar, who exhibits excellent ECD knowledge and asks many questions about recent ECD trends, resources and instructional methods, once hated children and didn't know how to treat them. She said that she had no patience with her young relatives whom she knew very little about. Sahar says that now she loves children and she would love to have a girl of her own one day. She has become one of the most popular ECD facilitators that mothers seek for advice and treat with respect. She talks about her ambitions and aspirations;

"The knowledge I acquired from the training I attended, motivated me to pursue my studies. I am currently thinking about joining the Open University. I do believe that what we have covered in the training is of great use, but I still think having a higher degree in education will change my professional status and enable me to become an early childhood specialist one day."

Sahar said that now that she has a respectable job, she can move with freedom and can even travel. She often travels to Minya for training and she excitingly told the story of her

visit to Cairo with the CDA to take a training course about political participation for rural women. The visit, that wasn't part of the ECD program, was encouraged by Sahar's new confidence and feelings of empowerment. She said that she wouldn't have thought of traveling out of her village or going all the way to Cairo city on her own if it wasn't for her transformation. She came back from her visit to talk to community women, that she had established a close relationship with being a nursery facilitator, about the importance of voting and political participation. The women perceived her positively and was highly regarded by them.

"I introduce myself as Sahar the teacher. The job and the CDA are part of who I am."

4- Nagah – Community Representative – Assiut

Nagah's apparent transformation was clear from our first interview. I decided to meet with her again and speak in depth about her life before and after the program. Nagah stated that her life was very boring before she worked, being newly married and having children straight away. She only had to do house chores and child rearing.

"I felt bored and was going through a state of emotional depression. My husband travelled frequently for work and I was left with my child at home with nothing useful to do. All days seemed the same and I felt that I was good for nothing."

Nagah stated that there was an urgent need for ECD facilities in their village. No nurseries were available and the children had to play in the streets most of the time. When the ECD program was introduced, many families were encouraged to send their children to the nurseries straight away.

"I used to watch programs on TV that showed young children singing or dancing in school performances. I dreamed about having a similar opportunity for the children in our village.

Now we conduct our own performances with the village children attending the ECD

program. The parents usually cry watching their children perform on stage."

She talks about her personal transformation stating that the program changed her from a completely shy person, scared of loud voices, to a confident woman that knows how to take care of things and negotiate her rights. She said that she feels better now that she works, which has an impact on her personal life; helping her become a better wife and mother. She replaced many of her wrong health, nutrition and hygiene practices at home with the correct ones which had a huge impact on her children's welfare and her husband's satisfaction.

Nagah described her relationship with her husband as "transformed". She said that she now shares in the decision making process and that she is able to communicate and negotiate her rights with her husband. She uses skills learned from the training such as choosing the right time and the right words. With her new character after training, her husband is encouraged to involve her in his affairs, now that she has an opinion and exhibits a better understanding of things.

"I avoided conversing with my husband, always being scared of making a mistake. I feel

stronger now with my experience and knowledge and I am more confident to speak to him

and negotiate life matters."

Nagah stated that after working, she uses her salary to buy herself things as well as share in home expenditures which is appreciated by her mother-in-law now that she is helping her husband. She feels that she has more control over resources at home now that she can decide what to buy and where to spend.

Nagah's husband participates heavily in child rearing and domestic duties. He often helps her in paper work needed by the CDA. Her colleagues stated that they often notice her husband's handwriting in Nagah's reports. When she is occupied with work her husband attends to the children and helps in their studying to give her room to work. Moreover, Nagah

stated that her husband usually feeds her children and helps in cooking meals if she is not home. Before the program she confirmed that her husband had very little to do with child rearing or domestic chores.

Nagah wants the best for her daughter saying that she will make sure she goes to university and become a teacher one day. She personally wishes she can enter a university and become a coordinator or an early childhood specialist. Nagah now feels that she has a role in her community: She corrects bad health and child rearing practices and often gives useful advice to various community members. Nagah thinks that she is personally regarded as a role model by many girls in the village and knows that she has become popular among community members.

"My relatives seek my advice and welcome me to their houses. I visit them more regularly now, going to and coming from work. My life was so limited and closed before, but now I see my neighbours and relatives, attend training and go to work."

