

Room to Grow

USAID supports new efforts to automate and increase storage space at the perishable goods terminal at the Cairo Airport

The perishables terminal in Cairo will have an additional 33 percent daily capacity and move from a manual to an automated system as a result of nearly LE 1.3 million in grants from two USAID projects to the Horticultural Export Improvement Association (HEIA).

HEIA, representing the country's largest agribusiness exporters as Egypt's leading horticultural trade association, received a LE 400,000 grant from the Information and Communication Technology Program (ICT) that will allow the terminal to become automated and web enabled as an e-business pilot project. Also, a LE 882,200 grant from USAID's Agricultural Exports and Rural Incomes (AERI) Project's Support to Trade Associations and Smallholder Groups Activity will allow HEIA to add 100 tons of additional daily capacity to the 300-ton-capacity terminal.

continued, p 4



A woman in Minya watches over a restless cow during a USAID-sponsored veterinary campaign.

On Solid Ground

Farmers in Upper Egypt are starting to reap the benefits of USAID's activities in agriculture that aim to raise incomes and expand exports

Midway through a four-year, USAID-led effort to transform the livelihoods of Upper Egypt's smallholders, project officials are seeing tangible gains farmers and livestock producers are making as a result of the assistance they are receiving. Two activities that tailor their services in horticulture and dairy and livestock have recently released reports demonstrating the impact of their activities under the Agricultural Exports and Rural Incomes (AERI) Project. About 100 associations represent thousands of farmers and livestock holders in Upper Egypt.

A report from EL SHAMS, which stands for Enhanced Livelihoods from Smallholder Horticultural Activities Managed Sustainability, documents the improvements of participating farmers across Upper Egypt. AERI's Smallholder Livestock and Dairy Producers and Organizations Activity has released a similar report showing how producers have benefited from more

balanced, cost-efficient feed mixtures, improvements in the quality and price of milk, and greater veterinary care services.

Among one of AERI's most important goals is helping farmers and dairy and livestock smallholders organize into associations that help their members make more money, secure business for the future, and have access to valuable information and training opportunities. The project also aims to give women a more active role in agriculture to help decrease gender gaps in employment and income.

One farmer in the Fayoum governorate, Bakry, has seen his income almost triple since he became connected to services provided in his village by EL SHAMS. Once he had high hopes of a time when his 8-feddan farm would bring his family of 10 more than LE 24,000 a year. With help from USAID, Bakry is no longer planting crops haphazardly but has used training opportunities and market information to switch from traditional crops to more lucrative medicinal and aromatic plants. Exceeding all expectations, his income will

continued, p 7

In this issue...

- P2 Managing Risk at the Border
- P2 Opening a window into trade talks
- P3 Egyptian woman first to head a WIPO assembly
- P4 Significant new effort underway to support economic reform
- P4 World Bank credits Egypt on customs reform
- P6 Microfinance Program reaches out to 1 mil. borrowers and counting
- P8 AmCham launches new trade project

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Opening a Window into Trade Talks

Journalists learn about the government's strategy for this December's world trade talks in Hong Kong

Dozens of Egyptian journalists have been receiving a detailed overview of the government's strategy for the upcoming Doha Development Agenda negotiations in the World Trade Organization (WTO). Starting in October, USAID's Assistance for Trade Reform (ATR) Project and the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Industry kicked off a series of briefings that serve to give the local press a comprehensive overview of the WTO and thus help them better inform their readers and listeners about the ongoing trade negotiations leading up to the December WTO ministerial meeting in Hong Kong.

Foreign Trade and Industry Minister Rachid Mohammed Rachid chaired the first briefing on Oct. 17 and has taken an active role ever since. The first briefing focused on agricultural issues with Waleed El-Nozahy, the head of the Central Department for WTO, offering

an overview of the Doha Development Agenda negotiations and the WTO.

A second briefing was held on October 24, providing further information on the agriculture negotiations with a focus on cotton. Further briefings through mid-November provided information on the non-agricultural market access, and services negotiations. The sessions will continue through early December. In mid-December the Minister will travel to Hong Kong with some of the reporters involved in the briefings to participate in the Hong Kong WTO Ministerial Meeting.

