



SUCCESS STORY

Enlisting Women on Lead Protection

Video demonstrates steps residents can take to safeguard themselves



Photo: LIFE-Lead Chemomics/Fady Nessim

In this scene from a USAID-funded video in Egypt, a homemaker teaches her neighbor how to protect her family from lead exposure through proper nutrition.

“From now on, I will watch my ways in eating and cleaning and I will wash my husband’s clothes separately after he comes from his work at the smelter,” said one woman in Shoubra El Kheima after seeing a video about lead protection.

The community of Shoubra El Kheima, north of Cairo, suffers from severe lead pollution generated by industries in the area. What is just as alarming is that many residents were unaware of the problem’s severity and of the simple actions they could take to protect themselves.

A USAID project aimed at remediating polluted sites began a communications strategy to educate and enable key groups in the community to spread the word about lead. The project reached out to influential community members so that they could become catalysts for action.

Women are a key target group because they can protect their families from lead exposure by adopting a few basic cleaning and nutrition techniques. The project produced a video to educate the area’s many illiterate women. The drama features a homemaker named Nabiha (which means “smart” in Arabic) who explains to her neighbor the health problems associated with lead and how she can protect her family.

The message has changed the perspective of women in Shoubra El Kheima. One woman said that before watching the video, she “did not know that my neighbors and I can have a role in protecting ourselves and our children from pollution.” Another said she was happy to learn that “there are very cheap and available foods that can reduce the risk of pollution for us and our children.”

Thousands of local women have seen the video, and are spreading the message to friends and family. Through a variety of communications approaches, USAID’s messages about lead pollution and health have reached approximately 15,000 people.