Nagah believed in the good effect of the program, encouraging women to aspire for more and look up to other women in their community. She said that her daughter's role model is her teacher and her own is a former coordinator. She is happy with what she had become and clearly exhibits her current feeling of self worth.

"I never expected that I would reach this stage and become who I am now. I truly feel proud."

5- Abdel Kerim - Program executive – Assiut

Abdel Kerim works with the CDA in Assiut. He is well spoken and exhibits strong information about many of Save the Children's programs and a general awareness of development. Abdel Kerim is a clear example of involving and empowering community members in the program. His personal story proves the program's cultural contextualization

in enabling community members and transforming them into agents of change who will ensure sustainability of the program. He talks about his experience before and after working with the program.

"I have always been outspoken. Since university I joined student unions and was active during my university years. I still knew little about development. After working with the CDA, I finally understood the meaning of "local councils" and the community's existing power to influence government decisions and expenditures. I never knew that as community members we had the right to monitor government expenditures regarding our community."

Abdel Kerim's story ensures involvement of community members in all initiatives and empowers them with feelings of ownership to everything they achieve with the local CDA and Save the Children

"The local CDA is known to everyone in the village by now. It is highly regarded and trusted, being a tool of change and improvement. Community men are encouraged to join the ECD meetings, observing the positive impact on their children and wives. They now believe in the CDA's ability to make their lives better and improve conditions in their village."

Abdel Kerim stated that he had to attend several training sessions about various topics with facilitators and community representatives. He has personally witnessed the positive change on his community women after their training. He said that facilitators and CRs usually make him proud and personally teach him things about child rearing, health, nutrition and hygiene

"Men are usually distant from child rearing practices, but we now learn from community women. One day in a training session, a facilitator spoke about dealing with children who take toys from the nursery, not understanding the concept of stealing. They will most probably bring things back to school the next day if dealt with correctly. I never knew that

children don't understand the concept of stealing. This facilitator taught us men something that day."

Abdel Kerim stated that working with many women he realized that their role is irreplaceable in development. He wants his daughter to become a pharmacist, and will allow her time to get to know her spouse before marriage.

"I believe that women have a huge role in development. In our villages with our traditions and culture, only women can reach out for other women. It is not acceptable for men to speak to women about reproductive health. Also in early childhood; women make good facilitators with their natural motherly instinct. They usually excel when directed and trained."

Abdel Kerim feels for community needs and is aware of his role as an agent of change. He believes that establishing partnerships with various stakeholders and community members will eventually result in development and better conditions.

"I believe in the power of "we". When we work together as community members we can change, even if we can only reach one level of the population, I believe that we are on our way."

He goes on speaking about how self reliance and taking initiatives, succeed in sustaining change.

"I remember an initiative by the ECD program in a nearby village (El Shanabla) where the children observed the building of a wall protecting them from a lake. The children who took part in this initiative, through observation and symbolic participation, always guard the wall with their lives since they built it with their hands. When people contribute to change, they usually sustain this change."

6- Sania – Community Representative – Assiut

Sania is one of the CRs who had a lot to say about their lives as women before their working and awareness experience. At first, she was not allowed to join the program and her husband refused her going to work. He now encourages her work after seeing the effect her knowledge has had on her home practices and child rearing. Sania who has only one child, stated how their community's health, nutrition, hygiene and child rearing practices were mostly wrong and used to harm children.

"It was common practice here to give babies sugar water when they were first born and start feeding them when they reached forty days old. We are still told by some of the elderly to wash children a lot and feed them before their sixth month. Now I know that this is wrong and I avoided doing that with my baby. Women would sometimes be pressured to deliver their babies at home to avoid seeing male doctors, as CRs convince the women to go to the hospitals."

Sania talked about the things they were brought up to believe in women in their community:

"As young girls we were always told to dress, walk and talk in a certain manner. Our mothers told us that we have to work hard to get a good suitor. When we got married, mothers told us that we have to obey our husbands and mothers-in-law in everything. No one told us we could think, speak up or discuss. They advised us to have many children and make sure our husbands were satisfied. After the training offered by the program, we have realized that many of the things the men or the elderly say are not correct and needed to be changed."

