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# Development Journalism, Gender Sensitivity and Sustainability in Egypt: Analyzing the Women's Voices project

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**Abstract**: Examining the concept of "development communication" and "development journalism" in the professional development of women journalists in Egypt, this study analyzes the *Women's Voices* Project undertaken by Deutsche Welle Akademy (DWA) in Egypt to develop the professional and gender sensitive skills of young women journalists. The project has taken place through a set of intensive professional trainings, leading to the establishment of the *Masr El Nas* website, intended to achieve sustainability or "media viability." Testing the role of this "media development" project in developing the interpersonal and professional skills of women journalists and in promoting "development journalism," through *Masr El Nas*, the methods used include in-depth interviews with the project managers, trainers and selected trainees, and a thematic content analysis of *Masr El Nas*, as a case study of development journalism.

Research findings indicate there is no nation-wide impact for the project, since it has operated in a tight media environment with a variety of laws strangulating media freedom, as well as media development projects. The project, as a result, failed to achieve "media viability." Yet, it could reach many of its small-scale goals, such as developing the interpersonal and professional skills of women journalists, enhancing gender sensitive reporting, using state-of-the-art technology, reporting on the people, and engaging local communities and attempting to develop them, as the interviews indicated. The content analysis showed that stories about marginalized women were dominant on the website, as well as stories from Upper Egypt, a blind spot for mainstream media.

**Keywords:** Communication Development, Digital Media, Media Development, Development Journalism, Gender Sensitivity, Gender Sensitive Reporting

## Introduction

Especially in developing countries where many citizens suffer from "undesired socio-economic conditions, the media has been recognized as the engine for development." Yet, the media power is subject to the feasibility of the "operating environment" and the likelihood of adopting a development journalism model (Lencho, 2013: p.123). Development journalism, focusing on

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development issues to serve ordinary people (Ismail, 2013) stems from the concept of development communication—the use of communication technology to foster development.

Operating in a democratic or a democratizing environment is crucial for development journalism since the process of "democratization" is central to development. This necessitates transformation at the societal, economic, and political levels, as well as the constitution, the electoral system, and the government practices, says Lencho (2013). Development is a "multidimensional process incorporating economic, socio-cultural… transformation" (Lencho, 2013, p. 122). It incorporates "human dignity, security, justice and equality," say Pant and Kumar (1995, p. 50, cited in Lencho, 2013).

Central to development is ensuring diversity and gender equality both in participation and representation. Research shows women in developing countries suffer gender inequality especially in media representation and participation in development (World Association of Christian Communicators, 2015). In Egypt's media, women do not have seniority, nor do they have editorial freedom. Gender stereotyping and sexualized representation of women in media is also common in Egypt, as they are often portrayed as passive and powerless in front of men (Institute for Women's Studies, 2013).

Meanwhile, the tight grip on the public sphere, the absence of media freedom, and the crackdown on media development efforts have been in effect since 2014, says journalist and media trainer, Omar Mostafa (2019, personal interview). After issuing the NGOs law and media laws, in 2018 and 2019 respectively, legalizing state control over NGOs and media organizations, including online media and social media, the situation has worsened, adds Mostafa. This makes conducting a media development project targeting women journalists, along with the uncertain status of Egyptian women, media freedom and democracy, a more challenging task.

Analyzing the *Deutsche Welle Akademie (DWA)*-sponsored *Women's Voices* project, 2014 - 2018, which aimed to empower young women journalists from around Egypt with state-of-the-art skills through their brainchild website, *Masr El Nas,* this research examines the project feasibility in producing development journalism and fostering gender equality in Egypt. Operating in a tight media environment, this research raises questions and attempts to provide answers on the viability of the project, and the extent to which it can improve the status of Egyptian women journalists and what represents an effective development journalism model. Using a mixed methods approach to boost the results, it combines in-depth interviews with the project manager, trainees, trainers, media professionals and experts, as well as a thematic content analysis of the *Masr El Nas* website, to evaluate its representation of development aspects, gender and geographical diversity, and its likelihood to yield a difference.

## Development Communication/Journalism

Development communication—communication about development operations—aims to inform the audiences about development initiatives, activities and results (Mefalopulos 2008). Development communication has two primary roles: (a) a *transforming role*, bringing in social change in a way that will bring a higher quality of life, where communication is an instrument to achieve these objectives; and (b) a *socializing role*, seeking to maintain some of the established values of society. Playing these roles, development communication seeks to create an atmosphere for change and provide *innovation* through which society may change (Choudhury, 2011: 3-4).

Development journalism is "a new attitude towards the treatment of certain subjects in relation to development, designed to serve ordinary people and not the elite," (Chalkley quoted in Ismail, 2013: pagenumber) by reporting on development issues in society and how society

was developing. To realize the goals of development journalism, Banda (2006) notes that a development journalist has to motivate the audience to actively cooperate in development; and must defend the interests of those concerned, reporting "ideas, programs, activities and events, …related to an improvement of the living standard." The essence of development journalism rests on promoting holistic development that equally benefits the people (Wimmer and Wolf, 2005).

"Media development"—the overall development of the media in a country—it reflects the status of free media expression, pluralism, democracy and gender equality. The goal of media development is to create and sustain a "healthy media sector," say Susman-Pena (2012), whereby the media must be free, independent, professional, and reach out to many populations, offering diverse perspectives and providing people with the information they need to make sound decisions and hold governments accountable. It also means that people can freely create, distribute, and exchange content—since the media cut across all sectors in society, its potential for impact is enormous (Susman-Pena, 2012). To reach its full potential, media development necessitates democracy and freedom of expression.

