



Lessons Learnt

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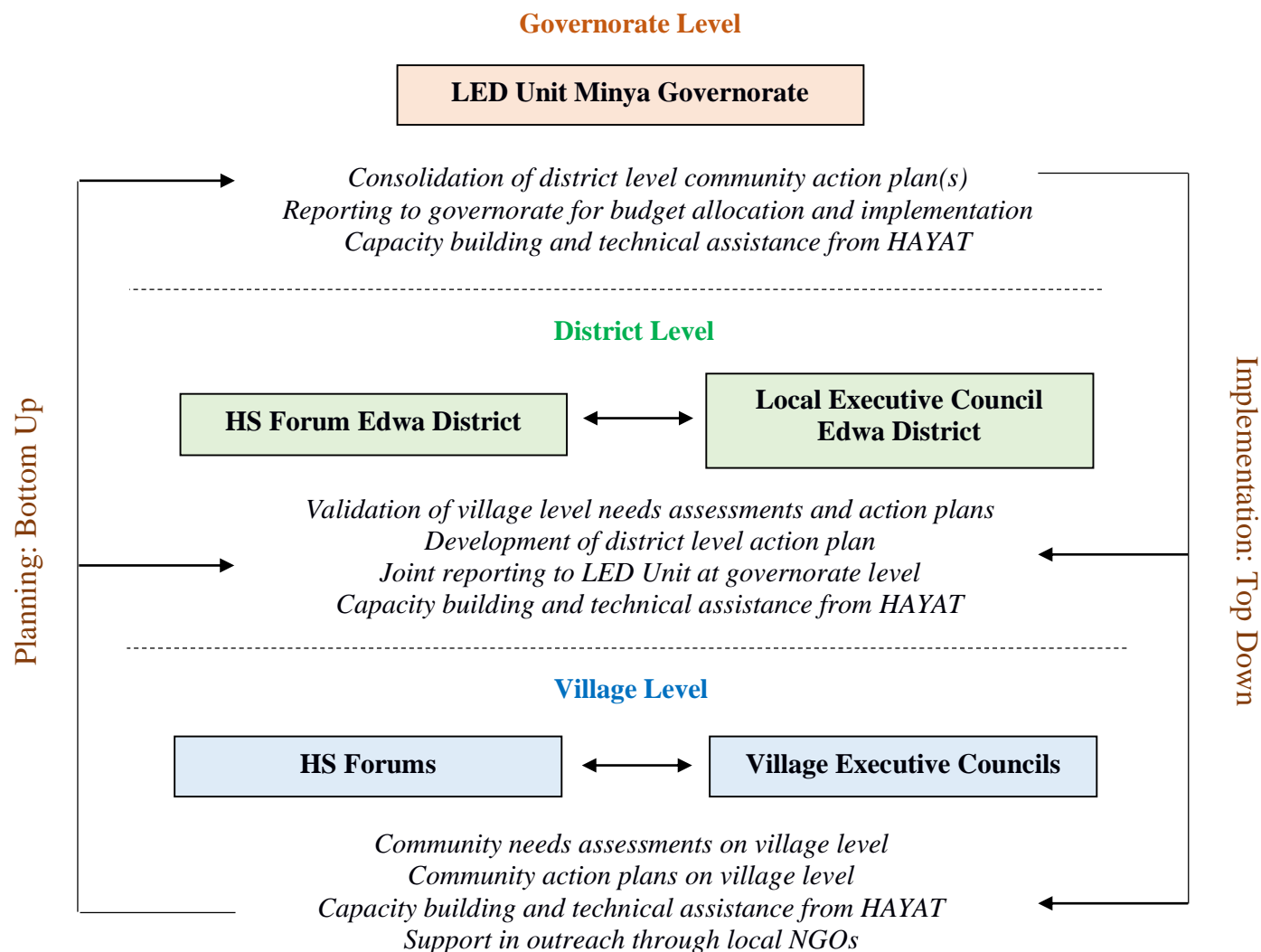
The HAYAT Human Security Forums in El-Minya Governorate: Process, Challenges and Lessons Learnt

The Human Security Forums: Designed to Empower Communities in Local Development

Designed as a key empowerment measure to enhance community engagement in local development, HAYAT has facilitated the establishment of six pilot Human Security Forums (HS Forums) in El-Edwa and Maghagha Districts, El-Minya Governorate. In cooperation with the Local Administrative Reform Unit (LARU) at the Ministry of Local Development (MoLD), the Governorate of El-Minya and the El-Edwa and Maghagha Local Administration Units, one HS Forum was created in each of El-Edwa's four mother villages (AtfHaidar, Safaniyya, Sheikh Masoud and Bani Amer), one in the village of Portobat in Maghagha and one HS Forum on district level in El-Edwa.

In absence of the Local Popular Councils (LPCs) that were abolished by the Court of Administrative Justice in June 2011, the HS Forums were established as a vehicle to bring together local communities and local executive councils on district and village levels in a joint planning and decision making process. The HS Forums are not mandated to replace the LPCs but rather to assist and advise the HAYAT Project and local government stakeholders in the identification of community needs, formulation of community action plans as well as implementation and monitoring of priority development projects on grassroots levels.

The HS Forums on village level assume the responsibility to map out pressing community needs in their respective villages (with support from HAYAT and local NGOs). In a participatory manner, these community assessments are then jointly transformed by the village-based HS Forums and the village executive councils (horizontal balance) into concrete action plans for each village. All village-level community action plans are reported to the HS Forum and to the local executive council on markaz/district level (vertical balance) for validation and for the realization of a comprehensive action plan for the sustainable development of the entire district. In a final vertical process, the district level community needs assessment and action plan is directed to the Local Economic Development Unit (LED) on governorate level. The LED Unit was established by the Governor of El-Minya to coordinate and facilitate the strategic planning and execution of all economic development activities on governorate level. The below process chart explains the horizontal and vertical functions of the HS Forums as embedded alongside the Egyptian local administration system.



