

Creating a Well-Balanced Environmental Children's Library Collection in Egypt

Green Corner Libraries Research Report

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Executive Summary

GreenCOM was asked by the Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency (EEAA) to develop a plan to strengthen, promote and expand the popular Green Corner library program begun by First Lady Mrs. Suzanne Mubarak in 1998 and now in 25 libraries. The program supplies environmental books, videos, CDs, and other materials to the libraries and trains librarians in how to use the materials in activities with the children who visit the libraries during the summer.

GreenCOM contracted a Cairo-based NGO, Horizon Inc., to conduct a survey of the materials in the Green Corner collection and of the librarians who had participated in the program. The purpose of the survey was to find out whether the materials selected were the best available and whether the librarians had the training and resources to conduct effective activities.

- We found that although many books were of high quality from commercial publishers they were not about the environmental topics of most concern to the librarians and students. Although some libraries had collections of 400 Green Corner books, most of the materials were not on local environmental issues or even on ecosystems familiar to Egyptian children. Nor did many of the materials engage students in investigating local issues or teach problem-solving skills as recommended by leading environmental educators worldwide. We recognize that there is a shortage of such materials available from commercial publishers in Egypt. However, many can be collected from nonprofit organizations in Arabic countries or adapted for Egypt from other languages and sources.
- The librarians interviewed were young and well educated in library science and had a great interest in and concern for the environment. Their major concerns were about water resources and pollution, development of problem solving skills in civil society and government, solid waste management, and urban environmental issues. They want to conduct hands-on activities in the community with students such as field trips, garden projects, and community activities. They felt they needed more training in working with children, activity guidelines, books on the above topics, and Arabic language short videos.

Our recommendations are that the librarians selecting the Green Corner materials work more closely with the librarians conducting activities so that they select materials appropriate to their needs. Many of these materials will not be available from commercial publishers. Materials that focus on environmental issues, problem solving and community actions are more likely to be published by nonprofit organizations. Some materials may be available in Arabic and others may need to be translated and adapted from other world regions. A list of materials for consideration is attached. Librarians should also receive annual training in conducting Green Corner activities and should be involved in developing activity plans. A system of using the more experienced librarians to help train the newer ones should be developed. This training network should be connected to regional and global environmental education networks such as the South and Southeast Association of Environmental Education and the World Conservation Union.

Background on Green Corner

The Green Corner Library project was begun by First Lady Suzanne Mubarak in 1998 to promote literacy and environmental awareness among children. Mrs. Mubarak had previously started two NGOs now involved with Green Corner: The Children's Museum and the Integrated Care Society (ICS). The Children's Museum in Heliopolis has a staff of enthusiastic guides who conduct environmental tours and activities. It has a Green Corner library collection and conducts environmental education (EE) activities in the summer. The ICS also headquartered in Heliopolis, has set up about 17 children's libraries in the past two years, that provide activities for up to 600 children aged 7-15 per day at each location during the summer. The activities consist of arts and crafts, and storytelling. Each location has about four librarians. Green Corner also exists at a number of other libraries that joined independently.

The project received favorable publicity and considerable support from businesses. Local business donated computers and video players for several libraries. In the summer of 1998, the ministers of environment and education agreed to expand the program into 30 school libraries in 6 governates. This extension was to be one of the activities under the Gore-Mubarak partnership.

Previous USAID Assistance

Two countries have previously supplied assistance with the Green Corner project: Denmark and the UK. Danida, the Danish donor agency, worked on EE materials in Egypt for 5 years, producing a set of three boxes of materials—one for schools, one for public awareness, and one for vocational schools. Apparently 1,000 copies of each unit was produced for a pilot, but the materials were never mass-produced and distributed. Danida funds also sponsored some educational display materials such as a plastic pyramid with Nile River information to be distributed to schools, and sponsored a workshop by Dr. Hassan Abou-Bakr of Horizon Inc., to train 39 librarians in environmental education skills in May 1999. In November 1999, the British Council sponsored a workshop by Colin Harris at the Children's Museum to train guides in environmental education skills. Librarians were invited to the three-day workshop, but few attended. A second workshop was held at the museum in November.