Sania mentions how the community resisted the ECD meetings at the beginning of the program:

"The women didn't want to go to meetings with men and their husbands wouldn't allow them. The mothers-in-law also heavily objected. The program offered meetings for mothers-

in- law, where we, as CRs, spoke to the elderly who are the most difficult, about ECD. We
showed our feelings of respect to the elderly and carefully suggested correct practices to add
to their highly regarded routines rather than replace them. It has to be very subtle or they get
offended. We worked very hard on reaching them.''

Sania speaks about her personal transformation from the program saying that she is more
confident to speak up now. Like Nagah, she said that she was always scared of making a
mistake when she spoke with her husband, but now she is proud of what she learned. She
communicates better with him and he listens to her opinions. She shares in home
expenditures and all spending decisions. She proudly stated that she has recently convinced
her husband to buy a piece of land.

Sania stated that in her village, men sending their wives to work is sometimes regarded as
a shameful matter. But stated that as CRs they resist these pre-conceived notions by
encouraging more women to work and join the ECD program. Sania has changed to become
one of the leading women in her community, coming from a nearby village, her work with
the CDA enabled her to quickly meet many people, who now regard her as a source of
advice.

Sania said that if she will ever have a daughter, she will teach her to think and negotiate,
finish her education and allow her to choose her husband. She aspires for her son to become a
doctor or a policeman.

7- Anaam – Mother – Assiut

Anaam stood out in the mothers' focus group discussion in Assiut. She was outspoken and
proud. When I met Anaam again she was very happy to tell me more about the effect of the
program on her life.

"I live very close to the nursery. I was encouraged to send my children immediately to avoid them learning bad things from the streets. Children's minds are like tape recorders, they learn everything they hear. I didn't want my children repeating horrible things instead of children songs and rhymes."

Anaam stated that before sending her children to the nursery and attending meetings offered by the CDA, she had a lot of spare time. When CRs approached her to come and attend the meetings, her husband refused.

"My husband made fun of the idea and said that my information was enough. He told me that in these meetings we would most probably discuss women problems and how to get rid of men. When I finally went, it turned out to be totally different. We learned about health, and nutrition, our personal cleanliness and improving relationships with our husbands. When I told my husband about these things, he was impressed and advised me to go again."

Anaam said that her husband was further convinced with the ECD program, when her practices changed at home. She used the techniques she learned from the women empowerment sessions to debate maters with him. She carefully chooses her words and the right time to approach him, which improved their communication. Her time management has also improved.

Anaam speaks proudly of how the sessions changed her for the better

"I am empowered to speak my mind. I have always been known to be outspoken but I knew very little, which forced me to stop arguing about things. Now I argue for my opinion confidently and proudly. I move freely and go out to meet with other women and discuss important things."

Anaam said that she shares her knowledge with community members, especially the women who still cannot leave their houses and attend meetings. She tells the women how the meetings changed her life and practices to the better. She believes that she has a role,

transmitting this useful information to other women in her community. Anaam encouraged her mother-in-law to attend meetings offered by the CDA.

Anaam stated that she thought about working with the CDA as a facilitator herself, but she is waiting for her children to be more independent. She wants her children to finish education and have decent jobs. She encourages them to be ambitious and aspire for the best.

Secondary data

Secondary data obtained from Save the Children ECD program guide, and recent evaluative studies were examined. Results confirmed the program's awareness of gender issues and their concern regarding women empowerment and gender relations. In their program guide, women empowerment indicators were often mentioned as vital program objectives.

The document listed the general benefits of ECD that supports Save the Children's program. One of those benefits was the impact ECD has on mothers and sisters. It cited Yang (1996), stating that the availability of ECD programs allows mothers to continue their education and become employed as well as allowing the older sibling (mostly a sister) to continue her education. The document acknowledged the importance of ECD as one of the Education for All objectives and facilitates the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG). It confirmed the impact of ECD on access to primary education for both males and females. This indicates the awareness of global development agreements that takes into consideration gender equality.

The guide mentioned that the program's vast impact showed on community girls. It talked about the importance of girls' education and the benefits of ECD as an early start for girls to education. It mentioned the benefits of the program on community girls creating new job opportunities (volunteer, facilitator or community representative). The work opportunity,

as stated by participating girls, had a positive effect on their general feelings about themselves. They became more self confident and felt respect from their community members.

