

# **Sustainable Ismailia Governorate Project**

## **CASE STUDY**

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### **Introduction**

In 1992 UNCHS (Habitat) initiated the Sustainable Ismailia Project as the second city in its global Sustainable Cities Programme. This programme has since grown considerably and valuable experience has been gained in generating effective locally – based environmental planning and management. UNDP/ Egypt has been supporting the governorate of Ismailia in managing the Sustainable Ismailia Project since its inception. Thus having continued involvement of UNCHS and UNDP will provide logical continuity as well as technical and management support.

### **Background on Ismailia Governorate**

Ismailia Governorate is located at the east of the Nile Delta covering an area of approximately 4482.8 km<sup>2</sup> along the west and east banks of the Suez Canal. It comprises five cities and Marakez with Ismailia city as its capital. Total population is 715 thousand while Ismailia city's population is about 471 thousand individuals.

The economic base of Ismailia is dominated by its administrative and service functions (83% of the labour force is engaged in the service sector). The city of Ismailia hosts the head quarters of the Suez Canal Authority and offices of Ismailia Governorate as well as being the premises of Suez Canal University and a number of directorates. In addition to this there are various agricultural activities, and Ismailia is famous for its distinguished crops such as mangoes, strawberries and tomatoes and accordingly this is connected with the existence of agro-industrial activities.

Moreover, being on a central axis between the cities of Port Said, Suez and Sinai and being so near to Cairo, the capital, gave a special attractive position for being an exporting outlet for Egyptian agricultural and industrial products.

Moreover, the construction of the Ferdan Bridge over the Suez Canal, the establishment of the Valley of Technology as well as El Salam irrigation canal serving land reclamation projects constitutes greatly in the development of Ismailia Governorate.

However, Ismailia city, the capital, as well as the entire governorate's cities and Marakez suffered from common environmental and economic problems. These problems are mainly the limited water resources characterized by low quality, constraints hindering micro enterprises, entrepreneurs suffering from limited access to business management knowledge mainly in the field of technology and marketing. Pollution of both lake Timsah and the Bitter Lakes threatens tourism and fishing activities. Furthermore, the problems resulting from the creation of informal settlements, which covers about 2,000 acres in Ismailia city alone has brought about many social and economic problems thus putting much pressure on local authorities to provide services for those settlements. In addition to that, the huge land reclamation projects are putting more demands on water resources.

## **Why was Ismailia Governorate chosen?**

Ismailia was considered to be a suitable SCP city for a variety of reasons; the first is that Ismailia's particular physical characteristics allow the relation between environmental and development issues to be brought into sharp focus. The second reason is that Ismailia reflects the Egyptian secondary city case where local government and citizens must rely upon their own development initiatives in a political environment, which as in all Egyptian governorates, still remains dominated by central government.

The project of Sustainable Growth and Development in Ismailia (SIP), is a typical pilot project that reflects the ideology of Sustainable Cities Program. It aims at setting forth a scenario for the sustainable development of Ismailia so as to ensure a lasting socio – economic growth, which goes side by side with sound resources and environmental management. As such SIP is the first of its kind not only in Egypt but in the Arab world as well.

## **The project had been implemented in two stages (projects ):**

- a) Sustainable Ismailia Project (SIP-I), which was concerned with Ismailia city and markaz (1993).
- b) Sustainable Ismailia Governorate Project SIP-II (SIGP) (a replication of Ismailia city experience) thus covering the entire Governorate of Ismailia with all its cities and markaz (1997), with special focus on training and capacity building.

Accordingly a permanent training and capacity building center was established in Ismailia in order to train local officials, NGO and CBO members how to work together to better serve their communities. UNCHS sent training materials in English and SIP staff members translated them into Arabic.

## **The two stages had four main objectives:**

- Strengthening participatory urban and environmental planning and management capacities. (EPM).
- Preparing long term strategic development plans.
- Preparing public investment project proposals to mobilize funding.
- Training and capacity building for local leaders, NGOs, CBOs, Women and Youth.

The main thrust of the project was to develop a process, which centers on a participatory approach towards both development and environmental improvement activities, based upon the principles of stakeholder representation, dialogue, share of information, transparency, and community ownership. This process is not at all seen as replacing existing local government structures or responsibilities, but in complementing them and helping to make them more effective.

EPM process and strategic planning also produce projects with vital importance to all sectors resulting in an integrated development which in turn enhances the community to apply all its sources and facilities to implement the projects.