In developing countries, media development is nurtured through projects conducted by international governmental organizations of well-established democracies to foster development, using all communication tools including interpersonal, audio-visual and mass media (Colle, 2002). Development Journalism is a tool of media development, whereby journalists apply the ideals learned in training workshops, in a way that would be more inclusive to the society's grassroots. Sustainability, or "media viability," as a media development goal, says Schneider et al (2016), not only includes financial sustainability, but also the media outlets' ability to produce high quality journalistic content in the long term.

Development journalism dates to the 1960s in the Philippines, where Alan Chalkley coined the term "development journalist" during a Thomson Foundation course. Chalkley (1968) identified the main tasks of a journalist as (1) to report the facts, (2) to interpret those facts within "their framework" and "draw conclusions" and (3) a third task that can be called "promotion," which includes promoting the facts and bringing them home to readers (quoted in Gunaratne and Hasim 1996: 98). In the same vein, Galtung and Vincent (1992) urged journalists to relate development to the "people" by reporting people as subjects, actors and agents rather than objects or victims; and define problems and solutions as clearly as possible, taking into account "ecological balance," and factors such as gender, race, class and nation (quoted in Gunaratne and Hasim, 1996: 99). These ideals indicate that gender balance and gender sensitive reporting, which can "help generate respect for the individual regardless of sex," (Joerger and Taylor, 2004: iiv) lie at the heart of development journalism.

Nevertheless, there are different views on the impact of media development. "Building the media as an institution means that it in turn will support other institutions," analyzes Susman-Pena (2012). A credible and trustworthy media would provide informative reporting about other development issues leading the people to support development. In contrast, John Merrill (1971: 240) doubted that the outcome of media development can be projected for an entire nation. "One might as well study the impact of a message on one person and project it to a whole group of people." It would be unrealistic to expect more than that, he adds.

Despite its benign intentions, development journalism—focusing on society and updating people with development information—has been widely criticized on practical and conceptual grounds. Shafer (1991) criticized development journalism for not enhancing the media's watchdog function (cited in Ismail 2013). Other scholars argue that it has "no fixed terms of practice," which creates variations in its application. Due to the malpractices of developing countries in applying development journalism, its presumed goal of 'promoting development', has been assumed as essentially serving national and government agendas (Ismail, 2013).

Asserting that development journalism should be a critical evaluation of government development programs or act as a watchdog on the government, Ogan (1982, p.10) says, development journalism is "the critical examination, evaluation and report of the impact of development programs which demands that the mass media be independent of government." In short, development journalism is meant to serve society with a socially responsible press (Ismail, 2013).

However, with the global variations in development journalism practices, it is important to note how it works in developing countries with different realities. Shah (1992, cited in Ismail 2013) points to the need to reconceptualize development journalism, since, according to Kamal the 'noble conception' of development journalism has been corrupted in various situations to serve the ruling elites (cited in Ismail 2013). Development journalism is highly influenced by diverse social, economic, cultural and political conditions of a country, says Ismail (2013). In Asia, it refers to "the 'government and elites' news, rather than promoting the citizens' voice" (Ismail, 2013, p.26).

Due to those practices, scholars differ about development journalism. While some denounce development news as "a camouflage for government control" or news management, others argue, development journalism was and still face struggles and misconceptions, as a "new" brand of journalism (Ismail, 2013). Waisbord (2010) says development journalism is an "obsolete term," "unfitting for developing countries," since it is unlikely that authoritarian countries allow critical watchdog journalism required for development journalism to function (cited in Ismail, 2013).

Efficient development journalism, thus, necessitates policies granting diversity. Journalists, governments, development partners and the general public need to learn about the role that communications and media can play in political change. However, it must be noted that supporting and strengthening the media in shifting political dynamics is a long-term process that needs persistence and involvement of all stakeholders. This includes involving journalists, NGOs, and civil society organizations and avoiding replacing "donor-driven agendas" for local aspirations and priorities. In addition, there is a need to encourage governments to commit to media development by legislating freedom of information, building information databases and making them accessible to journalists and the public (Wilson and Bama, 2007).

## Status of the Media and Media Development in Egypt

### *Status of the Media in Egypt*

Assessing the prospects of media development in Egypt necessitates a flashback to the status of the media in Egypt. The era before Nasser was marked with "a highly politicized and vibrant media environment and significant partisanship among both media professionals and audiences." Struggling against the occupation, many newspapers represented "a strong and dynamic partisan press" says Khamis (2011).

Since Nasser's rule, political regimes have employed Egypt's media to consolidate their power. Curbing down diversity and plurality, "Nasser's nationalization of the press marked the end of its freedom, professionalism, and excellence," says Khamis (2011). To mobilize the people behind his policies and ideologies, Nasser politicized the media under stiff regime control, established radio "to reach illiterate people in the Arab world," monopolized all newspapers and abolished private ownership, then launched state television, to consolidate his control of all media (Mollerup, 2015).

The situation continued the same way during Sadat and most of Mubarak's time. Sadat allowed political parties, without public base, to have newspapers, but constrained them by the Supreme Press Council, which never licensed a newspaper. He officially lifted censorship, yet assigned editors in all major publishing houses, which effectively worked as a censorship mechanism (Mollerup, 2015). Torn between the desire to increase democracy and fear of its exploitation, says Khamis (2011), Sadat shifted the press system several times, towards and away from freedom and diversity (Rugh, 2004).

Mubarak's era was marked with arrests and abuse of journalists—police assaults and raids, detentions, even torture under media laws of 1995 and 1996 which continued to restrict and imprison journalists (Khamis 2011; Sakr, 2013). Egypt's media witnessed remarkable developments, such as emergence of private satellite television channels, the spread of privately owned newspapers, and growing Internet accessibility (Khamis, 2011). By 2000, private television channels were allowed, yet only licensed through the Media Free Zone and not permitted to broadcast news (Sakr, 2012). Then, the first private newspaper, Al Masry Al Youm, owned by influential businessmen, was licensed in 2004, and people started to have more access to the internet.