Officials involved point to the briefings as further demonstration of the Government of Egypt's growing ability and effort to develop an international trade strategy that serves the nation's best interests and communicate that strategy to the public in a transparent fashion. Minister Rachid and his staff have answered numerous questions from the press during the briefings, articulating how they are representing Egypt's interests in the ongoing negotiations. Additionally, Minister Rachid has used the briefings as an opportunity to showcase the talent of key younger staff members of the Ministry.

ATR also teamed up with the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Industry and the

European Union-sponsored Trade Enhancement Program—A to sponsor a conference in November that brought business leaders, representatives of the press, government officials, and academics into a broader discussion on the government's trade strategy.

ATR has been working with the staff of the Central Department for WTO of the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Industry for over three years, providing training and mentoring on a wide range of issues relevant to the ongoing WTO negotiations. ATR's support has included general training in negotiations, management, and IT skills, along with significant technical training in the skills needed to actively participate in the current negotiations. ATR has also supported 18 staff of the Ministry by providing scholarships that have permitted them to attend the MBA program offered jointly by the Ministry's Foreign Trade Training Center and the Arab Academy. 

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Managing Risk at the Border

Customs officials seek tools to measure a shipment's risk without peaking inside

Two USAID projects have teamed up again to help their Egyptian counterparts, the Egyptian Customs Authority (ECA) and General Organization for Export and Import Control (GOEIC), develop a system that moves goods through the border more efficiently and effectively by using information, analysis and technology as opposed to physical exams that bottleneck shipments and tend to be ineffective.

The USAID Initial Implementation Task for Customs (IITC) and the Assistance for Trade Reform (ATR) projects brought customs and GOEIC officials together in October to find ways the agencies could increase their cooperation to facilitate trade. The meeting resulted in a joint statement signed by officials that defines the reasons why goods are being held up at the border, offers joint solutions and sets a performance target for the agencies to achieve by February 2006.

"Without risk management, scarce resources of both GOEIC and Customs are spread thinly, making it difficult to focus on

high-risk shipments and giving opportunities for disreputable traders to avoid detection," reads the City Stars Declaration, named after the place it was signed. "IT integration is both critical for implementing risk management and for facilitating trade directly through its power to enable single registration of shipments and joint inspections. We have seen the power of IT integration in Ayn Sokhna and in Damietta and we would like to see cooperation in this area extended to all other ports in Egypt."

Risk management has been adopted by customs agencies worldwide as a proven method to screen for questionable shipments without slowing trade. A risk management system will empower border officials in Egypt to decide whether a shipment can be cleared quickly or warrants further inspection. "By looking at the paperwork they'll know what it is, who shipped it, and who received it," says Tim Buehrer, ATR's chief of party. "At that point, officials can either say, 'Look, there's virtually no risk here,' or 'Oh, we have to take a look at these guys.'"

"IT will play a major role in making sure this comes together," adds Buehrer.

As part of the declaration, officials are resolved to work together to issue new import/export regulations related to risk management; design a risk management

system based on historical information on goods, importers, exporters, countries of export, and other useful information; cooperate where possible to develop an IT system that permits a web-enabled, single point of registration; and carry out inspections jointly when they are needed.

More immediately, Customs and GOEIC officials will seek to use these tools for a pilot project at the Alexandria Port-Dekheila with the aim of moving 60 percent of non-agricultural goods through the green channel — which means no inspection — by mid-February. The current level of goods passing through the green channel is about 10 percent, with goods clearing the customs requirements in an average of three hours.

"While the goal may seem lofty, the will and the skill are there," says Manuel Henriques, chief of party of the USAID IITC. "Having these leaders sign this document reflects well on how the Government of Egypt is looking at its services from the stakeholders' point of view." 

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Taking Judges to Trial

Training sessions provide the opportunity to test judges on their knowledge of intellectual property rights law

The offices of the Government of Egypt involved in intellectual property rights protection have requested additional assistance from the Intellectual Property Rights Assistance (IPRA) to train judges.

The USAID-financed activity had previously been involved in training Egypt's civil inspectors. This was expanded to include State Council Judges and newly appointed judges, and more recently the Ministry of Justice asked IPRA to offer its enforcement training to mid-level judges. In the coming months these judges will be trained on how to apply temporary injunctions for cases of counterfeit goods trademark and pirated goods.

Over the past year, IPRA has helped train both newly appointed judges and judges from the State Council, which is the state's highest court for administrative matters. About 450 judges entering the judicial system were trained in four separate groups over a four-day period this past summer. A particularly popular component of the training was a mock trial that allowed trainees to share how they would determine a case brought before them. The judges were presented with two points of view on an intellectual property rights case and were asked to consider the merits of both sides before explaining why they would decide the case in a certain way.