The guide also mentioned mothers as beneficiaries of the program; it mentioned how the parenting courses educated them about children's health, nutrition and hygiene with a significant effect on child mortality rate. Mothers became aware of appropriate child rearing practice which was indicated in their answers of a study survey, conducted by Save the Children to measure their knowledge of correct health and nutrition practices.

A recent evaluative study on Save the Children's ECD program's impact on children's performance in primary schools was conducted in December 2011. The objective of the study was to evaluate the effect of children's participation in the ECD program. The study focused on children's performances in grade one of primary school, identifying teachers' and parents' degree of satisfaction with the performance of the children who attended the child clubs in their first year in primary school.

The study tools had been applied on a selected sample from some villages in Minya and Assiut governorates where the institution work is concentrated; grade one children who spent two years in the child clubs (26 girls) and (22 boys), their parents (15 mothers) and (9 fathers) and grade one teachers (9 females) and (4 males) were the participants in this study. The results came in favor of the child clubs as children scored high in all the measured aspects. The teachers and parents indicated high levels of satisfaction with children's performance. Boys and girls scored almost equally and girls scored higher in some aspects that were measured, like in linguistics. The results of the study portray the attention the child clubs give to gender.

B) Cultural contextualization

From the interviews with the ECD manager, CDA personnel and discussions with mothers and facilitators, data was coded and divided into appropriate themes. The following findings were concluded in relation to the ECD program's cultural contextualization and the degree of community involvement.

Inceptions phase

The program was introduced by Save the Children to the local CDAs in Minya in 2001 and Assiut in 2007. A program executive in the local CDA in Assiut mentioned how his area lacked the availability of early childhood facilities and had access to only one distant school, when they were approached by Save the Children. He said the villages' influential community members, the CDA later board of directors, were excited about the idea and 3 ECD classes were opened. He stated that Kom el Mansoura being one of the villages with the least amount of services and access to resources encouraged the ECD project as it was desperately needed.

Similarly, in the discussion groups in Minya, there was a general agreement between participants about the clear need for ECD services and especially in their small distant village. Participating mothers confirmed that there was a need for ECD in their village. They were generally happy to find a safe place away from the dangerous and dirty streets. One mother stated that before the nurseries children often stayed in the streets for six whole years. When they had to go to school it was difficult for them to settle as it was late by then and the transition was most difficult.

The issue of security was brought up by one of the participating mothers who stated that their children are sometimes targeted for murdered for revenge (thaa'r; taking revenge is common practice in Upper Egypt). By keeping the children in schools, mothers can prevent this from happening. The mothers also mentioned that before the availability of the nurseries, women in the family used to have disagreements over children fighting, different approaches

to behavior management or child rearing practices. This has sometimes caused marriages to end.

Most participants stated that they knew about the program through relatives, friends or siblings. Some of the participants are related to owners of CDA which indicates how the program is initially introduced to community members who promote the program in their families and social circles.

Save the Children's ECD manager stated that the program usually starts by choosing a site. Since a partnership exists between Save the Children and MOE and MISA, connections with various government officials, the governor and ministries facilitate the process of choosing sites. MISA usually inform about the districts with the least access to resources from their research findings. The next step was choosing a local CDA owned by influential people in the community. After finding the CDA, the program implementation starts.

Different program coordinators attend an orientation session to meet with community members and introduce their programs. A general presentation about Save the Children and another about the objectives of the program is given in these initial meetings. Every program then identifies the target population before implementing the program's plan. Awareness campaigns start targeting the relevant population for ECD. The program is introduced to community women and men using an ECD specialist to promote the idea and raise awareness on the importance of the early childhood stage. Then calls for spaces in homes, for the nursery classes, as donations start.

As the ECD program highly relies on the concept of Home- Based education, there is a ongoing need for places to become nursery classes or child clubs. The CDA personnel, being the most popular and influential figures in the community, facilitate the process and work on attracting people and convincing them to donate spaces in their homes. The ECD manager said that in the beginning, community members were reluctant to donate space in their homes

to CDAs. They were suspicious of sending their children to their neighbor's donated homes or rooms, thinking that they might not be eligible to work with children. Community members generally doubted the importance of ECD and only believed in primary education that is mandatory by the government.