Mr. Harris and Mr. Abou-Bakr collaborated on a third British Council workshop at the Museum in April of 2000 to train four ICS librarians as master trainers in Green Corner activities. In May and June 2000, three three-day workshops were conducted for all Green Corner librarians and new graduates who would serve as librarian aides. The workshops trained 65 librarians and 14 new graduates. GreenCOM produced the activity workbook for distribution to all Green Corner libraries.

The Green Corner Collection

The IGC main library in Helipolis was given the task of selecting the books for the Green Corner section and distributing them to all libraries. Books are selected by a librarian from publishers' lists that have been approved by the ABBY for use in libraries and schools. No environmental educators have been involved in the book and material

selection. There are 400 titles on the list of Green Corner materials that we were given by ISC, however many are not related to the environment. This collection is said to be duplicated in each of the ISC libraries. The main library has a searchable computer index of all its materials including the Green Corner materials.

Planning the Surveys of Materials and Librarians

In February 2000, Mary Paden, Resource Center Director of GreenCOM, and Dr. Hala and Dr. Abu Bakr of Horizon, visited the ISC Library and the Children's Museum and held discussions with a number of administrators and librarians to gather initial information with which to design a survey of both the materials and the librarians.

Our initial survey of the materials showed that most of the print materials are in Arabic, but most of the CD-ROMs and videos are in English. The collection is mainly about animals and ecosystems, with fairly few materials on environmental issues. Many of the titles are translated into Arabic from other languages. There were relatively few materials that were about Egypt and locally produced.

While the main ICS Library and the Children's museum had large Green Corner collections, it was not clear whether all libraries had the complete collection, which is reportedly about 400 titles. Some of the smaller libraries said they had 200 titles.

Librarians and museum guides told us they would like more interactive materials such as games, CD-ROMs and videos that they can use in discussions. Since summer is break time for students, the most popular activities are fun. The guides said it is important the materials be in colloquial Egyptian Arabic as opposed to classic Arabic, since the children like to relax and speak informally in the summer.

We recommend that a goal be set for a balanced collection that reflects the best practices in environmental education worldwide and also meets the practical needs of the librarians and children. Our survey form was developed to help us identify gaps in the current collection and to know what types of materials to seek for translation and adaptation. In general, environmental educators recommend that students develop not only knowledge of the environment, but also environmentally friendly attitudes and behaviors. The preferred methodology in environmental education is to engage students in community activities where they can identify environmental problems, investigate these issues using standard skills such as data collection and interpretation, discuss their findings from the perspectives of the different stakeholders and cultural perspectives involved, and make a conclusion and develop a course of action to address the issue. In developing a course of action, students learn how to persuade, communicate, and organize their work plan and similar skills necessary for citizen participation in civic issues.

Environmental education principles are clear that teachers should not tell students what to think about environmental issues, but rather should help them develop the knowledge, attitudes, practices and skills that will enable them to identify and deal with issues in their communities, both as young people and as adults. Environmental education research shows that knowledge about the environment alone does not result in environmentally

friendly practices. It is also necessary to show students which practices are environmentally friendly, and to teach them citizenship skills that help develop a sense of empowerment that leads them to address issues in their community and nation.

Simply placing the books in the libraries was not enough to get students engaged in environmental education. Given the level of activity at the libraries in the summer it was clear that the materials would have to be showcased and the children engaged in them with a purpose. We proposed to produce a set of activities that would fit in with the librarians' summer schedule and train the librarians in how to use these activities as well as develop new ones. Because the libraries are filled during summer—up to 600 children visit each day (ICS estimates)—we felt it was important to offer a set of activities that could be easily plugged into their daily format and that would encourage the children to go to the Green Corner materials for further research. Part of our research was aimed at finding out what resources and time periods were available for library activities.