A group of judges are eager show their legal prowess during a mock trial at a USAID-funded training session.

Afterwards, the judges were involved in a discussion on how the actual case had been handled.

Officials involved in the training were impressed with both the eagerness of the judges' approach to the mock trial and the strength of their responses. "They were very interested and gave well reasoned decisions," says Jaleen Moroney, IPRA's chief of party.

In October of last year, IPRA conducted five days of training for more than 100 judges from the State Council who preside on industrial property appeals committees and hear appeals cases involving offices handling intellectual property. The program addressed issues for each of the offices involved, including the Patent Office, Trademark Office, Industrial Designs Office, Copyright Office, and Plant Variety Protection Office. The training offered an overview of each topic, grounds for refusal of an application, and a review of new elements of the relevant law. Two mock trials, one on a patent issue and another on

a trademark issue, also presented practical opportunities for judges to demonstrate their legal reasoning.

In follow-up work, this past September IPRA sent the Vice President of the State Council and a State Council judge serving on the Trademark Appeal Committee to the annual meeting of the Industrial Property Owners (IPO) in Seattle, Washington and the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office's Trademark Trial and Appeals Board (TTAB) in Washington D.C. The trip brought the judges into discussions on topics such as the role of experts in intellectual property litigation, patent dispute mediation, and estimating infringement damages. ■

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Egyptian Woman to Head International Patent Assembly

Egypt also leads successful effort to have Arabic adopted as an official language for international patent applications to the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO)

Egypt is quickly becoming an active leader in the world of international patent protection. At the WIPO/Patent Cooperation Treaty's annual meeting in October, the 127-member assembly elected

Nadia Abd-Allah, president of the Egyptian Patent Office, to serve as its chairperson. She becomes the first woman to lead the assembly and the first person from Egypt to lead a WIPO assembly.

At the same meeting, the assembly unanimously adopted a measure put forward by Egypt to adopt Arabic as an official language for PCT applications. The change will make it less risky for Arabic-only speaking scientists and inventors to apply for international patent protection. Previously, applications had to be translated into English or French, which required money up front for costly translation in technical areas without any assurances that an application would be approved. This turned the international patent application process into what some experts call a "rich man's game." USAID's Intellectual Property Rights

Activity (IPR) provides technical assistance to Egypt's Patent Office and serves as a liaison between the office and WIPO.

Jaleen Moroney, IPR's Chief of Party, says Egypt's growing prominence within the assembly demonstrates the great strides the country is making in the field of patent protection. After only two years, she says, Egypt has become No. 8 on the list of non-developed counties for the number of patents it citizens have applied for through the PCT. ■

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SUCCESS STORIES

continued from p.1 – 'Room to Grow'

Significantly, the AERI grant has leveraged another LE 329,300 from HEIA, which will share almost 30 percent of the costs for the LE 1.1 million expansion.

HEIA was founded in 1996 with funding from USAID, and works to raise the quality of Egypt's horticultural sector to enable exporters to increase their global market share and obtain premium prices for export products. The HEIA Perishable Goods Terminal, which is operated by Lufthansa, is the only facility of its kind in Egypt, and plays the critical role of storing perishable products that will be exported by major Egyptian exporters in a facility that controls the temperature and humidity levels. Cold storage not only protects the quality of perishable goods, but extends the life of products by reducing the chance of spoilage, which currently leads to the loss of more than 33 percent of Egypt's horticultural production per year.

Since opening in October 2003, the 4,000-square-meter terminal has helped increase Egyptian vegetable and fruit exports by 40 percent, raising the value that Egyptian produce exports command in international markets, thereby increasing profits for Egyptian growers and foreign earnings for the Egyptian economy. The terminal also enhances Egypt's market share, global competitiveness, and credibility of horticultural exporters in the international marketplace.

But Egypt continues to have a much greater potential for export, particularly during the windows of time when the European Union eliminates tariffs on certain



HEIA's Perishable Goods Terminal at the Cairo International Airport will help Egypt deliver produce abroad in a much more efficient and sustained manner.

products in short supply in the European market. Mohamed Omran, a senior agricultural economist at USAID, says the grant from USAID to increase storage space at the terminal will be particularly important during these two- to three-week windows of time when there is a huge demand to move these goods out of the country. Before the terminal opened Omran took part in a study in 2002 showing that Egypt had made only modest gains in using the full potential of the EU's custom-free quotas for goods such as potatoes, oranges, garlic, green beans, onions and strawberries.