The mechanism of working groups, which brings together all stakeholders, actors and popular representatives and characterized by broad presentation and flexibility, is considered the backbone of the EPM process the key objective of the project at all levels. Working groups fulfil the co-ordination and completion among the different sections at the desired level. Also working groups are capable of dealing with complex problems characterized by multi-concerned sides (upgrading areas). Moreover, exchange of information between working group members helped to clarify problems, provided fruitful discussions, which turned results to actual working plans. It also identified the responsibilities and roles of different parties but some stakeholders may not be willing to cooperate or share information, and some of them may not always be able to attend the group meetings. Therefore, the careful selection of stakeholders, the explanation of the EPM processes fully to and orientation them on their expected roles and inputs should be given big attention. Also, because WGs. are heterogeneous with varying capacities knowledge among the members, facilitators could assist in explaining some tools like brainstorming, problem analysis, negotiation etc. The incentives for working groups. Members should be connected to inputs rather than attendance.

The experience of SIP suggests that the role of key individuals can be crucial. Project management, which provides consistent leadership, based on a sensitive understanding of the local area, an ability to build consensus and mobilize partners, and skills in negotiating cooperation and agreement has been a factor mentioned by nearly all persons with knowledge of the SIP. Equally important in the SIP case appears to have been the ability of Project management to maintain a low-profile, letting other organizations and actors take a lead -and take "ownership". This style of project management was very well attuned to the needs of Ismailia and enabled the Project to operate smoothly and make steady progress.

## **EPM Process Dynamic**

The EPM process typically involves four distinct phases. These are:

- Information and Expertise
- Prioritisation, negotiating strategies and decision making
- Implementing strategies
- Mobilizing and efficient use of resources

The primary reference for all WGs was the Environmental Profile (EP) prepared by an external consultant in 1992 prior to the formation of the WGs. The EP provided a general overview of a broad number of urban environmental issues such as water, waste water, agricultural development, industrial development, pollution of Lake Timsah, solid waste management, and upgrading of informal settlements, with few specific recommendations.

Beside the EP: Speaking about Lake Timsah working group , both the “Technical Support Unit” together with the Lake Timsah WG ( LTWG) produced a document entitled Sustainable development of Lake Timsah. In the case of Urban Development working group, had also obtained information on informal settlements and slum areas through conducting social sample surveys and physical surveys. In addition, WGs initiated a process of obtaining information from the various stakeholders and governmental sources. This was not a straightforward process. For both the LTWG and the UDWG, project management through formal and informal channels of

communication initiated involving stakeholders. The City Consultation also provided a good opportunity to identify and solicit active participation of key stakeholders.

### **The Institutional framework of the project**

The SIP project was composed of the following:

The project Technical Support Unit gave technical support to the working groups and provided overall coordination for project activities. The Technical Support Unit was headed by a National Project Director and staffed with technical and administrative personnel. One vital role played by the National Project Director was that she daily liaisons between project activities and the local political structure.

The technical support unit had considerable technical resources in terms of national and international experts in the areas of environmental management, information systems, financial analysis, project feasibility studies, computer mapping, etc. The unit also provided direct technical, research, and administrative support to the working groups.

Moreover, a steering committee comprising 15 members was formulated for the purpose of building direct links with the most important institutional actors in the development and environmental sectors.

The committee was chaired by the governor of Ismailia and composed primarily of high- level officials from the governorate, the Suez Canal Authority, the Suez Canal University, and from central level development agencies and ministries. Citizens were represented through the chairman of city and governorate – level, local popular councils and heads of private groups. In this capacity, as chairman of the steering committee, the governor took keen interest in the project and devoted much of his very limited time to advancing its activities.

Latter on, and for the purpose of institutionalising the participatory approach a high level umbrella organ called “ the Council for Sustainable Development” of Ismailia has been established by a decree issued by His Excellency the Governor of Ismailia on June 1995 to replace the former steering committee. The Council had members representing all stakeholders in the Governorate such as SCA, SCU, Ismailia Governorate, Chamber of Commerce, SIP, the media, Local Popular Council... Subsequently, the SIP I project’s office was moved to the premises of the governorate, which in turn had deepened the institutionalisation of EPM process.

### **The project as a framework for coordination**

The value of the project as a framework for better coordination on environmental and development issues has already been demonstrated. The project was forging cross-sectoral, issue- specific links within local government and between government and key actors on the local scene, such as the Suez Canal University, Private sector entrepreneurs and popular interest groups.

For example the urban development working group included: the Deputy Mayor, The Head of The Physical Planning department, a Professor of planning and an expert from the local research center, representatives of the different political parties, the chairman and a member of the popular council, the head of the labour department, and third region representative.

## **Setting and Clarifying Priority Issues**

Stakeholders in all WGs represented a wide range of interests. Individual priorities were often far apart which made setting priority sub-issues a considerable challenge. In the case of the LTWG, the priority of the SCA was navigation while; fishermen were concerned with their source of livelihood, the Lake's fish. Private resorts on the other hand were concerned with attracting tourists while the community at large was concerned with the safety of fish consumption. These conflicting interests were resolved through reaching consensus on a set of criteria for prioritising sub-issues. The LTWG established criteria reflecting environmental, economic and public health concerns.