Sustainable Skills: Upgrading the Capacities of Local Community Representatives

Each HS Forum is composed of 25 nominated representatives, including community leaders, representatives of disadvantaged segments of the community, representatives of local NGOs, farmers as well as active youth and women. The selection of HS Forums members was concluded in public meetings so as to guarantee the inclusiveness and transparency of the process. In coordination with the local executive councils on village and district levels, HS Forum members were chosen based on their social reputation, their local networks and merits in serving their communities. Each HS Forum is headed by an internally elected Chairperson and is divided into five specialized sub-committees for agriculture, health, youth, women and economic affairs. The Chairperson also represents his village in the HS Forum on markaz/district level.

To ensure a meaningful engagement of the community representatives in developing their local communities effectively and sustainably, HAYAT has delivered a set of capacity building and training programs targeted at upgrading the skills of HS Forum members. All trained HS Forum members acknowledge benefitting from HAYAT's capacity building programs. They claim feeling acquainted with quantitative and qualitative data collection tools to fully understand and analyze community needs and trends. They have also upgraded their skills with regards to comprehending governmental processes and budgets, monitoring and evaluation of community projects and how to communicate and negotiate with public stakeholders in the participatory planning and execution of community actions. The capacity building programs provided followed a human security approach which equips HS Forums members with skills and actions they need to empower and protect local communities from the various development threats they are facing.



HS Forum members during a HAYAT training workshop on participatory needs assessment.

Based on the knowledge acquired and the community needs assessments formulated, the HS Forums have designed specific community action plans (priority projects) for each village with concrete timelines and expected outcomes. The priority interventions planned include for instance solid and agricultural waste disposal and treatment, upgrading of water and sanitation facilities and services, development of inter-village roads to facilitate trade, physical improvements of electricity stations, enhancing health services by raising community awareness on communicable diseases and building the capacities of local health units, and supporting youth employment and entrepreneurship by promoting small production-based and income generating value chains.

Having their capacities built, the trained HS Forum members and key community leaders have now the skills to support local decision making effectively and provide advisory services for the local executive councils and LPCs once reinstated.

The HS Forums: Co-Opted Structures With No Financial and Administrative Leverage

As per HAYAT's initial agreement with its Egyptian national counterparts, the HS Forums were not designed to be part of the formal local administration system but rather to function as a supportive body alongside the LPCs and the local executive councils, specifically in the area of local participatory planning. Logically, this has deprived the HS Forums from any real financial or administrative leverage/power as related to local planning, management and decision making. Their contributions remain thus of advisory nature.

In terms of community representation, the establishment of the forums has revealed the motivation of the local executive councils (on village and district levels) to control the composition of the HS Forums. Public employees and village level executives make up the majority of the HS Forum members and more than three quarters of the female HS members are civil servants. In some cases, village council heads were instructed by the local government to chair the HS Forum in their village. This co-optation has constrained the creation of HS forums that fairly and equally represent the different segments of the local communities. It has also contributed to the circulation of a misconception within the local communities that the HS Forums and the local executive councils are the same and has triggered a

certain degree of skepticism that local government officials are “hijacking” the HS Forums for their own interests.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The process and objectives of establishing HS Forums as a tool that represents local communities in planning and decision making have proven successful in terms of having an informal focal entity through which community needs and priority interventions can be channeled to the local government. HAYAT’s capacity building programs have contributed to upgrading the skills of more than 100 community leaders and HS forum members to effectively support and participate in the local decision making process for the sustainable benefit of the local communities they represent.

However, the informal and consultative nature of the HS Forums and attempts by local government stakeholders to control the forums have posed several challenges to the effectiveness and sustainability of the HS forum model. These challenges are highlighted in the difficulty to ensure a fair representation and participation of the local communities within the existing strong community power structures. Additionally, the operation of the HS Forums within the complete local administration framework - composed of local executive councils and LPCs- remains unclear. The chance of sustaining such community forums would depend on setting a clear framework of cooperation among different executive and community stakeholders. This framework shall enable local communities to have a real say in the identification, planning and implementation of priority projects, while coordinating and aligning with local government structures. An important role of MoLD and local NGOs is to sustain the built capacities of local communities and forum members to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of quality of services provided to local communities.

To achieve optimal benefits out of the HAYAT HS Forum experience, HAYAT recommends the subordination of the HS forums as formal consultative entities within the local executive councils or the LPCs on village and district levels as well as within the upcoming Local Economic Development sectorial forums.

In future projects, HAYAT recommends setting up community forums/representatives within existing local government structures that function upon a clear vision and mandate. It is also recommended that a clear scope of work and concrete criteria regarding the election/nomination of HS forum members are realized. The contributions of the HS Forum members should complement ongoing governmental efforts to reform the local administrative system as led by the Local Administrative Reform Unit at the Ministry of Local Development.

HAYAT in Brief

The overall goal of the “Human Security through Inclusive Socio-Economic Development in Upper Egypt” (HAYAT) Program is to improve the livelihood of vulnerable households, youth, women and children in target communities in Minya Governorate (El-Edwa and Maghagha Districts) through inclusive, pro-poor socio-economic development.

HAYAT has kicked off in June 2013 and is funded by the United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security Fund (UNTFHS), the Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC) and the Government of Japan. The program is jointly implemented by UNIDO, UN Habitat, IOM, ILO and UN Women. For more information about HAYAT, please visit our website on www.hayat-eg.org and follow our Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/HayatUpperEgypt>.