This is the second time the terminal will undergo a major expansion. In 2004 the daily

capacity of the terminal was increased from 180 tons to 300 tons.

Despite the growing capacity, the terminal has also been limited by the absence of some critical information that is neither systematically traced nor available to the terminal's users, including confirmation of receipt of shipments at the terminal, guarantee of proper temperature storage, and confirmation of shipment loading on cargo planes. Egypt's top agribusiness exporters agree that having real-time access to such information is a critical step to increasing their global competitiveness.

The new information system aims to accelerate the transfer from a manual (paper) system to the use of ICT in all operations, enable access to market critical information about Egypt's agribusiness exports through a web-accessible knowledge platform, enable secure, online, real-time access to critical financial data of the terminal, increase the level of transparency among stakeholders, and phase into a one-stop-shop for perishable goods tracking. **D**

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NEW INITIATIVES

Substantial New Effort to Support Economic Reform

The Technical Assistance for Policy Reform facility will build on the work of previous USAID projects in support of Egypt's ambitious economic reform agenda

USAID has initiated a reorganization of its approach to managing technical assistance in the economic policy area. The new, four-year Technical Assistance for Policy Reform II (TAPR-II) facility provides USAID and the GOE with a consolidated mechanism that can coordinate USAID's

contributions across most policy areas critical to economic growth, from the trade environment to human resources development.

The facility was created as a result of USAID/Egypt's conclusion that a streamlined approach was needed to support Egypt's efforts. By managing USAID's economic growth activities under the umbrella of one facility, USAID's designers are seeking greater efficiency and flexibility in assisting the GOE's Economic Cabinet and other leaders in Egypt's economic development.

Targeted at some of Egypt's main economic policy objectives, TAPR-II has the capacity to learn, adjust, and grow along with its counterparts in their approaches to achieving results. "That's the beauty of the project," says Richard Laliberte, TAPR-II's Chief of Party.

TAPR-II's counterparts include the Ministry of Finance, the Central Bank of Egypt, the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Industry, Ministry of Investment, the Ministry of Justice, and others. Overall, the facility covers seven components: the trade environment, financial sector modernization, macroeconomic stability, the policy environment for business, facilitating services for the private sector, human resources and program support. TAPR-II is implemented by a contract with BearingPoint, which has assembled a consortium of American and Egyptian companies. **D**

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Egypt Gets Kudos on Reform Progress

A new World Bank report names Egypt one of the boldest reformers of last year

The World Bank has commended Egypt on its efforts to improve the business environment. "Doing Business in 2006: Creating Jobs," one of the World Bank's flagship publications, lists Egypt as one of the top reformers in 2004-2005. In particular, Egypt received high marks for improvements in starting a business, registering property, getting credit, and trading across borders.

The report calls Egypt's decision to streamline customs procedures and trade documents one of "the boldest reforms, driving the biggest improvements in the Doing Business indicators."

"Egypt established a single window for trade documentation and merged 26 approvals into 5," the report states. "A time limit of 2 days for passing through customs now applies. Improvements at customs were part of a broader reform to cut the number of tariff bands from 27 to 6 and simplify inspection procedures at the border."

