Arab University Alliance for Civic Engagement

THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY IN CAIRO

JOHN D. GERHART CENTER

SCHOOL OF BUSINESS

PHILANTHROPY
CIVIC ENGAGEMENT
RESPONSIBLE BUSINESS

CASE STUDY

CIVIC ENGAGMENT IN ASWAN UNIVERSITY

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FOREWORD

Following a turbulent period for the MENA region, we now see high expectations for youth civic engagement and community development. As the largest Egyptian generation in history makes the transition to adulthood, they are increasingly inspired and mobilized to create change in their communities through service. This motivated us at the Gerhart Center to develop a publication, which was aimed at providing an overview of institutional civic engagement initiatives at Egyptian public universities.

At the John D. Gerhart Center, we believe that participation in civic engagement and community development at universities is an effective way to create social change agents who can make a difference in their communities. As such it should be considered an essential part of the learning experience of our youth.

This publication seeks to document and disseminate information on the various collaborative efforts between higher education and civic organizations, which is a greatly under-researched topic in the MENA region.

This report provides brief snapshots of institutional civic engagement initiatives in Aswan University. These snapshots are not intended to be comprehensive, but instead to provide a brief look into the varied ways through which higher education can contribute to, and simultaneously benefit from, civic engagement. While these programs are making important strides, this report makes it clear that more investment is needed to ensure that every young person is afforded an opportunity to participate in the development of his or her community.

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To begin with, I would like to thank ALLAH for everything.

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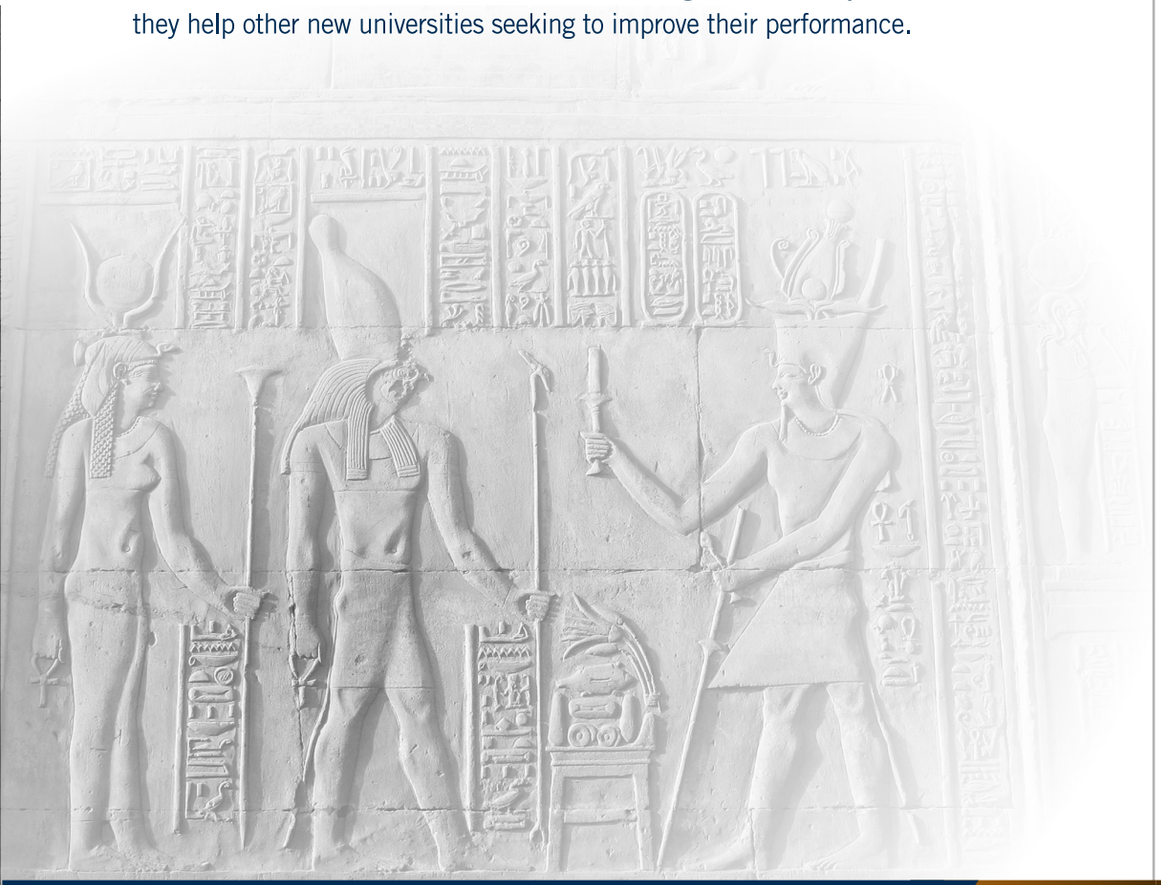
I am also indebted to the John D. Gerhart Center at AUC for their generous assistance; this work owes much to their intensive care and guidance. Many thanks to them as they help other new universities seeking to improve their performance.