The increasing media pluralism and diversity opened the way for newspapers critical of the regime and top official to break long-held taboos (Khamis, 2011). Likewise, satellite television offered uncensored alternative to the government media (Sakr, 2013). In addition, the widespread access to the internet created a new milieu for public opinion expression, and discussions of various issues. Yet, "it was not until the 2011 revolution that the proliferation of these new media aided a genuine shift toward political reform in Egypt," says Khamis (2011).

The government's direct and indirect media repression—including censorship, subsidies, regulations and ownership—and the amount of freedom of expression eased by new technology accelerated the rate of press freedom, despite restrictions, representing "a case of media schizophrenia," says Iskandar (2006; cited by Khamis, 2011). The "new media substituted, rather than promoted," democratic practice (Seib, 2007), acting as a safety valve for the public to vent out anger at political injustices, without allowing the exercise of any political rights (Khamis, 2011).

According to Sakr (2013), the most significant transformation in Egyptian journalism are the expanding informal online spaces, allowing journalists to challenge government disinformation. Soon after the Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF) took overpower, journalists faced two opposing trends: a robust one that wished to retain the old system and a liberal one that sought to meet the uprising's aspirations. Meanwhile, media start-ups recruited protesters as trainees, trying to redefine journalistic professionalism (Sakr, 2013). This was necessary, asserts Iskandar (2007), most journalists in Egypt lack the culture of serving as a watchdog or a catalyst for change, since journalism education is predominantly theoretical.

### *Media Development in Egypt*

Media control in Egypt has always strangulated media development and development journalism effort. As wonders Sakr (2013) "how rules for representation affect the likelihood of reaching consensus on professional ethics." Post 2011, NGOs concerned with development journalism aspired for more liberal laws granting them freedom to collaborate with international partners. Likewise, international initiatives sought to incorporate media managers, editors and journalists in campaigns promoting journalistic transparency and accountability (Sakr, 2013). All these attempts were halted with the crack down on NGOs and issuing of the NGOs law, which strangled international collaborations (Balz and Mujaly, 2016). As a result, all foreign media development organizations ceased from working in Egypt.

Approving and implementing the Anti-Cyber and Information Technology Crimes Law in August 2018 and the Media Regulation Law in July 2018, the government can now regulate and restrict online freedom of expression and jail online users seen as threatening the regime. Moreover, counterterrorism and state of emergency laws grant courts the right to prosecute bloggers and online activists for "peaceful criticism." With those regulations, the Supreme Council for Media Regulations has the power to put citizens with more than 5000 followers on social media, personal blogs or websites under state supervision, blocking or suspending their accounts (Muslim, 2019).

Naila Hamdy (2019, personal interview) confirmed, the launch of the NGOs law has directly affected media development agencies, "who chose to pull out of Egypt because they found it is not a good time to work here." Mostafa (2019) has witnessed several instances when media development organizations were "forced by the security to stop their activities." This include, GIZ, Thompson Reuters and *El-Sot El-Hor* (the free voice), a website operating with Polish funding. DW is not an exception from this despite *Women's Voices* ability to operate under those circumstances, he adds.

Some argue, journalistic training is necessary and urgent, despite performing in a tight media environment. Becker (2003) says journalists need to learn the basics and be ready to choose what to report on and how, when this is possible. Meanwhile, in the absence of international organizations, locally offered media training is positively seen by Hamdy (2019), as a good sign. Mostafa (2019), however, argues, "it is not up to the same quality offered by foreign organizations. The design of the training, the analysis of trainees' needs used to enrich the content of training offered by foreign organizations." Some local companies get famous journalists—lacking the training skills—to train. For many, it is more of a business, "Even when the training is offered for free, quality is not guaranteed," says Mostafa.

**Media Development and Women in Egypt**

The crackdown on media development, along with the absence of a consensus on media professionalism and the low status of women is reflected in the absence of gender sensitive reporting in local media in Egypt. Mona Badran (2019, personal interview), a media professor and trainer, confirms "the state media always tackle women in a negative way. When there is an attack on women, they ask questions that held women responsible rather than support them."

As for media training on gender sensitivity, Badran noticed that "younger generations are more willing and able to learn and apply the concepts of gender sensitive reporting. The outcome and follow up reports prove more positive representation of women issues." Menegatti and Rubini (2017) clarify, gender sensitivity is reflected in the significant role of language in defining gender, affecting gender roles in society. "Linguistic processes and verbal communication are… powerful means through which sexism and gender discrimination are perpetrated and reproduced." Gender stereotypes are usually "attached to the corresponding social roles," they say (p.1).

Women in the Arab world, says Sakr (2002), experience what Deniz Kandiyoti (2000: xiv) call "double jeopardy." Not only are they subjected to large scale restrictions in civic and political participation, but also, they are denied autonomy by discriminatory laws, yielding authority to their male guardians to decide whether they work or travel. As a result, women are predominantly barred from development programs and access to Information and Communication Technology (ICT). This "gender divide" is an important aspect of the digital divide. As a UNDP report (2005) emphasized, "ICT can be a powerful catalyst for political and social empowerment of women, and the promotion of gender equality" (Mandour, 2009, p.9).

Meanwhile, the UN places the lack of information access the third most important issue facing women after poverty and violence (UNESCO, 2003, cited in Mandour 2009). Research

on the impact of ICT on the gender gap in Egypt indicates there is a need to adopt policies supporting women's participation, as a promising field for improving women engagement. However, women must be equipped with skills to prepare them for these roles (Mandour, 2009).