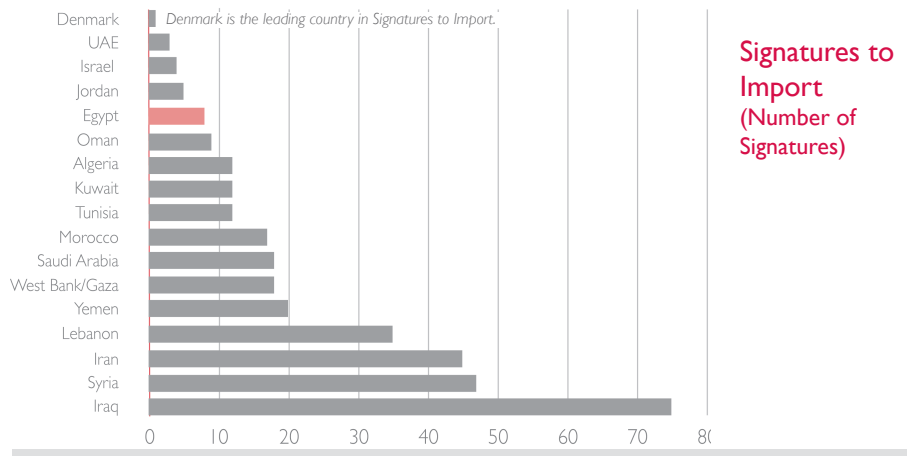
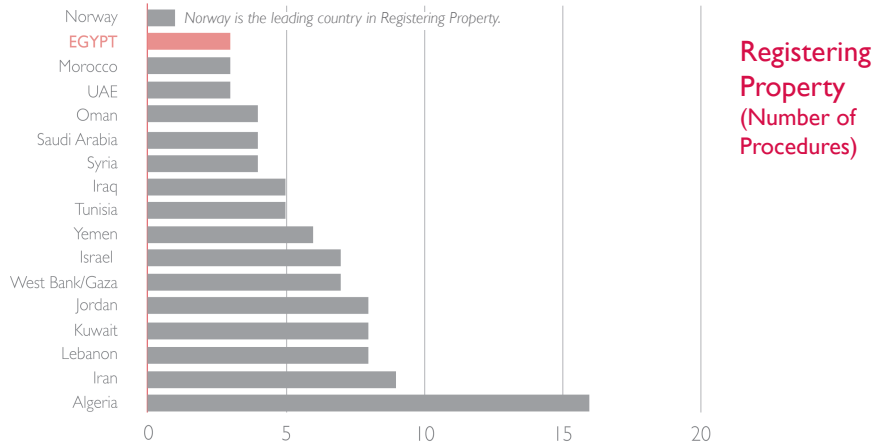
The report also cites areas where Egypt is in need of improvement. Businesses continue to pay relatively excessive costs to hire and fire and there continues to be a cumbersome amount of procedures and time required for businesses to carry out things such as registering a property, paying taxes and enforcing a contract.

USAID has provided substantial assistance to Egypt in the area of customs reform leading up to this report. Even before last year's streamlining of customs procedures, USAID's Assistance to Trade Reform (ATR) Project worked closely with the Government of Egypt to address concerns the United States and other countries had about tariffs on imported garments. The tariffs were eliminated as a result.

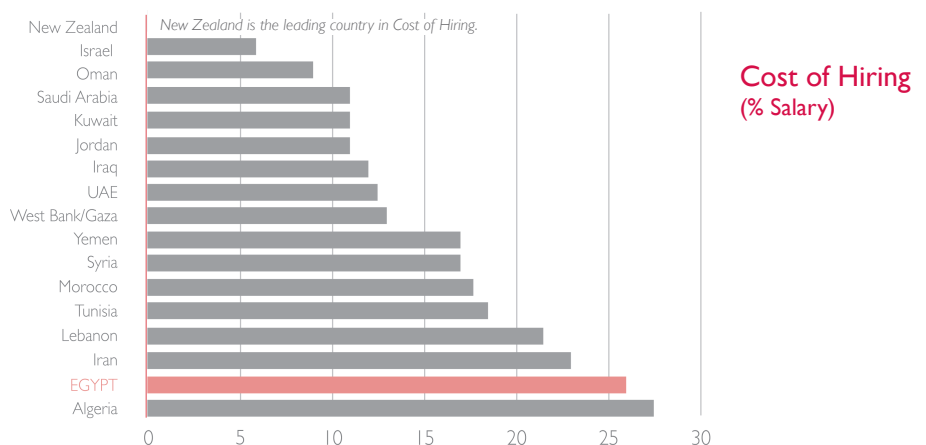
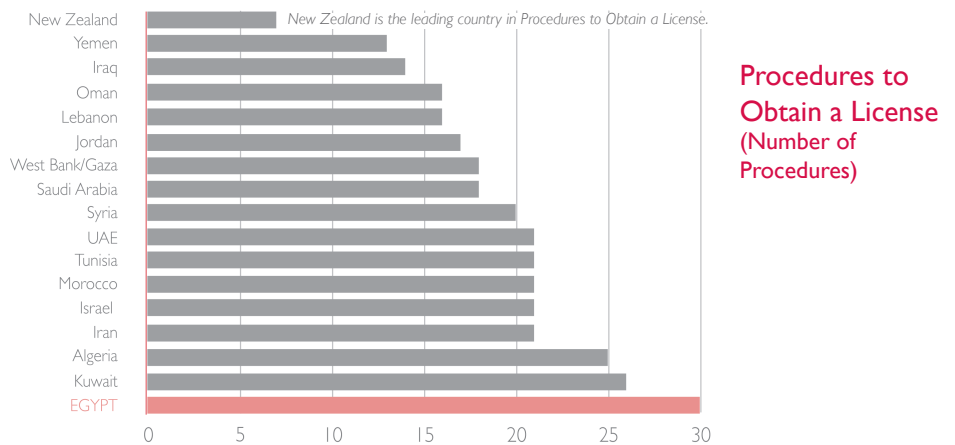
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Source: 'Doing Business in 2006'

