

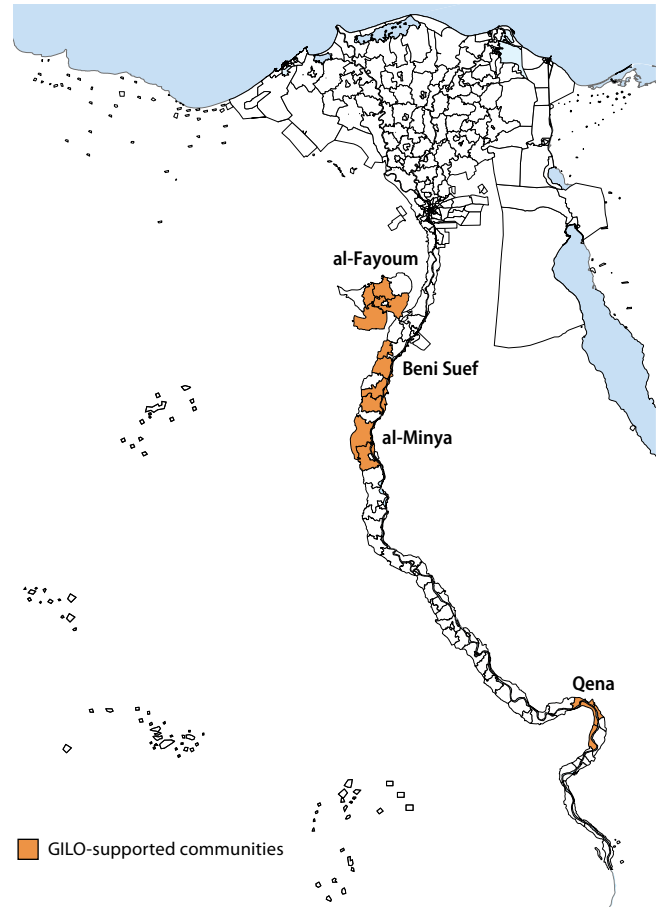
Girls at the Center of Education Reform in Egypt

In some areas of Egypt, barriers to quality education can be high, especially for girls. Cultural factors, distance to schools, overcrowded classrooms, lack of appropriate facilities for girls, and school staff who are inattentive to their specific needs of girls combine to keep many girls from enrolling or completing basic education through grade 9. These factors result in significant gender disparities in education; often, school enrollment rates for girls often lag behind that of boys by 20–25% in rural and remote areas of Upper Egypt.

Recognizing such obstacles to girls' education, Egypt has taken steps over the last decade to reduce the gender gap and improve educational quality for both girls and boys, in part by decentralizing the school system through a process of school-based reform. In February 2008, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) awarded RTI International a 3-year contract with the aim of improving girls' enrollment, attendance, and completion in select schools and communities in rural Egypt. The Girls' Improved Learning Outcomes (GILO) project works collaboratively with the Ministry of Education to build its capacity for implementing the school-based reform approach and to integrate support for girls' education into all aspects of the school reform process.

GILO Goals

- Expand girls' access to quality education in remote and deprived areas of Upper Egypt
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning in targeted schools and districts
- Strengthen school management and governance through increased parent, community, and civil society participation
- Decentralize and strengthen student-friendly school construction and maintenance



Including Girls in the School-based Reform Process

Improving learning outcomes, especially for girls, requires a comprehensive approach to school reform. Fundamental aspects of this approach include supporting schools in managing their own reform processes and demonstrating that community ownership is important in improving the quality of education. GILO works with school leadership to develop strong and effective school management teams and builds community-school relations by activating



democratically elected school boards. GILO also emphasizes training teachers to practice student-centered teaching methods.

GILO's girl-centered focus contributes to this process by supporting an inclusive approach that promotes participation from all segments of the community in learning, teaching, supporting, and managing their educational improvements. Encouraging women and girls, as well as men and boys, to participate together in shaping education in their local schools enhances the scope and quality of education reform.

Creating Space for Girls

Working with the ministries of Education and Finance, GILO analyzes census data, along with results from participatory community surveys, to identify communities and schools with both the greatest need for and the strongest interest in improving girls' access to quality education.

GILO also collaborates with ministerial bodies and local communities to adopt innovative short- and long-term approaches for improving girls' access to quality education. Short-term approaches, such as temporary; add-on; and multi-grade classrooms, are introduced as intermediate solutions in areas where new school construction is not an immediate option. Decentralized procedures that favor low-cost, student-friendly models of traditional building construction serve as long-term approaches. Communities are also developing their own unique strategies to improve girls' access, including activities such as land donation, provision of transportation for girls living in more remote areas, and community-led girls' education awareness campaigns.

Building Girl-friendly School Environments

To ensure that girls are granted full and equal access to quality education within schools, GILO has developed a range of girl-focused capacity building packages tailored to school leadership. These packages introduce administrators to effective school leadership and management techniques and support them in addressing challenges to girls' education in their annual school improvement plans. School social workers and board members learn to practice good governance and engage communities (women and men together) in the school reform process. School and district-level supervisors also receive girl-centered training and tools to support girl-friendly, student-centered pedagogy within the classroom.



GILO piloted the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) in Arabic for the first time in Egypt. [Photo: Robert LaTowsky]

Improving Learning Outcomes

In May 2008, GILO worked with Egyptian linguists and educators to pilot the first Arabic adaptation of the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA), a 15-minute test developed by RTI and administered orally to measure students' foundational literacy skills. Test results are used to identify learning barriers and help train Egyptian teachers in the skills and tools they need to improve teaching practice and student learning.

The project also introduces teachers to techniques for engaging students in active learning, as well as in offering girl-friendly educational practices, such as calling equally on girls and boys. GILO will also provide new information and communication technology and furniture to help facilitate student-centered interaction.



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For more information, please contact
Michelle Ward-Brent, Technical Manager
E-mail: mwardbrent@rti.org

RTI 5859-3 00 0110



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