

## EMPOWERS Regional Cross Visits



A Region-Wide Cross Visits Programme was organized and implemented by EMPOWERS during the months of August and September 2006. The programme that was coordinated by the Regional Documentation and Communication Specialist from the Regional Information Programme, based in INWRDAM (one of the EMPOWERS regional partners) consisted of two visits. The first visit took place in Jordan during 13-15 August including 30 participants while the second was in Egypt during 4-7 September with the participation of 38 participants. In the two visits, the participants (being from the three EMPOWERS countries: Egypt, Jordan and Palestine) were selected and nominated from:

- other water management projects implemented by EMPOWERS partners;
- key stakeholders in EMPOWERS (community leaders and governorate/district staff); and
- other MEDA Water projects.

The two visits had the following main objectives that are part of the overall approach of EMPOWERS:

- Sharing experience and learning

among community leaders (women and men) in planning and management of integrated local water resources.

- Learning from the experience of EMPOWERS and other approaches.
- Exploring new insights and development horizons for possible use in participants' communities.
- Establishing relationships among local-level stakeholders on the basis of mutual interests.

In Jordan, the programme of the visit started with presentations made by local officials from Balqa (EMPOWERS' pilot governorate) about water-related issues there, their experiences with EMPOWERS and the aspirations they now have about the implementation of EMPOWERS approaches by the government. The field visits were to three of the pilot communities in Balqa: Rumaimeen, Omm Ayyash and Tell Al-Mantah. In these villages, stakeholders gave overviews of their water problems, emphasizing absence of participatory work as a main impediment for having their voices heard in decision making departments and thus a reason of persisting conventional patterns of water resources management. The

participants became more interested and inquisitive when the local stakeholders started presenting the EMPOWERS-based strategies they have developed for tackling those problems, demonstrating the skills they have acquired in using tools like problem tree analysis, visioning and scenario building. The field visits were followed by one day workshop in Amman also bringing together the participants and local stakeholders to address in working groups and plenary discussions challenges met during project implementation and the requirements of sustainability and advocacy on national and regional scales.

The visit to Egypt started in Cairo, specifically in the DRTPC and CEOSS offices, being two of the partnership members in this country. Experts in both institutions presented their activities and role in EMPOWERS. In Beni Suef (pilot governorate), the participants received different presentations on the agricultural realities and water problems specially those related to the drinking water network. In the visit to one of the project's pilot communities, Bahsamoun, citizens displayed the activities of EMPOWERS in their village and the skills they have



obtained through involvement in planning for and implementing these activities. The participants were given the opportunity to see other ventures in water resources management in the nearby governorate of Fayyoun. Members from water users associations in the district of Sinoros presented their activities in managing local water ponds (Tera') while farmers from the village of Behmo gave a field demonstration of a water-saving method of rice irrigation. Upon the conclusion of field trips, a workshop was held in Cairo to exchange ideas and feedback drawn from observations on the local communities interaction with EMPOWERS. Working groups also discussed similarities and differences between EMPOWERS and Water Management Project in Fayyoun.

During group work sessions participants in the two visits produced a wide range of recommendations based on their observations of the activities within EMPOWERS against the background of their different experiences and knowledge around water management challenges in the three countries.

Among the recurring attributes of EMPOWERS as seen by the participants one finds the project's emphasis on empowerment of marginalised groups, involvement of officials in participatory work, exchange of experiences among the different stakeholders and creation of public awareness around critical water issues.

The participants were also able to identify challenges that emerge during and after projects of EMPOWERS' scope, such as conflicting interests, change of staff in institutional stakeholders, lack of funding, and absence of legislations that ensure sustainability.

Among the several lessons learned in the two visits as cited by the participants:

1. significance of outlining duties and responsibilities of local communities and officials;
2. necessity of enhancing participatory work on the project's three levels: local, intermediate and national;
3. emphasis that has to be given to women's role in improved local water governance;
4. need to build the capacity of local stakeholders and civil society institutions as to become actively involved in local water resources management and able to demand water rights; and
5. applicability of EMPOWERS approach in other developmental fields other than water.

Such insight into what EMPOWERS has been doing in the past three years was



furthered by a set of recommendations seen by the participants as bases for horizontal and vertical improvement and dissemination of EMPOWERS approach. These recommendations mainly revolved around enhancing the implementation of activities that are already being undertaken by EMPOWERS. However, most recurring opinions were in favour of:

1. allocating more budget for carrying out physical projects and for training other teams that would facilitate similar future initiatives;
2. involving official and non official agencies in evaluating the project;
3. creating a database for water related information that also includes EMPOWERS outputs and is accessible to all actors in the field;
4. drawing on EMPOWERS experience in establishing stakeholders platforms for developing expanded knowledge communities (always involving locals and officials) that would discuss, adapt and adopt EMPOWERS approaches and tools in new areas; and
5. incorporating a cross visits programme component in similar future projects.

The EMPOWERS Cross Visits Programme stirred not only interest in water problems in the above three countries or its approach and achievements in addressing them. It actually presented the programme as a model that, if replicated by future interventions, may encompass whole countries with the mode of improved local water governance implemented by EMPOWERS. The participants' call for a wider investment of such a programme was not a baseless or theoretical invitation. It was prefaced by a high degree of interaction with the presentations made by the EMPOWERS communities and partners. The questions addressed to the project's stakeholders indicated the participants' desire to go into the minute details necessary for transferring EMPOWERS approach to their own work.