Egypt has made progress in key areas...



...But still needs work in others



A First for IBM'S Cairo Technology Development Center

IBM's Cairo Technology Development Center (CTDC) has become the first software development center in the Middle East to achieve the highest of the Capability Maturity Model (CMM) levels after receiving CMMI Level-5 accreditation in early October. Through its Software Engineering Competency Center (SECC), the Egyptian Ministry of Communication and Information Technology (MCIT) has adopted an ambitious program to provide technical assistance to Egyptian software development companies seeking to improve their work processes to meet international best practices and standards. The CMM, including CMMI (Capability Maturity Model Integrations), are tools that help organizations improve their development capabilities and maintain the quality of their products and services. The tools are applicable to any business process, but over time have become predominately associated with the software development process. With technical and financial assistance from the USAID Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Program, SECC has assisted five Egyptian software development companies in attaining various levels of CMM accreditation, improving the companies' competitiveness in the international marketplace for software products and services. The USAID ICT Program provides up to 80 percent of the cost of the formal evaluation for CMM once company achieves accreditation. In addition to direct contributions, the USAID ICT Program provides support to the SECC for general awareness of software engineering development and improvement through public awareness events, training programs and workshops, and sponsorship of Egyptian participants in international conferences. The five Egyptian companies that have attained CMM accreditation, with USAID ICT Program assistance, to date are IBM's CTDC, EDS-Egypt, ITSoft, DMS, and Raya Software.

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Microfinance Program Supports One Million Borrowers, and Counting

USAID/Egypt's Microfinance Development Program has now reached out to a cumulative number of one million small and micro entrepreneurs since the program started 15 years ago. Support for micro-enterprise development has been an important feature of the U.S. economic assistance program in Egypt, and USAID has been the largest financier of microfinance initiatives in Egypt since 1990, focusing on commercial activity. USAID's microfinance partner institutions, comprised of seven business associations, two commercial banks, and a private credit guarantee company, manage an outstanding loan portfolio of more than \$96 million, serving about

470,000 active borrowers with a default rate of less than 3 percent. Significantly, more than half of the borrowers are poor female household heads located in some of Egypt's most economically disadvantaged areas. USAID is expanding its current microfinance development program in Egypt to focus on the development of the financial sector as a whole in attempt to make financial services for the poor and low-income households more sustainable.

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EFS to Establish Training Development Laboratory

As part of an effort to establish a working title registration system, the Egypt Financial Services (EFS) Project is helping the Government of Egypt establish a training laboratory for carrying out urban property registration. The Ministry of Justice's Real Estate Publicity Department has signed off on a floor plan and an equipment procurement plan for the Training Development Laboratory (TDL) in Dokki, which will be used to train selected staff from the Real Estate Publicity Department and related personnel from the private sector on how to use the newly designed preparatory title registration system. Training will cover the system's business processes, field survey data

collection, systematic adjudication, improved customer service and public outreach, and system administration and management. The training will be applied at two preparatory title registry offices the EFS plans to set up. Construction at the TDL and installation of the new equipment is scheduled to be completed at the end of January. In parallel, a minor upgrade of the Egyptian Survey Authority's existing training center will also take place.

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AERI Seeks to Improve Farmers' Access to Finance

Lack of finance has been identified as one of the main challenges facing small farmers who are receiving services from USAID in Upper Egypt. Through the Agricultural Exports and Rural Incomes (AERI) Project, USAID has helped create about a hundred farmer and livestock associations and is providing technical assistance to help organized smallholders increase exports and incomes. The AERI Agricultural Business Development Services Activity now wants to help local banks see that the associations representing these small-holders are a secure investment, as many farmers have struggled to get loans on their own. Farmers need improved access

to finance from local banks for their day to day needs, such as seeds, pesticides, or feed. "Finance is a very major part of sustaining AERI activity," says Herb Williamson, chief of party of the Agricultural Business Development Services Activity. The activity is now looking into the legal issues standing in the way of developing a mechanism to lend money to the non-profit organizations that represent AERI's beneficiaries.

