

Success Story 3

Samaher Gamal El Din Hefny: A Shining Star

“We need to work on ourselves for the self is the core of change and development”.

Samaher Gamal El Din Hefny is a young woman from Aswan. She has made tremendous progress in her education and now she is well on her way towards finishing her Bachelor degree at the Faculty of Agriculture in Aswan with a focus on her dream to revolutionize food processing in Egypt.

Hefny does not remember herself being particularly more optimistic than her colleagues at university. On the contrary, she used to find herself thinking about all sorts of dead ends in life: social ones; which are mainly associated with her being a women living in an isolated environment in Aswan, in addition to professional impasses that are again derived from being a female member of a workforce where unemployment, nepotism and discrimination are characteristic.



However, her mindset began to transform after she concluded her first training of trainers (ToT) session at Y-Peer Egypt. This experience opened Hefny’s eyes to a treasure of knowledge and self-development. She described these training sessions as “the only field that would help us realize behavioral change in Egypt.” Hence, she overcame cultural and traditional obstacles that could have stood in the way of applying for an advanced ToT event in Jordan.

Upon her return from Jordan, Hefny was sure she had found her path in life and thus there was no stopping her progress. From this point onwards, she spread herself as thin as possible in order to familiarize herself with all there is to know about simulation games and workshop facilitation techniques.

Her activities included Amr Khaled’s Lifemakers organization where she played a major role in the *Mashrou’ Insan* project. She also participated in Enactus Egypt and CDS CRISP Simulating the Egyptian Transition project (SET III) - Zamposia. In addition to having spearheaded several student initiatives such as Civilization Maker with engineering students and the Youth Creativity Forum; which were mainly focused on empowering Egyptian youth, Hefny’s toil did not go unnoticed for she was a recipient of Microsoft’s Aspire Woman Award. She was celebrated for her much valued contributions to the Aspire Woman’s mentorship program.

Hefny’s career in mentorship and facilitation reached its peak when she was chosen as part of a team of 40 facilitators for CRISP CDS project - Simulating the Egyptian Transition (SET III) “*El Wasaa’ya*” in Aswan and Port Said. This particular round of CRISP CDS simulation games aimed to propagate values of

peaceful co-existence so as to encourage the birth of a peaceful environment whereby people of widely differing social backgrounds, political ideologies and gender orientations live in harmony.

The idea of peaceful co-existence hit a nerve in Hefny. Following the conclusion of the final workshop, she began reflecting on what it really meant for someone to be at peace and conversely what it meant for someone to experience conflict. This dilemma led her to question the so-called Egyptian values or in other words the lack there-of ethical pillars. Having had the chance to enrich her critical and analytical skills during the workshops, she started posing two sets of questions: What are norms? Where do they come from? And can we channel them to people who did not have values to begin with?*

The second set of follow up questions tackled the processing of such norms: Do values and norms dictate our afflictions and behaviours? And if the answer is yes, then can we differentiate between surrendering to social pressure on the one hand and accepting difference on the other?

Having come into direct confrontation with these almost rhetorical questions for the first time, Hefny became preoccupied with the paradoxes surrounding acceptance and change. The CRISP CDS simulation established peace as a desirable end result for the clash experienced by people every day. However, Hefny did not find this answer gratifying. What is more, she highlighted the possible paradox attached to acceptance. She explained saying “we have no comprehensive understanding of what happens when we accept others. Is it simply mere acceptance or is it a manifestation of an inherent weakness within us?”

This is a question that Hefny herself could not answer. Nonetheless, what she uttered after expressing deep confusion was somewhat of an illustration of the great depth character, maturity of mind and purity of soul she reached: “We need to work on ourselves for the self is the core of change and development”.

**Hefny’s scepticism on the workshops’ true ability to instil values and ethics in people that have none is a highly beneficial contribution to our development project. It is indeed undeniable that values and ethics are intangible. Luckily, they are also volatile. This means that even though we are incapable of insuring transmission, we are quite sure that we are social beings that adapt and change. What is equally fascinating is that we learn in mysterious ways.*