

Early Memories of El Bayad HDP

Jo Nelson (who participated in El Bayad, September 1976 – March 31, 1978)
answers questions about her experience
August 2019

I am still involved at a distance in July 2019. I visited with staff in February 2018 and interviewed them, particularly about "residue".

1. How would you summarize the focus of the HDP during the period you were there? This was the beginning of the project: the focus was the Consult and all of the strategies that came from the Consult – preschool and education, water, agriculture, sustainable business, setting up a Community Development Association, health caretakers.
2. What key HDP accomplishments were realized while you were there? Clean, filtered water from a well near the Nile, piped to a tap in the community through donated pipes set in trenches dug in the limestone through a series of Friday afternoon workdays. A preschool run by village women. Literacy classes for women. Several beginning small industries (which alas did not survive). An experiment with drip irrigation on the edge of the desert. A CDA in process of being registered.
3. What about the project worked well and why? Weekly "stake" meetings with education about the world through stories of other HDP's. These were mostly co-facilitated with expats and local Egyptian staff and there was lots of learning all round. The preschool was a resounding success (see residue below). Local young women became literate and began planning their own curriculum within a year and a half. Teamwork between Muslim and Christian villagers was strengthened.
4. What did not work so well and why? The activities that needed "expert" input such as in agriculture and business did not have adequate support and local knowledge. ICA staff had some, but not enough to translate into locally successful, sustainable projects.
5. What from the project are the most important "lessons learned" you'd like to share with others. Learn to become a "human being" to local people, sharing knowledge with each other respectfully rather than paternalistically. Example: the idea of using black plastic to keep weeds down around tomatoes instead of carefully placed sorghum stalks would have meant importing the plastic at great expense, and would not have sustainably used a local resource, which could also be placed at such an angle to protect the tomato plants from cold winds while capturing the sun on the opposite side (The Boivin/Said story). Or the Sheikh Mustapha story, where going into his back room and milking his cow made me a "fellaha" or farmer like he was rather than an "habla", or educated foreigner that knew nothing that could help the village. (Afterward he offered my husband Wayne two buffalo and a cow for me as a joke, which I took as an expression of my worth in his mind.)

Outsiders do not have the depth of generosity that local people often have, especially in Egyptian culture. We outsiders give from what we can spare rather than all that we have. I once ate eggs pressed upon me as gratitude for the preschool that I knew were the children's dinner, because I knew intuitively that to refuse the generosity would have hurt people deeply in a way that would be difficult to recover from. At the same time I discovered my resentment in sharing tea over and over from our limited food budget.

6. How would you describe long-term results, or "residue," of the project? What can be seen today? This is the report from ICA Egypt, ICA-MENA, in February 2018, when asked this question:
 - More than 25 strong CDA's in Beni Suef Governate

- A small loan fund for small businesses, coupled with how to start and manage income generation
- Farming – modern techniques – others are imitating – e.g. solar, bio-gas
- Capacity building – build wide networks and NGO's getting funding from others
- After capacity building, mentoring and coaching: leaders developing for international and national development agencies from living and acting together
- For other governates: Contracts for building capacity all over Egypt – many projects in each governate – training, implementation, network
- Trainees in GIZ -- management
- Preschool – Montessori curriculum – started in Bayad, now all over Egypt. Training of teachers
- Ministries using Participatory Rural Appraisal – used in ICA 20 years ago, and they got it from us
- Further education – work with government to engage health education with children
 - Child-to-child – using for 20 years through ICA
 - Also women-to-women – educating non-literate women
- Government uses our health caretakers and builds on their skills
- ICA-trained people hired by agencies have high standard

Mahmoud el Rashidi, who was on our staff at the beginning, went on to become the Dean of Sociology at Minya University and taught many students about participatory development. His daughter is doing the same, and one son works for a development agency in Minya.

7. What relevance does project work in Bayad have for challenges being faced in the world today?
 - Participation in decision-making that affects people's lives is being demanded – the support for creative participation rather than opposition, and tools for looking for the wisdom rather than the surface level are desperately needed.
 - You don't have to be educated to have wisdom about your own life. (People knew bilharzia in the water was killing them slowly; but there was no other option at the time. The only available water was contaminated until we all (educated foreigners as well as villagers) discovered that the soil could filter it. Educated Egyptians at the time thought that villagers weren't capable of knowing.
 - Those who have the opportunity to work shoulder-to-shoulder with people different from themselves have the possibility of having their lives transformed. It only works if the people affected themselves are in charge of what is needed.
8. Please share newspaper clippings or other public items that you might still have about the project. I have a blog, on which the first 3 entries from 2015 are a memoir about my personal experience in Bayad, done for a writing class and titled "The Making of an Ordinary Revolutionary". The link for this part of the blog is <https://jofacilitator.ca/?s=egypt>