INTRODUCTION

Aswan University was established in 2012 in the city of Aswan after a long period when the region suffered from lack of services. As a new university with a belief in its role in developing society, Aswan University inaugurated 14 faculties to provide different services to Aswan city, and to the villages and suburbs in this area.

The purpose of this case study is to document civic engagement initiatives by the Faculty of Nursing of Aswan University. To date, this is the only faculty of the university that has undertaken any such initiatives. It began a number of community service projects two years ago. However, since the CBL workshop presented by the John D. Gerhart Center, many other faculties of the university, including the Faculty of Agriculture and the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, are planning to begin community service work.

The study depends in large part on interviews, as it is not culturally acceptable in Aswan to ask people to fill out surveys. These include an interview with the dean of the Faculty of Nursing, as the person responsible for all faculty initiatives.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN ASWAN UNIVERSITY

The Faculty of Nursing plays a major role in Aswan Governorate and its villages. Their definition of civic engagement is "working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through political and non-political processes" (Ahmed 2017). Because the Faculty of Nursing is considered a social-service educational institute, its civic engagement work began in 2013, the year of its inauguration. The purpose of their initiatives is to help sick and wounded people to be properly cared for, at no cost to them.

Students, under appropriate supervision, are responsible for delivering this high-quality service. Staff members prepare them for this work in several steps. First, they must convince the students that such service is a moral and social obligation that Aswan society needs. Second, the students are taken to visit patients who have recovered, so as to see their happiness and thus be motivated to participate in the projects. Finally, an effort is made to increase the students' awareness of their moral duty towards people suffering from poverty and ill health. Both males and female students take part in these initiatives.

Civic engagement activities are a core part of the curriculum. Students take courses that explain the importance of civic engagement and social service. These activities are obligatory for third- and fourth-year students and count heavily toward their grades: they receive 60 points for participation out of 200 points in the third year, and 60 out of 150 points in the fourth year. Their service focuses on taking care of infants and babies at nurseries and schools, and of the elderly living in old-age homes. First- and second-year students are not required to participate in civic engagement; however, their participation is encouraged with 5 bonus points for each student plus a certificate of participation.

To deliver these services, each year the university prepares a large convoy of 15 students and 32 staff members to visit hospitals within Aswan city and in villages outside Aswan. Their patients are the destitute people in all the hospitals who cannot pay for their treatment. The students provide services to people of all ages, especially old people who need special care. The staff members evaluate each student's work, and certificates are given for excellent performance.

Unfortunately, the culture of Aswan discourages people from taking part in interviews with strangers; however, the supervisors of the convoy are able to make a kind of oral survey among patients to find out about their needs and their satisfaction with the services provided. The two most frequent suggestions from the patients are, first, that the medical services provided by the university should be available all year long, and second, that the medical care be free to those who cannot pay.