With the lack of access and participation in ICT use and production, new technologies could become a significant factor in marginalizing women (Hafkin and Taggart, 2001); however, a positive aspect of ICT is strengthening women's political empowerment (United Nations, 2005). ICT has the potential to significantly increasing women's voice and enhancing their participation in public life where they employ technology to empower themselves… raise awareness, develop networks, and increase advocacy for women's causes. ICT can thus be used to pressure policymakers to respond to women's perspectives and concerns, leading to more gender-equitable policies and social services (World Bank, 2004, cited in Mandour 2009).

According to a survey on social media impact and potential for women empowerment, most respondents felt social media could enhance women's participation in different aspects of public life. Yet, there were some doubt about the empowering effects of social media in the absence of actual changes in gender equality legislations and rights on the ground (The Role of Social Media, 2011). Muslim (2019, p. 26) coincides technology is "enabling and empowering women in environments that are politically and religiously restrictive" in three aspects, "knowledge building" despite censorship; providing a "wider range of voices and initiatives;" and inspiring women to establish "far reaching relationships and alliances which can create allies and greater interventions."

According to Muslim (2019), in the last decade, women in the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region have used the internet to garner support for their work and disseminate images and information about social and political issues. "This has created a connectivity for women's rights activists where they are able to create alternative ideas around identity politics, citizenship, and political participation in mediated discursive spaces," says Muslim. As a result, women can "redefine patriarchal gender roles while questioning the sociocultural, economic, political and legal institutions constraining them" (p. 26).

## Methods

Examining the concept and theory of "media development" and "development journalism" in the professional development of women journalists in Egypt, this study analyzes *Women's Voices* project undertaken by *DWA* in Egypt between 2014-2018. Seeking to develop the professional and gender sensitive skills of young women journalists, *Women's Voices* has taken place through a set of intensive professional trainings, leading to the establishment of the *Masr el Nas* website, as a training hub for applying development journalism, and to ascertain the sustainability and "media viability" of the project. Deliberately avoiding politics, *Masr El Nas*, which translates as "the people of Egypt," founded by the young women journalists, has been a milieu for stories about significant people, places and traditions/events from all around Egypt.

Seeking to foster gender equality in Egypt through gender sensitive reporting is key to the reporting approach of *Masr El Nas*. Media development, development journalism and gender sensitivity goals were sought in *Women's Voices* project at two levels: (1) personal and professional development of the trainees through capacity building journalistic training, (2) applied development journalism reflected in their coverage of their local communities on *Masr El Nas* website. To examine the efficacy of each level, the methods applied include (1) in-depth interviews with the project managers, trainers and selected trainees on the project details and (2) to examine the quality of "development journalism" a thematic content analysis of the *Masr el Nas* website identifies if the themes covered addressed and served the goals of gender sensitivity, development journalism and "media development" at large.

The in-depth interviews with the trainees have taken place predominantly by telephone or through social media communication, using text and voice messages. A few audio-recorded interviews have taken place in person. The interviews have primarily addressed the following research questions, based on the project's goals, identified in next section.

***RQ1: Capacity Building and Professional Development***
How has the capacity building/professional development training affected your views, role, skills and professional performance?

***RQ2: Supporting Development in Local Communities, Women in Particular***
In what way, if any, do you support or help development in your local community, especially women?

***RQ3: Whether Mas El Nas is Reflecting or Fostering Development, Supporting Local Women***
Whether or not has the *Masr El Nas* website been positively reflecting or fostering micro-level development and supporting women in local communities?

## Case Study: *Women's Voices* Project

### *Phase one: Women's Voices*

Phase one of *Women's Voices* started in 2014 with the purpose of raising the awareness of experienced mid-career women journalists regarding gender and sexuality, focusing on interpersonal skills and capacity building, says Osama Asfour (2019, personal interview), trainer and coordinator with *DWA.* "The project was planned to counter the lack of gender balance in journalism positions in Egypt," says Asfour. "The idea of *Women's Voices* is to make more voices for women in the media—by empowering women and developing their interpersonal skills so that they can hold senior positions—that is to make voices for women who have no voice!" he added.

The first phase focused on raising the awareness experienced women journalists about gender and boosting their interpersonal skills. It included what it means "to be a woman" in Egypt, the meaning of gender, women's media representation and hidden media messages about gender stereotypes. "It was clear that most women attending the workshop had never talked openly about gender barriers, lower wages than their male counterparts and sexual harassment at the workplace. Participants were also looking for ways to build their self-esteem," indicated a Deutsche Welle report (Egypt: Networking Women Journalists, 2014).

Participants were trained on using their body language and voice in interviews, raising their awareness of their competencies. At the end, they had to identify their next professional goals and how they are going to achieve them. To ensure sustainability, the best trainees were selected to take a Training of Trainers (TOT), so that they would be ready to pass this experience to fellow journalists. This was followed by a Coaching Training, where a group of journalists were chosen to get trained by the TOT trainees to apply what they learned while getting on-the-spot feedback from DW trainers, says Asfour (2019, personal interview).

#### *Outcomes of phase one*

Outcomes of phase one included founding of the *Egyptian Women's Media Union (EWMU),* at the closing conference of 2014, and selecting the best TOT trainee in 2014, Soha Tarek, to

become DW's main trainer in Egypt, as well as Trainers' Supervisor and Chief Editor of *Masr El Nas*, from 2016 to 2018.

Tarek (2019, personal interview) says she learned in the TOT qualities that benefited her in her output throughout the journey with *DWA*. These include, (1) absorbing reactions and dealing with different personalities; (2) organizing the meeting room for a useful and active training; (3) designing and planning workshops; (4) time management; (5) the techniques of meta-plan (using colored cards); (6) the benefits of using different learning methods; (7) the trainer's body language; (8) the differences between brainstorming and energizing activities; (9) solving sudden problems during the trainings; and (10) the importance of following up after finishing the training.

