

# ISHRAQ



## A Second Chance Program for Marginalized Rural Girls in Upper Egypt

**IN THE BEGINNING:** In Egypt, out-of-school girls in rural areas are the most disadvantaged and the most underserved. In 2001, working with information gathered by the 1997 Adolescence and Social Change Survey (ASCE), the Population Council, in partnership with Save the Children, Caritas, and the Center for Development and Population Activities (CEDPA) designed a program to provide girls with safe learning spaces. The program, called **Ishraq**, meaning “enlightenment,” intervened during the crucial years of early adolescence, providing a second chance to learn, and an opportunity to socialize with other girls and delay marriage.

The pilot program was implemented in four villages in El-Minya governorate and enrolled 278 girls. The girls were offered a package of skills—literacy, numeracy, life skills, and, for the first time in Egypt, sports—to prepare them for integration into formal schooling. For 30 months, girls ages 13-15 met four times a week with Ishraq **promoters**: local female secondary school graduates recruited by Ishraq to teach. 92% of the girls who sat for the government literacy exam passed, and 68.5% of them went on to enroll in preparatory school. They expressed a desire to marry at an older age, objected to female genital mutilation (FGM), and joined local associations.

### THE OBJECTIVES

- ☀️ Create safe public spaces for girls where they can learn, make friends, and lay foundation for citizenship
- ☀️ Improve girls’ functional literacy, recreational opportunities, life skills, health knowledge and attitudes, mobility, basic livelihoods, and civic engagement
- ☀️ Positively influence social norms by mobilizing the community and developing peer networks
- ☀️ Institutionalize the Ishraq model with an emphasis on girl-friendly spaces

**ISHRAQ NOW:** Based on the success of the pilot, in 2009, with a grant from the Minister for Development Cooperation of the Royal Kingdom of the Netherlands (through their Embassy in Cairo), Ishraq and its partners, the Population Council, Caritas, Teaming for Development (TFD, formerly CEDPA), the Egyptian Food Bank, and Save the Children, launched an ambitious scale-up in 3 Upper Egypt governorates: Sohag, Qena, and Fayoum. 1800 previously out-of-school girls, now ranging in age from 11-15, enrolled in Ishraq.

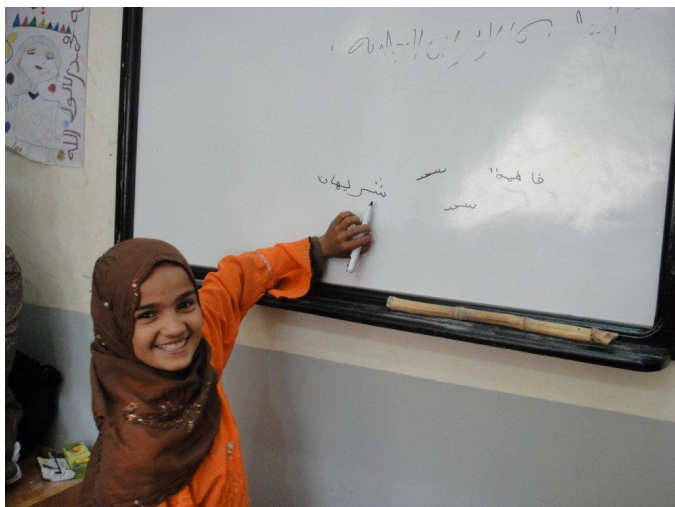
**Ishraq’s holistic approach—developing skills, increasing self-confidence, and building citizenship—brings a girl from isolation to awareness, changing her future and the future of Egypt.**

### THE PEOPLE

- ☀️ **Promoter:** a female high school graduate recruited from the local community and trained as a teacher and mentor of participating girls. She is the critical link between the girls, their families, and the Ishraq project team.

*“Ishraq fulfilled our dreams to be educated and respected by our families and our communities.”*

*- Ishraq participant*



An Ishraq girl in Qena writes her name on the board. (photo by Nadia Zibani)

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## THE PROCESS



### EVALUATION

Assessing the impact



### IDENTIFICATION

Selecting villages, girls, promoters, & NGOs



### TRAINING

Introducing curriculum & training promoters at the village level



### EXAMINATION

Testing the girls



### COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION

Mobilizing community & engaging families



### IMPLEMENTATION

Opening classes

*“For the first time in my life I learned that girls have equal rights to education as boys. In the past my understanding was that girls did not need to be educated because they were going to marry.”*

-Ishraq participant



An Ishraq graduate from the pilot phase

### NOTES FROM THE FIELD, FAYOUM: “Why did you have to wait for Ishraq before you invested in your girls?”

asked Nadia Zibani, Ishraq Senior Program Officer, on a recent visit to El Mawalek in Fayoum governorate. It is a simple question that, for a poor village pushed from the oasis to the edge of an inhospitable desert, is difficult to answer.

El Mawalek’s location is not the sole evidence of its poverty. Potable water has only been available for a year. There is no health center within walking distance, and many residents suffer from curable maladies. A listless Ishraq girl had yet to find treatment for her anemia, but begged to remain in class. Before Ishraq, El Mawalek’s educational facilities were limited to one primary school, just three years old. Before Ishraq, only boys were educated. Girls stayed home, waiting for marriage.

Before Ishraq, girls in El Mawalek had no time to be concerned about their own future. Financial pressure to work in the field and home kept them busy; social pressure kept them isolated. Their seclusion made others in the village perceive them to be ignorant, and they had no means of convincing anyone otherwise.



Girls in El Mawalek take the first literacy exam. (photo by Nadia Zibani)

In spite of the obstacles, El Mawalek’s girls are no longer staying hidden. The village’s youth center director—whose lined forehead showed years of work and worry—marveled at the high turnout. **“What am I supposed to do with the girls when they demand education?”** he wondered.

On the day of Zibani’s visit, El Mawalek’s girls walked together from their homes to take the first literacy exam. They entered the youth center in a cacophony of friendly chatter. Each spoke passionately about her future. They wanted to be nurses and teachers and business owners, and saw the chance to be good mothers and happy wives. One girl put it simply, **“I want to learn so that I can help other people.”** Throughout the day, she would say this more than once.

## THE NUMBERS

3 governorates

30 villages

60 classrooms

1800 girls

*“Who could believe the day would come when we would be able to enter the youth center? We never dared come close because it was for men only. Now we are equal; we have the right to go there.” - Ishraq promoter*