The issue clarification process involved a number of techniques and tools. Besides routine information collection, issue analysis and mapping were indispensable. Water quality tests conducted on the Lake's coasts were instrumental in identifying the most polluted areas and for routine monitoring. The UDWG employed field visits as a primary method of field investigation.

The stage culminated in the holding of four parallel issue specific mini-consultations, which brought together resource persons and stakeholders to clarify priorities and consider strategic options.

## **Prioritisation, Negotiation and Decision Making:**

Once clarification of priority sub-issues was complete, WGs commenced on a process of issue analysis and considered policy and implementation options available. The purpose was to formulate strategies in which a common vision for the future could evolve. Unfamiliar with strategic planning, WG discussions often transgressed to project implementation. Nonetheless, an integral part of the process was the revision of central and local plans and strategies in order to ensure consistency with national priorities. Once WGs generated their respective strategies, an Environmental Strategy Review Workshop was held to review issues specific and environmental management strategies formulated by the WGs. The workshop signalled out priorities, which are agricultural, industrial and urban development as well as the development of Lake Timsah and identified two more priority issues namely human development and water resources for which new WGs were formed. In fact the WGs prepared a comprehensive Strategic Development Plan (SDP), which integrated the inter-linked issue-specific strategies and policy interventions into a single planning document. Had the SDP been adopted as a formal and official statement of the governorate's long term vision, this could have set the stage for reorienting the planning process in Ismailia. The SDP now requires updating and official endorsement in order for it to become Ismailia's sanctioned blue print for development into the century.

During all the previous phases, Experiences of the University Professors (Suez Canal University and other Egyptian Universities) have been used, hence we can say that a cadre of National expertise who benefited from the experience was produced, the gained experience started in the training field. As a result those national expertise moderated the Projects' Specification Working Sessions sufficiently.

## **Projects Identification and Prioritisation**

SIP objectives have targeted –in general – for building and supporting an effective management system to undertake the tasks and responsibilities of sustainable growth and development of Ismailia City as a major goal. All processes, operations, activities,

and sub-phases such as developing strategies, institutional reform.... etc, have been formulated and attuned toward this major goal. The main objectives of SIP were to develop and produce a set of projects that target and respond to immediate needs and priorities of development and environmental management of Ismailia.

A National consultant was hired to support the technical unit to achieve the following objectives:

- Identification of a set of projects as identified earlier in environmental management strategy statements (project long list).
- Selection of priority projects with working groups (project short list).
- Conducting pre-appraisal studies for the short list projects and selection of minimum 3 projects for pre-feasibility study phase (PFP's).
- Preparation of pre-feasibility studies for selected projects including project development plans.

### **Implementing Strategies**

The broad strategies conceived by the WGs acted as the necessary framework for agreeing on and initiating concrete actions and interventions. WGs began developing a long list of projects. Initially, some 36-project ideas were generated. Project prioritisation criteria were then developed collectively by the WGs and each criterion was given an arbitrary weight. The criteria reflected key environmental, economic, social and institutional concerns. These criteria were used to prioritise the long list of projects. Nine projects were short-listed for further development and implementation. Standard project data sheets were prepared for each of the priority projects. A number of projects were developed into pre-feasibility studies while others were developed into full-fledged project documents.

### **Mobilizing and Effective Use of Resources**

Resource mobilization for priority projects proceeded along a number of axes . This included tapping resources from the Governorate's capital budget and requesting that projects be incorporated in future central budget cycles. Proceeds from land sales and cost sharing by the communities in slum areas to finance upgrading projects constituted important sources of funding. A funding Consultation was also convened in an effort to solicit additional funding.

The Funding Consultation is of particular interest since it represented a new EPM related procedure introduced to the Governorate for the first time in 1996. The purpose of The Funding Consultation was to show case the portfolio of priority projects with corresponding field visits organized to some of the proposed project site.

The Funding Consultation was attended by a considerable number of national and bi-lateral funding agencies. However, the event created considerable publicity for SIP and opened avenues of dialogue with funding agencies.

Since then, a number of the priority projects have been funded via central and local resources. The covered drainage project received funds from a central tourism development fund. The solid waste management is expected to receive funds from the

Social Fund for Development (SFD) while the restoration of Lake Timsah had been officially enlisted among priority state projects and has received a code number for consideration in the budget of the Governorate's current Five Year Development Plan.