As for the establishment of *EWMU*, Shahira Amin (2019, personal interview), independent journalist and board member, says "it was established to empower and support women journalists and provide training to journalists in Egypt since 2015." Lending legal, moral and professional support to media women, especially those in provinces outside Cairo where training opportunities are few, *EWMU* organized hundreds of training workshops in Suez and the Delta and Upper Egypt for young professionals - women and men - covering ethics, writing skills, conducting TV interviews, editing, and investigative reporting. In addition, in 2016, the *EWMU* was awarded Responsible Leaders' Award by the BMW Foundation, partnered with regional and international organizations, such as the Friedrich Ebert foundation, UNFPA and *Tha'era* network, says Amin (2019, personal interview).

During the Friedrich Ebert partnership and sponsorship, the *EWMU* provided training workshops covering more than fifteen provinces, and its board member were trained on sustainability and proposals' writing. Sponsored by Friedrich Ebert, the *EWMU* launched their own website to give visibility to the investigative works written and produced by their trainees. "The stories were also published by various media outlets and included award winning pieces on women's right of to their inheritance and a report on gender violence," says Amin.

Afterwards the *EWMU* partnered with UNFPA for a series of training workshops on family planning, reproductive health rights and FGM. "*EMWU* has been commissioned by UNFPA to organize a new series of workshops in Luxor and Cairo for journalists, covering family planning and birth control," adds Amin. Finally, *EMWU* has partnered with *Tha'era*, a regional network of women from social democratic parties in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia to conduct advocacy trainings for members of the parties (Amin, 2019, personal interview).

### *Phase Two: More Women's Voices*

Phase two of the project, *More Women's Voices*, running 2015-2018, avoided some of the obstacles encountered in phase one, as some of the trainees, from governorates outside Cairo, apologized for reasons related to male superiors, fathers or husbands, who discovered they would spend a week away. *More Women's Voices*, says Asfour (2019, personal interview), sought to train women journalists around Egypt in their own locales: Aswan, Asyut, Alexandria and Port Said.

To widen the scope of training chances, trainees were selected from each of these four cities and also from relatively smaller surrounding cities. For example, trainees from Alexandria were selected from Alexandria and Beheira as well, trainees from Assiut were selected from Assiut, Sohag and New Valley, since they are closeby cities. The trainees were a mix of 3rd and 4th years of Mass Communication students and fresh graduates. "The initial purpose of *More Women's Voices* was to inhibit gender culture and develop personal capacity at an early age," says Asfour, "so that young women journalists can be ready for the job market." In addition, the training focused on brainstorming an idea of a digital media project.

"The purpose was to create an online platform for them where they can work from their own cities," says Asfour (2019, personal interview).

Upon finishing the capacity building training in four governorates, top performing students from each workshop attended a bootcamp in Cairo, "to validate a digital media idea and have a concept and specifications developed," says Asfour. The bootcamp included intense workshops on conducting needs assessment, business modelling, project management and marketing, and how to structure a team, says Asfour (2019, personal interview). By the end of the bootcamp, they developed a digital platform idea, *Masr El Nas* website, and designed its specifications under the supervision and guidance of experts in media, project management, and entrepreneurship (Asfour, 2019, personal interview).

### *Major Outcome of Phase Two: Masr El Nas Website*

Launched at the end of 2016, the *Masr El Nas* is the brainchild of *More Women's Voices* trainees. "Taking ownership of the website is the main reason why journalists reported stories in a volunteer basis for three years," says Soha Tarek (2019, personal interview), the main *DWA* trainer in Egypt, and Supervisor and Chief Editor of *Masr El Nas*. While Ms. Tarek herself is a byproduct of *phase one*, she became a major catalyst for change in *phase two*, guiding and inspiring students throughout the journey. "During the run-up to the launch of *Masr El Nas* website, extensive journalistic training was taking place during 2016 to produce a large variety of stories, enough to launch a website," says Tarek. "A blog carrying the same name was initially formed to encourage the trainees to report stories and see them published online and to share them among their communities." The stories published in the blog were republished later in the website, says Tarek.

The editorial policy of *Masr El Nas* (2016) stated that *Masr El Nas* is a non-profit website, depending solely on the voluntary work of its contributors. The main body of contributors consists of women journalists from different parts of Egypt, aiming to enhance the role of women journalists in Egypt, and giving them the opportunity to publish stories representing their unique locale. The journalistic material published in *Masr El Nas* is characterized by its "story telling" nature, emphasizing Egyptian society and its concerns, with its different social and age strata, to enhance the value of local journalism (*Masr El Nas* Editorial Policy, 2016).

Deliberately skipping politics, the website is divided into three sections: (1) "*Woshoush*" or Faces: profiles of local and influential people; (2) "*Hekayat*" or Stories: features about traditions, practices, achievements of local Egyptians, and (3) "*Foshetna*" or Our Outing: featuring pictures and stories about historical or significant places in the different governorates, not usually placed under media spotlight. "This section aims to enhance tourism in under-discovered spots," says Tarek. In 2018, a new feature, mobile video, was introduced to the website, showing stories covered by mobile phones, after a mobile journalism (MoJo) workshop had taken place, she adds.

To run this website during 2017-2018, trainees were offered various training types: journalistic, management and technical. The last phase of training also included financial "Media Viability"—how to find a sponsor for the website, after *DWA* informed participants that the project had ended, and they will stop funding the website. In Media Viability, trainees learned to search online for funding organizations, to write proposals about the project, with the help of trainers, says Asfour. Establishing and funding of the website for two years was a serious attempt at realizing media sustainability, yet financial viability was a distant goal due to the current political circumstances, says Antje Bauer, the project manager.

Sustainability, argues Asfour, was partly realized through the amount of development achieved by the trainees, not only through the training they had, but also their lives have completely changed. "They cannot accept anymore any compromise on their personal or

professional freedom. Some of them are now working in mainstream media and advancing in their jobs," says Asfour. As explains, Basma Rashad, one of the participants from Aswan, "It is inacceptable now that I work under limits on my freedom of expression and professionalism anymore, after the quality of journalism I experienced in *Mas El Nas*."