The ECD manager believes that they succeeded in reaching people by their sound communication with the community members. They addressed their needs by always responding to people's queries, concerns, and worries. Establishing partnerships with community people through local CDAs was key to the program's success. When the first classes were opened, people were more curious about the children's learning in the child clubs. They used to peep in the windows and later ask more questions about the program. The numbers of children sent to the child clubs started to increase.

Training and Capacity Building

The program executive exhibited excellent knowledge of ECD. He stated that he attended intensive training that enabled him to lead others. Facilitators in Minya stated that they were trained by a Save the Children team, through the CDA on many topics: health, first aid, educational topics, planning, MAP, new curriculum, resources …etc. Facilitators said that after attending training, they became more aware of their needs and were able to fill in surveys offered by the CDA, for suggested additional training topics. They requested training on skills of how to deal with parents and establish home to school connections.

Participating mothers listed the topics they learned about in their parenting meetings. They said that they talked about children's health, hygiene and nutrition, when to visit the doctor and when to have children vaccinated as well as important child rearing information. They stated that in the meeting they also talked about their relationship with their husbands, birth

control, and reproductive health. They taught them how to better communicate with their husbands.

The ECD Manager stated that the need for training was apparent as they launched the program. Training for facilitators and CDA personnel was part of the program's initial plan. However, the need for different training topics was usually suggested by the program implementers, mainly facilitators at that time. Another need for reaching out to parents started to be visible: Mothers were constantly asking if their children would be able to read and write. It was clear that the mothers knew very little about ECD and the needs of that stage of a child's life.

The ECD manager stated that the program is not rigid, on the contrary it is very flexible. They catered for community needs based on various participants' feedback. They started running sporadic seminars about child psychology and development before realizing that mothers needed steady meetings.

Reaching out to the parents started by conducting home visits for children who are frequently absent or have behavioural issues in school. Home visits were also part of the ECD health component for regular health check-ups. The ECD manager remembers when the majority of the children in class had seasonal eye infections and were away from school. The need for investigating the causes and spreading health awareness encouraged a series of home visits. The objective of these meetings was to find out what caused the eye infections and if the cause was bad practice at home that needed modification. Forms were used as tools to gather information from parents and establish a true partnership between home and school.

Nutrition, being a component of ECD, was another reason for home visits and meeting with parents. The facilitators started by advising parents to substitute unhealthy snacks sent to school with healthy food like eggs and milk. Then a need for a wider approach for reaching parents was apparent and the idea of having "health and nutrition messages" was developed.

Cooking gatherings took place, where mothers were taught how to prepare affordable balanced meals for their children. Save the Children then combined UNICEF's ECD messages with their own to develop a guide with health and nutrition messages for the parents that were shared by the facilitators to use with parents. An ECD parent massages manual was then developed with information about all ECD components.

Resources, standards and curriculum

The program executive stated that quality and safety standards had to be applied in ECD classrooms and that community members that donated classes in their homes follow the standards. He stated that resources used in teaching are appropriate to children's environment and references.

Assiut mothers also stated that in the nurseries they used resources that were familiar to the children and sang educational action songs; (wind the bobbin up in Arabic) in addition to songs and stories from their folklore. They stated that they willingly opened their homes to become nurseries and as mothers, they greeted the children at the door every morning.

Classrooms observed in Minya were very clean and tidy and the ventilation and lighting were good. There were lovely displays on the walls of the classrooms and the overall atmosphere was very pleasant. Children sat at three different tables, divided into small groups to work with different materials. They were doing puzzles at that time and the children were helping one another. The children seemed very happy and engaged. They greeted the ECD manager, with a lovely song. They proceeded to sing another action song about a little chubby fish. They sang eagerly and most enthusiastically. They exhibited self confidence and excellent communication skills. I observed the play area that had outdoor play equipment on sand. All equipment were in a great shape.

The ECD manager talked about using resources that are affordable and available in the environment. Workshops are given to facilitators and participating mothers on creating resources from local materials. The facilitators and the mothers mentioned that in our discussion in many occasions. They use straw, palm leaves, palm stones…etc. for various learning activities. The ECC manager gave an example of using dates or stones for teaching numeracy aspects like counting and making patterns.