The Survey Methodologies

Library Materials Survey

A list of about 400 titles of Green Corner materials was obtained from the Integrated Care Society. We discarded a number of titles that were unrelated to natural or human environments. Of these, we selected 95 titles to examine individually. Many of these titles were one book in a series of 5-12 books by the same publisher on the same theme, but with different individual topics. Thus the 95 titles—86 books, 7 videos, and 2 CD-ROMs—represented a larger number of individual volumes in the library.

In setting up the survey instrument, we discussed whether there was a yardstick to measure a well-balanced children's environmental library collection. We are unaware of any attempt to create such a yardstick and doing so is beyond the scope of this research. However, we felt it would be useful if a combination of children's library specialists and environmental educators took on this task.

These 95 titles were examined individually by Horizon staff with a questionnaire (see p. 15) that attempted to answer a number of questions about the collection:

- Were the titles in Egyptian Arabic and about the Egyptian environment?
- What were the environmental topics and issues in the books?
- What age level of student were they for?
- Were the materials well produced with clear writing and photographs or drawings?
- Did they address environmental problem solving and individual behaviors and actions?
- Did they provide a number of perspectives on an environmental issue?
- Did they cover the geographic range of local, national, and global environmental issues?
- Did they deal with the environmental issues of most concern to the librarians and students?

- Did they present the concept of sustainability in which environment, economics, and equity issues must all be worked out together or did they pit environmental concerns against development concerns?
- What were the formats of the titles: books, videos, activity guides etc?
- How did the books handle gender issues?

Librarian Survey

For the survey of Librarians, Horizon conducted personal interviews with 21 librarians at 21 libraries. Of these libraries, 17 were affiliated with ICS and two were not (two libraries were not categorized.) Nineteen of the libraries were in large urban areas and two were in smaller communities. Eleven were in Cairo, six in Giza, and two in Shubra El Kheima towns adjacent to Cairo. Two libraries were in Menufia, a rural delta town.

Location of Libraries Where Surveys Were Conducted

Cairo	11
Giza	6
Shubra El Kheima	2
Menufia	2
Total	21

The questionnaire was developed to find out:

- What resources were available in the library (computers, number of Green Corner titles)?
- Do the librarians have a hand in selecting the titles?
- How many students come to the library each day in the summer?
- What are the time periods available for activities?
- What types of activities are most effective?
- What is the education and experience level of the librarians?
- Are they concerned about environmental issues, and if so, which issues?
- Do they see the students as being interested in environmental issues? Do the students like Green Corner activities?
- Are the librarians regularly conducting Green Corner activities? If so, with what response? If not, what stops them?
- What additional resources or training would help them to conduct more Green Corner activities?
- Were there gender differences in how boys and girls engaged in Green Corner activities?
- Were librarians linked to resources in their local communities?

The data was collected by Horizon in March and April 2000. It was tabulated by GreenCOM and analyzed by GreenCOM and Horizon.

Research Findings

Materials Survey

Many books were of high quality from commercial publishers, but they did not contain the environmental topics of most concern to the librarians and students. Although some libraries had collections of 400 Green Corner books, most librarians would not attempt to estimate how many Green Corner materials were in their libraries. The materials are not distinguished from other library materials in any way. Most of the Green Corner materials on the official list were not on local environmental issues or even on ecosystems familiar to Egyptian children. Nor did many of the materials engage students in investigating local issues or problem solving as recommended by leading environmental educators worldwide. There is a shortage of such materials available from commercial publishers in Egypt. However, it can be collected from nonprofit organizations in Arabic countries or adapted for Egypt from other languages and sources.

Most of the books in the Green Corner collection are part of a series and were recently published. Most are of high quality and most are in Arabic (38 % originally in Arabic and 57 % translated to Arabic). Most materials were suitable for ages 10-15, with the fewest appropriate materials for ages 7-9.