**Research Findings:**

***RQ1: Capacity Building and Professional Development***

Concerning how has the capacity building training affected their views, role, skills and professional performance, all respondents concurred that their vision in life, for themselves and their surrounding has immensely shifted to a more liberal open-minded approach. According to Samar Mohamed (2019), PR Officer at Change Academy, "My first lesson with *DWA* was that I should always try to reach my goals regardless of societal or gender obstacles because I am a girl from upper Egypt. I learned that I could do what I want if I just try.

Hanan Fawzy, another *DWA* trainee, says she now adheres to a more liberal approach in life. "I deserted a lot of my traditional ideas, and I now think that everyone has the right to do what they want," she says. "I became more open to life and more self-confident and self-assured. I learned to accept my own mistakes and learn from them." At the professional level, Fawzy says,

> I became more daring to go through experiences, which requires a lot of wisdom and patience. Knowing my rights and responsibilities, when I found myself less appreciated and unable to work freely, I did not hesitate to quit a job so that I keep my self-respect and self-appreciation in everything that I do, and I don't regret it.

Ivonne Medhat, journalist from Port Said, who became a journalist at *Al Shorouk* newspaper concurs, "I owe *DWA* all the professional skills and entire journalistic cult that I apply now in my work at *Al-Shorouk* newspaper, a job that I earned thanks to *DWA* training." The technical skills she acquired most significantly include, she says, how to manage a website and upload material gave her a unique caliber at work. Managerial wise, Medhat says, "I learned to manage differences and the different opinions among the group members, and how to make my team less stressed," adding, "I learned from Soha so many things, at the professional and personal levels."

Another DWA trainee, Rashad, says she benefited from "the multiplicity of personal and professional skills acquired through this project, beyond journalistic skills, such as business management: "finding our own project, certainly boosted my capabilities." At the personal level, she says, "travelling on my own gave me a personal space. This was a milestone for me to realize. Now if there is training or work, I can easily travel in my own." Another trainee, Dina El-Naggar, a journalist at *Al Masry Al Youm* in Alexandria, says her caliber make her special at work. "I am now asked to do special reports that none of my colleagues at work can do," adding, "Now, knowing I was trained with *DWA*, I am assigned to make features using videography." Applying a gender sensitive approach, El-Naggar says, "In the content of features, I choose a creative angle that supports women, directly or indirectly.

Trainees have also learned to be more persistent and resilient. Lamia Mohamed, another *DWA* trainee, says "I am now more determined to achieve my goals." She explains, "I became able to face problems, to see the situations different angles, and treat them in a more logical way before taking decisions." She adds, "I also acquired "persuasion" skills, to get my rights, and complain about the traditions and norms preventing me from getting my rights."

***RQ2: Supporting Development in Local Communities, Women in Particular***

As for benefiting local communities, especially women and women journalists in their areas, (RQ2), Fawzy says, "my self-confidence made me more trustworthy for my workmates. They trust my judgment about the different professional and personal situations they face." El-Naggar has created an online network of co-corkers, mostly women, where she shares the technical skills, she learned with *DWA*. Likewise, Lamia Mohamed, another *DWA* trainee, asserts she now has the power to help others whenever possible.

Likewise, Samar Bahnasawy says,

> I support my female colleagues to become more positive and effective and ask for their rights even if they are small rights. I learned in the training to be able to find for myself and other women good job opportunities without having to go to Cairo. The trainings encouraged me to seek my dreams. I had a dream of studying Business Administration, and now I earned a scholarship from the Communication Ministry to study MBA."

As for empowering other women, Lamia Mohamed, coincides, "I advise my friends on how to live their life without fear of facing people and defending their rights." Mohamed adds that she helps her friends "who still cannot find their way to find it and help them find their skills and develop them."

Dina Mahmoud, producer at *Sout Masr* channel from Aswan, says "I support every girl who faces the same societal difficulties I faced for being a girl from upper Egypt, passing on my experience and how I overcame those difficulties." Mahmoud established a project in Aswan called *Genderist*, for women journalists to write about indigenous women in upper Egypt, and the different types of gendered suffering they face, such as the use of violence against them, discrimination, bullying, female circumcision, sexual harassment, marital rape and marriage of minors. She says, "Now I support many girls who need a lot of support to know their rights and insist on getting them."

In addition, Medhat says she passes on her knowledge to her colleagues at work, whether they are newly hired or just trainees. "It makes me happy that I know something, and I can pass it to other colleagues and benefit them." Being a good image for *Masr El Nas*, Medhat says, "My boss asks me to get colleagues from *Masr El Nas* to work in *Al Shorouk*. Knowing our work, he trusts we are well educated and can provide good quality journalism."

***RQ3: Whether Mas El Nas is Reflecting or Fostering Development, Supporting Local Women***

As for the role of *Masr El Nas* in women's development and societal development at large (RQ3), according to Hanan Fawzy,

> *Masr El Nas* was a breath of fresh air for local working women, women journalists or local culture that nobody has ever heard of. Many women came under the spotlight through *Masr El Nas*, whether women with business startups, women with problems, or women who wished for their voices to be heard.