Save the Children worked with a committee of MOE, MISA, The General Association of Education Building (GAEB) and the Civic Defense Association (CDA) on establishing and unifying ECD standards. Standards were designed and modified to fit cultural needs. Assessment takes place three times a year where children's various developmental aspects are measured using appropriate tools and resources.

Community members' input and cultural sensitivity

The program executive from Assiut stated that facilitators' feedback about the program and resources is always taken into consideration. It was apparent from various discussions with the program participants that their input and participation is key to the program's success. CRs and facilitators stated that their feedback was always useful to the program coordinators. Having direct contact with community members, CRs and facilitators would frequently advise program coordinators to make appropriate changes to better address the community needs.

The ECD managers talked about involving community members (CDA, participating parents and facilitators) in many aspects and stages of the program. The facilitators and interested mothers were involved in developing the curriculum by adding or modifying the MAP and other resources used to teach. The MAP was modified by the facilitators removing irrelevant items like animals the children would not recognize. The ECD manager told a story

of an incident where facilitators debated the importance of teaching rural children about "traffic lights", stating that the children do not see them. They are not present in their environment. Facilitators' input was considered and modifications were made.

They take part in curriculum evaluation and assessment by giving regular feedback about the program's challenges, strengths and parents' needs. Parents' feedback also guides planning and practice. Their needs to be able to help children with home activities guided the program planners to invent new resources that would facilitate learning for children and their illiterate mothers. Cards with pictures and simple activities were designed to be used at home.

In 2009, an initiative took place that encouraged the elders' contributions to the program. A needed theme of "Peace and Tolerance" was identified and various teaching resources were collected from the community's culture and local heritage. Folklore songs and stories were listed by the communities' elders' and printed in books to teach about the theme.

All participants mentioned the issue of mobility and traveling being a problem. Local CDAs took measures to facilitate the women traveling. They conducted most of the training in the local CDAs and brought instructors to the villages as much as possible. Facilitators stated that the CDA often supports transportation for the girls to travel if they have to go to the city for training.

Sustainability plan

From the interviews and observations it was clear that the program involves the local CDAs in all program aspects from beginning to the end. This enables community members to sustain the program.

The ECD manager stated that Save the Children focuses on a number of aspects to ensure the sustainability of the program: Capacity building of the CDA personnel by providing training on community mobilization, writing funding proposals, project management,

investing in human resources; facilitators and CRs, maintaining partnerships between local CDAs and government officials.

Save the Children connects local CDAs with government officials to ensure sustainability of the program. The CDA program executive in Assiut stated that as moderators, Save the Children has connected the Kom el Mansoura local association with influential government representatives and officials, by inviting them to their regularly held meetings (Dawar el Mogtamaa) with community members. The idea of these social meetings, is to raise awareness of the importance of ECD aspects with parents (mothers and fathers), explain what the children do in the nurseries and what mothers do in their training meetings, to fathers and elderly members of the community. Seeking acceptance and involvement of all stakeholders in the ECD program, and connecting influential community members (like CDA board members) with government officials who can enhance the village services, health and educational needs. The presence of those previously hard to reach figures in the poor village meetings increases the community's trust of the local CDA and the ECD program and encourages community members to join the program and trust their services. Health and education services in Kom el Mansoura have developed since the ECD program began, and connections were created with the government that became more aware of the poor village's needs.

As part of the sustainability program, the concept of a "living university" was established which is a tool for transmitting successful experiences to new areas. A TOT (training for trainers) system was established to eliminate the need to bring outside trainers by having community trainers ready at all times. This model has been showing success and trainers from Minya (senior facilitators and CRs) were taken to Assiut to train program newcomers.

Regular quarterly visits take place to Minya for progress evaluation. During these meetings,

facilitators' feedback is collected and training on new topics is offered. Save the Children

consider themselves a lifetime resource centre for the local CDAs.

Conclusion

Amidst a political revolution, a social revolution often starts. In Egypt's January 25th revolution that ousted a dictator and is aiming at ending a corrupt regime, revolutionaries are working hard on enforcing democratic values, equality, social justice and human dignity. As the main chant in Tahrir square was always one calling for bread, freedom, human dignity and social justice, the struggle is still striving to achieve these demands. A country moving towards social equality for all, must work for gender equality. Hence, women empowerment is in the heart of Egypt's social transformation and path to equality achievement.

