

Najah's Success

The first time I met Najah -a 24 years old poor widow from Masharqa village in Egypt- was in one of EMPOWERS village meetings in June 2005. The EMPOWERS team was establishing a women group in that village. At that time, Najah seemed as a woman unrelated to the Arabic meaning of her name which is "success".

Najah's husband had died in a car accident after four years of marriage leaving her with a three years old child to support. But Najah's high school certificate could not find her a job. Moreover, she was deprived from the opportunity of a new marriage that would provide her with support and protection, as some communities in Upper Egypt are against a widow's marriage to someone not from her husband's family. Najah's late husband had no brothers which made the chances of a new matrimonial life very slim. As a result she suffered a permanent state of sadness and morbidity about the future.

Najah joined EMPOWERS activities after hearing about the project from a friend. She first attended one of the meetings hoping that she could find a job through contacting EMPOWERS staff. We made it clear to Najah that EMPOWERS does not provide job opportunities or financial remuneration in return for her work and that the benefits will be of a public nature that includes the whole village.

During meetings I observed how intelligent and hard working Najah was. I talked her into continuing to work with the project even if she did not see a tangible personal benefit.

Najah decided to go on with her voluntary work. She joined the Masharqa Women Group and participated in collecting data on water problems in the village. Like the other members of the group, she transferred what she learned to other women with no direct involvement in the project. She also took part in building a problem tree for her village, vision, scenarios and all steps of our planning cycle.

With new self confidence and skills, Najah overcame her sorrows and started to see things in a different way. In June 2006, Najah -who became an active member of the education committee in Masharqa Community Development Association- passed an interview for working in a new education project in Beni Suef. Out of a hundred applicants Najah was one of the nine persons selected for working in that project. In the job interview, Najah explained what she learned through EMPOWERS and demonstrated how the methodology can benefit people in all fields and not only water.

Today, Najah not only has a job but also a husband. She decided to resist negative social habits by accepting marriage to a farmer who was not a member of her late husband's family. She argued that what she cared for was her new husband's understanding personality and his appreciation of her and readiness to take good care of her child. For me, Najah has finally fulfilled the meaning of her name.

May Abu-Elseoud
EMPOWERS- Egypt

New Language

Rural life in any country is abundant of words that express simplicity and spontaneity which comes from direct contact with nature, water, soil and vegetation. But when nature is degraded and water exhausted it becomes unusual to resist the introduction of new terms whose adoption indicates a positive attitude towards innovative approaches in the management of scarce water resources.

Hajj Ghaith from Jenin governorate in Palestine is one of many local stakeholders in EMPOWERS communities in Palestine, Jordan and Egypt who can now make a presentation on problem tree analysis, visioning, scenario building and strategizing.

He also exemplifies the locals' confidence in approaching government officials, expressing their problems and demanding the right of participation in decision making regarding the management of water resources.

The confidence and knowledge have led to a new discourse in our villages characterized by a developmental and participatory diction.

Buthaina Mizyed
EMPOWERS- Palestine