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SUCCESS STORIES

continued from p.1 – 'On Solid Ground'

reach LE 72,500 this year, which adds up to LE 20 a day for each of his family members.

Since Bakry has shown such great eagerness to take advantage of every training opportunity that comes his way, EL SHAMS nominated him to receive training from the University of California at Davis in post-harvest handling this past summer.

Many of Upper Egypt's farmers are ill-equipped to make such gains on their own, having neither the bargaining power nor market information to take on more promising alternative crops independently. Joining farmer associations opens up access to market knowledge of the most lucrative crops and provides opportunities to acquire the skills needed to adapt to the changing needs of the marketplace through USAID-provided technical assistance. Associations can use their larger membership numbers to negotiate better prices for farm inputs and also negotiate forward contracts that guarantee future work for farmers under much better terms.

For instance, the Abou-Bakr El-Sedeek Beef Group previously had purchased their animals by the head and pursued a strategy of feeding them a mixture of ready-made pellets and some ground corn. No vaccinations were given to the animals and fattening cycles of six to seven months pushed up costs. With AERI technical assistance, the association's 30 members purchased animals based on weight, developed more efficient feeding rations, applied a vaccination program, and readjusted the fattening periods. The result was a savings of LE 400 for each head of cattle.

In all, AERI's livestock activities have increased the income of their 1,973 small-holder families by more than LE 8 million, or about LE 4,000 per family. More than 10,000 other families have benefited indirectly from AERI services and increased their collective income by about LE 15 million, or about LE 1,400 per family. AERI officials report that this additional income has allowed smallholders to keep their children in school, pay for better medical services for their family members, and expand their operations to bring in additional income.

One of the most effective farmer associations thus far in horticulture, the Mostaqbal El Sa'eed for Agricultural Community Development of Dandara, has secured 11 marketing agreements to grow cantaloupe, peppermint, watermelon and grapes on 208 feddans. The association



Milk is tested before being delivered to a milk collection center at Talla village in the Minya Governorate.

also forced local traders to lower prices for cantaloupe and tomato seedlings by growing their own in a nursery of 11 greenhouses and selling them at fair market prices. Prices dropped from LE 60 per tray to LE 40 for members and LE 45 for non-members, saving farmers money and bringing in LE 800,000 in revenue for the association. The association used the profits to pay for additional woman laborers in the community and purchase additional crop inputs to help its members prepare for the coming winter crop season.

Women in particular are making impressive gains under AERI. The Nile Valley Group in El-Minya has had great success training women in improving post-harvest handling of grapes. The association initiated two days of training this past April and June that helped 45 women and seven men learn the ins and outs of grape bunch cleaning and thinning.

The training helped many of the women get jobs on grape farms, and one of the trainees even ended up becoming a supervisor. One worker explained to EL SHAMS how the training taught her how to retain a job.

"I used to work as a daily laborer in collecting grapes with other girls from my village," said Rawia Salah. "But, looking back at the experience now, I can see that we didn't have any real experience in how to handle or collect grapes properly. Consequently, I used to have constant conflicts with the farm owner."

El SHAMS has changed everything. "Now,

the farm owner appreciates our work and it's becoming increasingly hard for him to let go of us," said Salah.

According to Tom Herlehy, chief of party of EL SHAMS, AERI's assistance has helped smallholders come to represent more than 12 percent of Egypt's horticulture exports in selected crops, which he calls remarkable. Most recently, smallholders are taking advantage of opportunities to export mangoes, pomegranates, and grapes.

Ultimately, USAID is seeking to help these activities become sustainable. To do this, AERI has encouraged farmer associations to start taking more initiative. Already, the Shark Tameya has independently negotiated two forward contracts with EL NENAIE Company for onions. Sustainability is coming one contract at a time. ▶

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Visit AERI on the web at www.usaideconomic.org/AERI.