The findings of the study indicate a strong impact of culturally appropriate ECD on women empowerment and gender relations. The community's involvement in developing, implementing and maintaining the program contributed heavily to the success and sustainability of the program. The findings revealed that there is a vast need for educational development in distant villages of Minya and Assiut. Moreover, there is an urgent need for various services in these places and the likes. Hence a fundamental reason for the positive impact of the program was the district's need for general development. Involvement of community members at an early stage of the program and choosing local CDAs that are trusted by people facilitated the process and minimized community resistance. Many participants stated that they were never approached by anyone before, and that the ECD initiative was desperately needed by their community. People were encouraged to participate when witnessing the positive impact the program had on their children, women and the community.

Save the Children, taking the role of the moderator has proved to be a successful model of development. Facilitating partnerships between unreached communities and the government was a major role of the developer in this study. Being culturally sensitive to community's needs was another source of success that makes this model replicable.

ECD proved to have a significant impact on women empowerment and gender relations: It had a huge impact on women's feelings about themselves: the way they perceive themselves, their self esteem and efficacy. Most participating women now believe that they have a role in their communities and are agents of change; Their families have also been impacted: women have become better mothers and wives, their communication and negotiation skills have improved and they participate in the decision making process at homes. Gender inequality common practices are being challenged, resisted and eradicated; and Community perceived notions are changing, gender roles are being revisited and women's mobility is becoming more acceptable. Although aspects of gender inequality still exist in the community, social transformation is clearly taking place.

Some of the findings indicated existing misconceptions of gender roles and preconceived notions, but existing ideas are clearly being challenged and aspects of gender equality are appearing. As empowerment is contextual with changing indicators from one social context to the other, empowerment has clearly taken place in the existing social context of the study.

The grassroots movement in this study is another successful model to be replicated. This movement has clearly led to changes in individuals and will ultimately result in a broader societal and cultural change. A replication of such a model will result in further changes in unreached districts which has a direct effect on the overall move towards societal and cultural change.

ECD's components of development, health and nutrition, had a direct effect on the improvement of these aspects in the community, which resulted in better gender relations and community's overall well being. The multiple benefits of ECD were clear and the study confirms the importance of ECD as a development tool and catalyst for societal transformations.

Limitations and recommendations

The study is highly based on interactions with people and forming a relationship of trust. This made it challenging in comparison to quantitative designs where direct interactions with people may be avoided. On the other hand, gender is still a sensitive topic in our traditional Egyptian culture and researching it is difficult, especially in the rural areas of Upper Egypt. Establishing good relations with people was the way to overcome the study's limitations. The short time span of this study was another limitation. Studies measuring gender transformation usually require longitudinal studies that are more in depth.

Working through Save the Children NGO and the local CDA enabled me to have easy access to participants but limited my choice of random samples of participants. Participants were selected by local CDAs prior to my arrival.

The coordination between times of my visits and the launching of the ECD program in new villages was difficult. This limited the possibility of observing the program in the inception phase. Data collected in regard to this aspect came only from participants narratives. Another limitation was the difficulty of meeting with non-participating mothers in Minya. The village visited was all reached and finding non-participating families during my short visits was difficult.

In Minya, the program has been running for a long time; consequently, the majority of families in the village have participated in one way or another. It had an apparent effect on community women, but this effect has been taking place for so long that the women were not excited about it anymore. So these women were different from Assiut women, being slightly less enthusiastic about what they learned and achieved. I attribute this to the fact that the program in Assiut is recent, hence the effect on participating women is enlightening, as the women are eager to talk about their current transformation and freshly acquired knowledge.

This takes us back to the contextualization of empowerment indicators. Empowerment indicators in Assiut are not necessarily the same in Minya, since Minya's ECD preceded that of Assiut in reaching women. Additional indicators could have to be added in this sense.

It was apparent from the visit to the CDA in Minya that only senior facilitators were trained on women empowerment issues; the difference was clear in young facilitator's answers. It is important to recommend women empowerment sessions for new facilitators in addition to their usual ECD intensive training. As gender beliefs are usually embedded in facilitators' teachings to young children.

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