Students and staff members alike realize their important role in society, and they look forward to doing more of this kind of service whenever they can.

The patients who receive these services greatly appreciate them, but they are disappointed when they realize that the medical treatment cannot continue due to lack of financial support. Most of the families in these villages have to wait from one year to the next to receive treatment, which leads to poor outcomes.

After the CBL workshop presented by the John D. Gerhart Center at AUC, many other faculties within Aswan University started to plan civic engagement projects in Aswan, Halaib, and Shalatine. The Faculty of Agriculture and Natural Resources is preparing some initiatives that will be useful to the Aswanian people,studying the best uses for Aswan soil and the most suitable plants to grow there. The Faculty of Veterinary Medicine will send veterinarians to provide medical service for the sheep, goats, and cows of poor farmers in poor villages.

FUNDING AND PARTNERSHIP

Financial support for these undertakings is very weak at Aswan, and no permanent sponsor or provider is available. Aswan University itself provides financial support for some convoys each year; there is no partnership with governmental or non-governmental bodies.

Since it is a new university, its budget is directed to establishing the new campus and providing the necessary facilities and equipment. Considerable funding is also devoted to Aswan University hospital, which provides services to hundreds of people. Although the money available for civic engagement initiatives has been small, every year the budget is increasing. However, now that other faculties are becoming involved, the existing budget will be divided among three or four faculties. This means that Aswan University will have more initiatives, but with lower effectiveness.

CHALLENGES AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite the great efforts of Aswan University to support society through its health and educational initiatives, it faces certain difficulties:

(1) Initiatives provided by the university are available only during the academic year, and they stop for about four months during the vacation; this means that during 1/3 of the year there is no medical or educational support for the people of Aswan. This is a considerable social crisis.

(2) Financial support is very weak, as Aswan University is the only source of financial support for all initiatives. This leads to the failure of programs.

(3) There is the problem of security and permissions required to move about in suburbs and villages.

(4) The social culture in Upper Egypt in general, and Aswan in particular, does not accept strangers even if they are coming to help them. People are certain that there is nothing for free!

(5) There are not enough centers to provide the social services needed in Aswan.

(6) Some participants stop their service after they graduate, as they are not paid for this work and they need to support their families.

(7) The media sometimes frighten people away from civic engagement representatives, even if they are from the public sector.

In order to overcome some of these problems, the following are suggested:

(1) Signing a protocol of cooperation between Aswan University and the John D. Gerhart Center, specifying the kinds of support the center can provide to the university.

(2) Support from the Gerhart Center for medical convoys, in the form of medicine or financial support, under the supervision of Egyptian authorities, to provide more opportunities for poor patients to receive treatment.

(3) Giving workshops for Aswan University students to make them aware of the important and necessary role they have in society.

(4) Inaugurating long-term projects as collaborations between the Gerhart Center and Aswan University, to provide training for staff members and employees in promoting the university's role in the development of society.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSION

Aswan University is a newly established university with no history of civic engagement. It has great responsibilities toward the society of Aswan and its villages, but there are no sponsors to provide help. The Faculty of Nursing is the only faculty so far that engages in civic initiatives; it runs convoys to treat patients inside and outside Aswan city. The people of Aswan need more help to improve their social, medical, and financial status.

SUMMARY

Civic engagement is something new for Aswan and its people. Before 2012, the concept was unknown, and the government was considered the only entity responsible for serving people. Since the founding of Aswan University in 2012, it has tried to provide some help, but it has encountered many difficulties. Aswan University is doing its best to cooperate with both public and private sectors under the supervision of the government authorities to provide the best service for the people of Aswan and to achieve social progress.

To sum up, civic engagement or social service is like the three angles of a triangle. The first angle is the provider of the service. The second is the recipient of the service, who may need encouragement to accept foreigners and to believe that he deserves this attention. Finally, financial support is crucial to the success of any initiative.

REFERENCES

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