RRSA Hands off Website, ELink

Results Reporting Support Activity has provided assistance to USAID/Egypt's Economic Growth Program for three years and now passes on its public awareness responsibilities

Results Reporting Support Activity (RRSA) was launched in November 2002 with a mission to improve the monitoring and evaluation of USAID's economic growth activities and help show the public how Egypt benefited from economic development projects financed by USAID. Scheduled to close at the end of December, the project helped create an institutional memory for USAID in its efforts to improve the environment for trade and investment.

RRSA is now working to ensure a smooth transition in transferring its public awareness component to the recently launched Technical Assistance for Policy Reform (TAPR-II) facility.

RRSA's completed tasks include producing dozens of evaluations analyzing the impact

of projects in an array of areas such as agriculture, trade reform, customs, and commercial law; client satisfaction reviews focusing on USAID's Growth Through Globalization efforts; organizing multiple conferences and technical assistance workshops; publishing the ELink newsletter; and designing and maintaining an online repository of information about the program at www.usaideconomic.org.eg. The website will continue to serve as a showcase for the economic growth activities of USAID and its partners, offering a breadth of information and news pertinent to ongoing reform efforts.

Performance monitoring was also a vital part of RRSA's efforts, including workshops in performance monitoring for USAID staff and their implementing partners, data collection for annual reporting, and maintenance of data performance sheets.

The RRSA team is now working to transfer its website and newsletter to TAPR-II, which was created to bring USAID's economic growth activities under the umbrella of one facility that streamlined services to the Government of Egypt (See "Substantial New Effort to Support Economic Reform"

on page 4 for more details). Among the activities it is taking over for RRSA are public awareness, including the economic growth website and the ELink newsletter. RRSA is working through the end of the year to assist in the transition and is confident that its work has provided its successors with a framework for continued success.

The website will continue to provide access to detailed information on all of USAID/Egypt's economic growth activities, including hosting sub-domains for the Egypt Financial Services Project (EFS), Agricultural Exports and Rural Incomes (AERI) Project, and Commodity Import Program (CIP). TAPR-II will reintroduce the ELink early next year. In the meantime, EFS and AERI will continue to produce newsletters that report on ongoing efforts and news relevant to their fields. The publications are available at www.egyptfs.com and www.usaideconomic.org.eg/AERI. ■

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NEW INITIATIVES

AmCham Takes on New Trade Project

The project seeks to unleash trade between Egypt and the United States and liberalize Egypt's trade regime

USAID has awarded the American Chamber of Commerce in Egypt (AmCham) a three-year, \$3.5 million contract to expand Egypt's trade ties with the United States. AmCham's Trade-Related Assistance Center (TRAC) will position itself as a premier resource of information for local and international businesses on ongoing free trade talks between Egypt and the U.S. Chief among its goals, TRAC will advocate for the liberalization of trade, advancing a faster-moving and comprehensive reform agenda in addition to championing a free trade agreement (FTA) with the United States.

AmCham Egypt is the first and largest overseas affiliate of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce in the Middle East, representing more than 1,200 members that are either U.S. companies doing business in Egypt or Egyptian companies doing business in the United States. AmCham Egypt will build on

its established ties and reputation as a leading think tank in Egypt's business community. Through the TRAC project, AmCham will be more able to facilitate business ties with potential U.S. customers, establish itself as a resource center for the Egyptian business sector on FTA issues, serve as a trade career center, and develop an information web portal on the Egypt-U.S. FTA.

TRAC's prime objectives are to:

- Enhance the ability of firms and industries to capitalize on available business opportunities, and
- Establish links between the private sector and the government and convey the private sector's point of view during FTA negotiations.

The Trade-Related Assistance Center (TRAC), through its preset objectives, fits within AmCham's strategy to upgrade Egypt's business environment through encouraging government-private sector dialogue. Such work seeks to tap the full potential of the Egyptian economy as the biggest economy in the region. ■

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CREDITS...

EG LINK IS PUBLISHED BY DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATES' USAID-FUNDED RESULTS REPORTING SUPPORT ACTIVITY (RRSA)

Editorial Board: RRSA Team, USAID

Editor: Jeson Ingraham

Designer: Corrie Blankenbeckler (corrie.kdesign@gmail.com)

Printer: Concept Marketing & Advertising

Contributions by: USAID SO-16

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This publication was made possible through support provided by the Office of Economic Growth Egypt SO-16, U.S. Agency for International Development/Egypt, under the terms of Contract No. 263-M-00-03-00006-00.