Primary education – Egypt

Improving the quality of teaching with functional schools

KfW has been committed to primary education in Egypt for decades on behalf of the German Federal Government. Around 900 primary schools have been built, rehabilitated and provided with new equipment. Phases one through six of the programme with an overall funding of EUR 122 million were successfully completed in 1996. During the seventh and eighth phases, known as the Quality Education Support Programme, functional and child-friendly schools are built in Asyut, Sohag and Sharqia, and targeted measures are taken to reinforce parent and municipal councils as well as administrative structures.

Context

Nearly half of Egyptian schoolchildren are not able to fluently read and write after five years of school. This is partly due to heavily overcrowded classes; in the project district of Belbeis, a class has an average of 52 pupils and the numbers are increasing. Teachers are not able to respond to the educational needs of the children – instead of acquiring life skills, the focus is on stolidly learning the curriculum by heart. Overcrowding in schools impedes qualitative improvements, and the building conditions continue to deteriorate.

Project approach

In the Quality Education Support Programme (QESP), the need for additional school capacity is first being evaluated together with the authority for educational buildings and the municipality (Integrated Village Planning). Based on this plan, the existing schools are rehabilitated and additional classrooms are added or new schools built. There are comprehensive training sessions in each school that instruct teachers, parents and administrators how to use the new facilities and also how to organise classes. There is also a Simple Maintenance Award.

The constructed schools are fully functional schools that are child-friendly. High-quality education begins with an environment suited to the needs of the children. For example, windows should not be on the side of the building facing the sun because temperatures in the rooms can reach up to 45 degrees Celsius during the summer months. The schoolyard needs to be designed in a way that is suitable for children and provides enough shade. Classrooms must also be large enough for the large number of children.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project name</th>
<th>Quality Education Support Programme</th>
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<tr>
<td>Commissioned by</td>
<td>German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Country/Region</td>
<td>Egypt</td>
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<td>Lead executing agency</td>
<td>Ministry of Education and Technical Education</td>
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This selection of criteria for a functional school illustrates how substantially functional schools contribute to learning quality.

Because the schools are tailored to fit the local conditions, individual school designs emerge. The right location is also important. If schools are more than three kilometres away, only 30% of girls are sent to school. On the other hand, if the schools are only up to one kilometre away, over 70% of girls are sent to school. This information can be used to counteract the gender gap.

Three to four children often need to share one bench or two chairs. QESP schools are equipped with a combination of ergonomic chairs and benches so that the teachers can flexibly react to growing class sizes and are also able to deviate from a “chalk and talk” teaching approach. Equipment for geography or physical education classes is also included.

The infrastructure measures are supported by a social component. This approach is used in two areas: in class itself and in school management. Teachers are often overburdened with the large number of school-children and do not have appropriate training in how to constructively and peacefully handle the situation. Local NGOs are now involved in providing additional educational training for the teachers. The second training block introduces school management, teachers and pupils to how to adequately use and maintain the school and the equipment provided. Activities like collectively cleaning the classrooms or schoolyard are simple but effective methods to keep schools in good condition. According to a concept called “Kaizen”, everyone in the school is included so that everyone can identify themselves with the learning environment and develop suggestions for improvement and proactive initiatives. This will counteract the reckless way school equipment was handled in the past and impart valuable life skills.

The Simple Maintenance Award Fund (SMAF) intends to further strengthen this process. Structured as a competition, incentives are provided so that the schools are able to be maintained over the long term. Primary schools that have demonstrated good maintenance practices in the past are able to apply for additional financial support. The SMAF is widely known amongst the schools, which contributes to the success of the maintenance fund. Thousands of applications are submitted every year as the programme is designed to be simple so schools can easily follow the procedure.

**Impact**

In the last six phases, 900 individual projects were undertaken for new construction, expansion, or rehabilitation of primary schools. 2,050 children and teaching staff participated in what is known as the Active Learning Days; 383,000 children already benefit from child-friendly and functional schools from the previous programmes.

Proactive initiatives also developed out of the training blocks that were offered. One example is the initiative for disposing of broken school furniture that was stored in the schools, blocking classrooms. It began in the Minsha’a district and quickly expanded to numerous public schools in two other governorates. This illustrates that the right stimulus can inspire proactive initiatives at local level.

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