Societal development, says Bahnasawy, journalist from Assiut, "happened exclusively to women journalists who were received DWA training." Lamia Mohamed agrees "we always shed light on issues related to upper Egypt, a blind spot for the mainstream media." She adds,

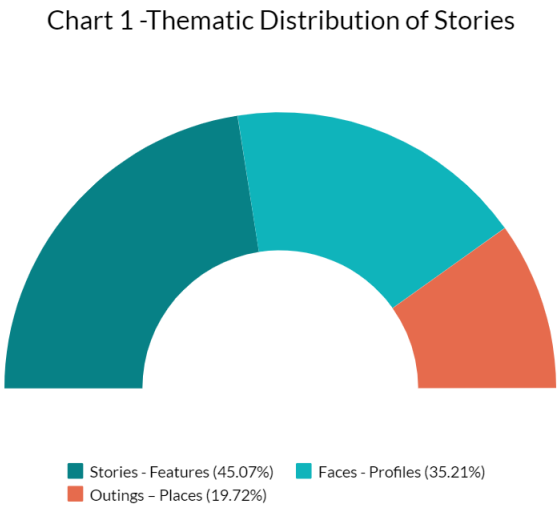
> The most viewed and read topics are the ones from upper Egypt because they are very scarce, and the mainstream media always focus on Cairo, not paying attention to issues related to upper Egypt nor humanitarian issues in general.

According to El Naggar, "I always think of women when I think of a story to write about. I think and reconsider the angle of my story to make it positive, promoting development at grassroots level." Hoda Magdy, a journalist from Port Said, concurs, "In *Masr El Nas* we like to focus on the success stories of local women despite the hard circumstances that they face, especially in upper Egypt." She adds, "our goal as a community media was to reach out to places and people far away from the media and break the elite-oriented centralization of media in Egypt."

Stories of local people have inspired other local people. Rashad asserts, "people follow the development stories about other people in the same areas and use it as an inspiration to become developed themselves, by taking a similar path or starting a similar project." She adds, "People also trust and consume from the local projects that we write about in *Masr El Nas*."

**Thematic content analysis of the Masr El Nas website**

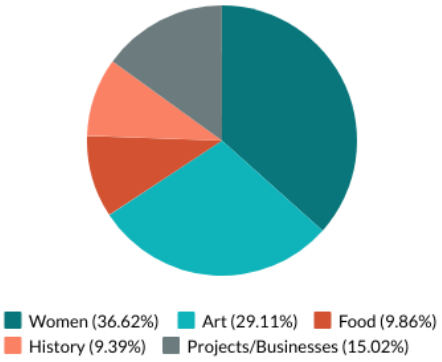
The thematic content analysis of the *Masr El Nas* website during 2017-2018 demonstrates that the overall goals of the project were predominantly met. This feeds to some extent into the journalism development goals. Avoiding politics, the 213 stories published on *Masr El Nas* are thematically divided into three section as follows: *Hekayat* or stories of local people (features), 96 stories *(45.07%); Woshoush* or faces, profiles of local people, 75 stories *(35.21%)*; and *Foshetna* or our vacation about special places and outings, 42 stories (*19.71%*) (see *Chart 1*). According to a report by Soha Tarek, the Chief Editor, almost *65%* of all stories took gender balance into account, or exclusively covered women's issues.




The themes addressed in the features and profiles sections were predominantly about local people, especially women, who have special achievements or established a local project using a simple idea. "People used to wait for the stories about them to get published. Then, they start showing them to other people proudly. They started to feel they are doing something meaningful and worthwhile, and they became an inspiration for others too," says Ahlam Al-Mansy, an independent journalist. Mohamed adds, "Women in rural areas have lots and lots of stories to tell. They just need to be heard. They deserve that their voice reaches out to the world."

A detailed analysis of the themes addressed on the *Masr El Nas* website (*Chart 2*) shows that women's issues represented the largest number of stories covered by *Masr El Nas (36.6%)*. These are followed by stories about local culture, tackling norms, customs, traditions, and art *(29.1%)*, which indicates the importance given to the unique aspects of the local culture. Following are the stories about locally established projects, male focused, representing *15%* of all stories in *Masr El Nas*, which shows attention to both fostering development and realizing gender balance. Finally, food *(9.85%)* and history *(9.38%)* stories reflected special facets of Egypt's culture and history, rarely covered in conventional media.

Chart 2 - Themes Addressed on Masr El Nas Website

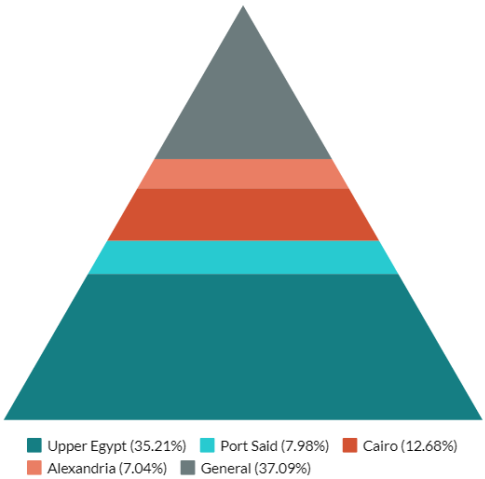



Stories about local women of Egypt *(36.6%)*, shown in *Chart 2*, were thematically analyzed to explore the aspects of women's issues covered in *Masr El Nas*. This analysis *(see Chart 3)* has shown women-related stories are predominantly about women in business who have established local projects, representing *39.7%* of stories tackling women issues. This is followed by stories related to women in culture or art *(24.3%)*, usually about women performing local traditions on different occasions or women using their talent in drawing or music to foster development. Then, comes the stories about women in general *(23.07%)*, which include profiles with successful women or editorials by women or men, about women who influenced their lives, published in special women occasions. Stories about women's rights (8.97%) were remarkably fewer despite its women empowerment goals, and women in sports (3.8%) made up the lowest percentage, since the website was more focused on business and development issues related to women.

