

28/6/7 -- Canadian aid aims to help Egyptians help Egyptians, Eric Walberg finds out.

The Canadian Embassy recently hosted an exhibit of SMEs that have benefitted from aid from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). Working in Egypt for about 30 years, CIDA has concentrated its efforts during the last eight years to support SME development as well as basic education, its other main focus. SMEs provide the livelihood of more than 90 per cent of Egyptians, according to head of CIDA in Egypt Peter Paproski, "so that's where we decided to put our emphasis."

In addition to cooperation with the Ministry of Finance on SME funding, there are two hands-on projects, one through CIDA's Business Development Support Services Project (BDSS) in the Delta (Alexandria) and Upper Egypt (Minya), with a coordinating office in Cairo. The other is working with Al-Mubadra, an Egyptian NGO with regional economic development centres in Cairo, Qena and other cities.

The goal of the programme is to assist specific sectors, women and youth, in supporting equitable and sustainable economic growth, "to share Canadian values of environmental awareness, equal opportunity for men and women, and children's rights," according to Paproski. "CIDA is not a bank," he stressed, "but provides non-financial support to improve the ability of SMEs to get loans, manage their businesses, improve quality, and move up the value chain from, say, two to 50 workers."

CIDA tries to coordinate and develop partnerships in its work with other aid agencies such as the Aga Khan Trust for Culture Initiative. It provided \$500,000 to the trust's very popular Al-Azhar Park project, which boasts a spectacular panorama of Cairo. Paproski hopes to work in partnership with the Aga Khan Trust on its Al-Darb Al-Ahmar community development project near Al-Azhar in Cairo, where hundreds of craftsmen have workshops producing fine metalwork, carpets and other handcrafts.

At the embassy exhibit, Al-Ahram Weekly spoke to Haidy Wagieh Sadek, administration officer

for the Minya BDSS office. The local SMEs involved in the project sell honey, royal jelly and other health foods in addition to wood carving, lace work and carpets. Sadek has worked with the Coptic Evangelical Association of Social Services (CEOSS), which provides education in health, education, commerce and agriculture, "but this CIDA project has quickly shown concrete results, which is what really counts," she said.

Yasmeen Nabil has been working for 4 months on her unit project in Beni Sweif and was very proud of its fine lace work and carpets . "We already have 20 young women in our group. Just look at the fine quality. The girls work at home and their work is excellent. It is so important to the families participating."

The various projects are planning to produce catalogues, and the Minya BDSS office already has a website www.miniainvest.com.

BDSS is also developing a Small Business Advisor Programme in conjunction with the American University in Cairo, a Small Business Certificate programme with Egyptian universities and the establishment of a One-Stop Shop for SME exports in Alexandria. The agency is working to assist these small projects in reaching the world market through Internet access.

<http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2007/851/ec4.htm>