



## **Making the Difference: Volunteer Center Initiative**

At our present, volunteers are regarded as a main vehicle for initiating and supporting development projects. Egypt has reached a stage where governmental and non-governmental efforts need to be intensified to fulfill the requirements of development. The concept of volunteerism in Egypt has deep historical and cultural roots. It emerged in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and continued with progress in the 20<sup>th</sup> century through various means and forms. It has been embodied throughout the Egyptian history by the religious and social practices that encourage assisting and giving to others. Volunteers have been an important channel to deliver assistance to the deprived social groups in the society. However, this work was to a great extent lacking organization and appropriate framework. The Egyptian society is known for its spirit of cooperation and helping people in need. This has been evident in rural areas where harsh economic conditions make it imperative for people to lend each other a helping hand. By the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the role of volunteers in Egypt and the Arab world has been accelerating and gaining confidence and support of local and international donors and the community as well. Throughout the past decades, the philosophy of volunteerism has changed from being a philanthropic work that focuses on making donations to a basic mean to achieve development.

It is the pleasure of the Center for Development Services (CDS) in conjunction with the Youth Association for Population and Development (YAPD) to adopt and implement the initiative of establishing the Egyptian Volunteer Center (EVC). The volunteer center would bridge the gap between the efforts of volunteers and organizations that require human resources. It is located in YAPD headquarters in Cairo.

The aim of this pilot project is to promote volunteerism in society and mobilize volunteers with the ultimate aim of supporting and strengthening development initiatives in Egypt. Furthermore, the project would represent a model for an applicable volunteer center to be replicated in Egypt and the Arab world. The model is to fit with the cultural and societal framework of the Arab region. Undoubtedly, this would benefit youth all over Egypt and organizations in need of volunteers and the local community served by the organizations. The duration of the project is two years to be implemented in four Governorates of Egypt: Cairo, Giza, Alexandria and Menya. Since Egypt has been one of the pioneering countries in the field of volunteerism, the project is regarded as a new entry point to development.

The project staff has successfully gained the commitment of the YAPD staff and some of its volunteer members. The staff has assessed and improved their technical and training needs. Among the achievements is the formulation of three main application forms: the first to be completed by the organization, the second by the volunteer and the third is named as the "chance" form. Identification of interested organizations has been achieved through organizing various visits to a number of NGOs in the four previously mentioned Governorates. For the aim of promoting the concept of volunteerism among youth, the staff has participated in various youth

gatherings, clubs, universities, youth centers and forums. This was a good opportunity for the project staff to better understand volunteer's motivations as well as interests. It was also a chance to disseminate the proper understanding of volunteerism dynamics.

Among the achievements of the project is the design of a database program that facilitates the matching process of volunteers with organizations. The project members has lastly organized a two-days workshop "Volunteerism and Managing Volunteers" at the headquarters of YAPD that included twenty-three of the NGOs selected from about forty NGOs that the staff interviewed over the past six months. The workshop highlighted the concept of volunteerism and its importance to accelerate the development process of Egypt. The participating organizations frankly expressed their perceptions and expectations to volunteerism work in Egypt. They also shed the light on the main challenges facing volunteerism and means of organizing and managing this work among both the volunteers and the organizations.

The future actions of the project include the opening ceremony scheduled at the end of March 2002. This ceremony would mark the official launching of the EVC. In addition, we are planning to collaborate with the Ministry of Youth and Sports to replicate the volunteer center model among the youth centers in all the Governorates of Egypt. The coming future actions would also assist in developing the main features of this project to ensure its effectiveness. Eventually, all Egyptians, especially youth, will be able to reap the fruits of the efforts of volunteerism to put Egypt on the path of sustainable development.