According to Tarek, in 2018 the website launched two campaigns under the Hashtag *#Tell_her_story*. The first was in March 2018 in conjunction with three occasions: International Women's Day – March 8; Egyptian Women's Day – March 16; and Mothers' Day – March 21. The second campaign was on October 15th in conjunction with the International Day of Rural Women. "The first campaign was remarkably successful as per audience interaction in social media comments, as well as the posts' reach in social media. Some articles were published in mainstream media outlets about *Masr El Nas* and its campaign," says Tarek. The total number of published articles in this campaign include 19 articles and three interactive videos on social media, she adds.

Chart 3 - Thematic Distribution of Stories about Women

Chart 4 - Geographical Distribution of Stories




Geographical diversity, or the goal of getting women journalists from all around Egypt to report from their own local cities and about their local communities is meanwhile realized in the geographical distribution of stories, shown in *Chart 4*. Although the largest percentage of

stories *(37.08%)* are not location-based, representing historical profiles, or features on special norms or customs, yet Upper Egypt—a blind spot for mainstream media—represented the largest producing area for *Masr El Nas* stories. Stories from Upper Egypt *(35.2%)* came from five major cities: Aswan, Asyut, New Valley, Luxor and Qena. This indicates the website focused on the areas marginalized and less represented in mainstream media. The stories from Cairo *(12.6%)* were reported while students were attending training on various journalistic skills, says Tarek.

**Discussion and Conclusion:**

Despite being a unique case study, reaching to a great extent most of the "project's goals," *Women's Voices* as a media development project cannot yield powerful development in a stiff media environment. Media development necessitates a minimal level of democracy and freedom of expression, as well as persistence and involvement of all stakeholders (Wilson & Bama, 2007). As a result, *Women's Voices* could not aim to sustain a "healthy media sector" since this necessitates a free, professional and independent media, reaching out for most people (Susman-Pena, 2012).

While the *Women's Voices* project does not precisely reflect the goals of development communication—not focusing on state-level development—journalism development is more represented in the *Masr El Nas* website, serving ordinary people and reporting only about self-development at the grassroots level and motivating and engaging people (Banda, 2006; Wimmer and Wolf, 2005). Journalists have reported on the people as subjects and actors, considering "ecological balance" (Gunaratne and Hasim, 1996), as the content analysis shows.

Established to realize sustainability, or Media Viability, *Masr El Nas* only achieved the practical facet of media viability related to producing high quality content. Despite training on proposal writing and fundraising, once *DWA* funding ceased to exist, it was impossible for the trainees to find an alternative who would fund a media outlet amongst the new laws strangulating independent media operations, international partnerships and freedom, and especially in relation to receiving funds (Muslim, 2019).

Leaving out politics, however, *Women's Voices*, did not train journalists on providing a critical evaluation of the government development programs and their impact on the people, nor on enhancing the media's watchdog function (Ismail, 2013). While this was not the project's goal, it is yet a needed skill since most journalists in Egypt lack the norm of serving as a watchdog or a catalyst for change (Iskandar, 2007). The project focused more on developing the professional journalistic and interpersonal skills of young women journalists to empower them in society and enable them to find a good job. These are also the goals of development journalism, especially in the absence of proper media education yielding skilled journalists, the scarcity of training due to new laws, and the lack of a suitable media environment. Becker (2003) asserts journalists need to learn the basics and be ready to choose what to report on and how and when this is possible.

Paradoxically, many of them now refute compromising their freedom and professionalism and seek jobs in different fields due to the sturdy media environment. One of the trainees, Fawzy, resigned from a journalism job to keep her self-respect and professional ethics. Others, now working in mainstream newspapers, struggle to incorporate gender sensitivity in their reporting and use innovative reporting techniques, such as videography. The journalists' professional performance in the media outlets where they work indicates at least a level of 'media viability' has been achieved. Using advanced ICT techniques is a development milestone that Women's Voices has reached, overcoming the "gender-divide" in technology plaguing most women in developing countries (Mandour, 2009), despite facing "double jeopardy" (Sakr, 2002) and bearing with the lack of gender equality legislations.

"Enabling and empowering women" in terms of "knowledge building," providing a "wider range of voices and initiatives," and inspiring women to establish "far reaching relationships and alliances" (Muslim, 2019) through technology is also proven in Women's Voices. In *phase one*, the *EWMU* was established to empower and provide professional training and support for women journalists across Egypt. *EWMU* also partnered with the Friedrich Ebert foundation, UNFPA and the *Tha'era* network—a regional network of women activists establishing far reaching relationships. Since *phase two*, participants still seek funding from foreign organizations, addressing them with professional proposals, while six of them are figuring out the legal requirements to keep *Masr El Nas* online, declared Rashad (2019, personal interview).

*Masr el Nas* has served as an indirect advertisement tool for women with small projects. This shows development journalism through *Masr El Nas* has motivated the audience to *actively cooperate in development*; and defended their *interests*, most notably, women. In *phase two*, the target of developing the skills of women journalists from rural areas has been realized, earning them the capacity and eagerness to develop their communities, and their proven awareness and application of gender sensitivity. The thematic analysis of *Masr El Nas* reveals a serious attempt at realizing gender balance in the stories covered, with *65%* of the stories taking gender balance into consideration, as indicated by Soha Tarek's report.

The overall roles of development communication were realized. The *transforming role* was reflected in the liberal views that women journalists acquired and started applying in dealing with their local communities, their ability to persuade others of the importance of their work, and in pursuing a higher quality of life. This is in addition to the higher journalistic ideals that apply in *Masr El Nas* and other media outlets. This was proven through the interviews and the fact that many of the participants are achieving their potential in life, whether in their careers or in social development, such as with the *Genderist* project by Dina Mahmoud. The *socializing role* is reflected in the stories about local tradition, norms, and peculiar places around the different governorates of Egypt. *Innovation* is reflected in the innovative ideas through which they write their stories, and the skills and technologies they mastered, such as uploading material to the website, editing for the online reader, and using mobile journalism and videography in reporting.

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