The significance of small funds and kind contributions in project implementation deserves to be highlighted. For instance, an unused irrigation ditch in the informal settlement of Kilo 2 area used as an open dumping site quickly became a public health menace due to rodents. Using private donations, the ditch was filled. A citizen from the same area donated a piece of land (120 square meters) in order to build a new electricity booth. In El Bahtini area, a citizen exchanged his land for similar lot elsewhere in order to facilitate the building of a sewage station for the local community.

### **Fast Track Projects**

Beside strategy led projects, SIP initiated a number of fast track actions. These are mostly short –term actions characterized by a sense of urgency. In all cases, the EPM process helped arouse popular interest and political support and facilitated the co-ordination among the key players involved. The transportation project for graduate youth for example helped in solving the inadequacy of public transportation to the Industrial Zone and El Mostakbel City. Through the purchase of a fleet of minibuses with SFD funding, this project has created approximately 50 permanent jobs.

Another fast track action initiated by SIP was a study proposing the relocation and establishment of a new wholesale market. Previously, the market was located in the busy center of the City of Ismailia, creating traffic congestion and environmental problems owing to inadequate solid waste disposal systems. Intensive efforts by SIP have resulted in the relocation of the market to a new site and the establishment of a new private managing and owning company, the Ismailia Company for Wholesale Markets.

Apart from these two major fast track actions, a number of demonstrations – type projects have also been initiated. These include periodic dredging and cleaning up Lake Timsah as Suez Canal Authority allocated 50 million Egyptian pounds for cleaning the lake.

### **LESSONS LEARNT**

- Political Support of local government (governor and local Popular Council) is very important and without this support the process would have never been successful.
- Environmental concerns can be part of the development agenda at the city level:

EPM process has brought environmental concerns on the development agenda and sharpened the focus on managing natural resources and thus clearly showed the success of and the need to continue cross sectoral coordination and interested parties participation.

- EPM promotes information sharing; the EPM process stimulated local players representing different interests to share information. Preparing the environmental profile and disseminating it along local actors, circulating research results among interested parties and discussing specific issues in working groups made sharing information easy. EPM process emerged a mechanism that is *sine qua non* for existing development arrangements to be effective.

- Participation causes institutional transformation:

Inviting the representatives of different interest groups in Ismailia to participate in the different events such as City Consultations, working groups meetings, mini consultations had persuaded these institutions to adapt EPM as a process for urban planning and management.

When SIP shifted gears towards strategic projects' identifications and development, the participation of end users was important, suggesting the importance of inviting NGO's and CBO's to participate in the process. The establishment of the Society for Development and Environment came in response to meet this need. Also, establishing this NGO made it easier to mobilize resources for project implementation by this NGO made it easier to mobilize resources for project implementation by approaching donor agencies interested in financing NGOs.

- Preparation and studying the Environmental Profile “ EP “ is essential to set up strategies and priorities as well as clarification of issues. But to make the EP more reliable and a credible source of information, the data from different sources should be cross-checked and continuously innovated. This requires establishing official technical unit comprises experts and technicians able to obtain data and statistics from their original or primary sources, analyse them and extract information and conclusions in this respect. The Sustainable Committees at the markaz level should be sustained and supported financially and technically.
- EPM process and strategic planning produce projects with vital importance to all sectors resulting in an integrated development which in turn enhances the community to apply all its resources and facilities to implement the projects. In this respect, the project team should always keep a portfolio of project ideas ready in case unexpected funding opportunities arise. Also, fast track actions and demonstration projects should receive utmost publicity and media coverage.
- EPM processes build technical capacities, SIP had had close functional relations with the governorate and its different departments and committees. Members of the technical Support Unit (TSU) of SIP gained experience in cross-sectoral coordination, and generating and using information. These members will constitute a resource for SIP II by acting as technical support for the EPM introduction in the remaining four markaz. Further more the intensive and productive involvement by representatives of the interested parties (Known as stakeholders under SIP) in the working group activities had also deepened the commitment to the EPM institutional set-ups.
- Capacity building and enhancing capabilities of the local stakeholders and different partners is the only guarantee for the continuity and development of the EPM process in both executive and elected councils and other partners from private sector, NGOs and CBOs. In particular, the local governmental organizations should be given the utmost attention in this respect that to realize the participation of all partners in the sustainable development and growth of the community.

- The NGOs and CBOs member in the governorate as well as in the entire country are in need to intensive training and informative programs to fulfil effectively their participatory role in the process of environmental planning and sustainable development beside their classical social roles.

### **The national and international support to SIP and SIGP**

In Ismailia, the administrative and funding support from UNDP and the technical and substantive support from UNCHS appear generally to have operated smoothly and effectively, to the significant benefit of the project. The SIP and the SIGP have also received timely and beneficial support from the UNDP program officers assigned to the Project.