The great majority of the books are informational, such as field guides or science books about different ecosystems (**see Table B**). Very few of the materials dealt with local issues or encouraged students to research and investigate issues, or to form an opinion and try to influence others to improve the environment. The issues of most concern to the librarians were addressed the least in the materials. Only 5 % addressed local issues (**see Tables C and D**). Only 4 % of the materials were solution oriented (**see Table E**). Only 11 % of the materials put forth the philosophy of sustainable development (**see Table F**). Others either pit humans against nature or simply do not address any issues. Twenty % of the materials presented more than one perspective on issues, but 62 % did not present any perspectives on issues (**see Table G**). Almost 30 % addressed gender roles, but for 70 %, gender roles were not applicable (**see Table H**). Although the librarians ranked behavior change as a high priority, only 15% of the materials address practices and behaviors while 71% provide factual information (**see Table I**).

Table A. Percent of GC Materials Suitable for Different Ages

Age	% of Librarian Responses
7-9	11
10-13	32
14-15	39
15 +	26

Table B. Content of Materials

Most Common

Dictionaries of Animals and Plants

Nature History

Description of Environment

Least Common

Health and Environment

Environmental Issues

Life Science

Table C. Environmental Issues in GC Materials

Most common issues

Natural Environment 31% of responses

Biodiversity 18%

Least common issues

Urban planning 1%

Society and environment 2%

Waste disposal 2%

Water pollution 2%

Air pollution 3%

Agriculture 3%

Global concerns 5%

Table D. Geographic Focus

Local 5%

National 15%

Regional 5%

Other regions 30%

Global 46%

Table E. Attributes of Materials

	Lots	Some	No	N/A
<i>Motivates the Reader to learn</i>	40	49	10	
Solution-oriented and empowering	4	16	9	69
Clarifies cultural conflicts	19	30	39	8

Table F. Environmental Perspective of Materials

Humans vs. Environment 20%

Some of each 20%

Sustainable Development 11%

Does not apply 46%

Table G. Balance of Views Presented

One view presented	17%
More than one view presented	20%
Does not apply	62%

Table H. Gender Roles Addressed

Yes	29%
No	71%

Table I. Area of EE Study Addressed

Information/knowledge	71%
Awareness	14%
Practices/behavior	15%

Librarian Interviews

The librarians interviewed were fairly young and well trained in library sciences (see **Table J**). They conducted activities for between 75-165 children per day (see **Table K**) of which about 50 or less were involved in Green Corner activities (see **Table L**). Most of their activities are less than 60 minutes long and they usually do about eight related sessions on a topic on consecutive days (see **Table M**).

Table J. The Librarians are Young and Educated in Their Field

University degree	95%
Cairo University	57%
Library Science degree	45%
Graduated in 1990s	67%

Table K. Numbers of Children in Libraries per Day, Summer 1999

<i>Number of Children</i>	<i>% of Libraries</i>
0-100 children	38%
101-200	38%
201 +	14%
Don't know	10%

Table L. Number of Children in GC Activities per Day

<i>Number of Children</i>	<i>% of Libraries</i>
0-50	43%
51-100	19%
101 +	10%
Don't know	29%

Table M. Parameters of Library Activities

Most (86%) of the activity periods are 60 minutes or less
Most activities have multiple related sessions, 38% have 8 related sessions

In 1999, 95 % conducted Green Corner activities but only 24 % of the librarians said they had adequate resources to conduct these activities (see **Table N**).

Most of the librarians interviewed had taken some previous Green Corner training and had conducted Green Corner activities for a portion of their children. Reportedly, both children and parents (see Table O) enthusiastically received these activities. Interestingly, most librarians would not even guess how many Green Corner materials were in their libraries. Only 33 % said they were involved in selecting the materials. They thought the materials were more useful for children aged 10-15 (see **Table P**).

Table N. Green Corner Activities in Libraries 1999

Most Librarians attended previous Green Corner training;
95% conducted Green Corner activities in 1999;
95% used Green Corner materials to prepare their activities (mostly books and posters);
76% said they did NOT have adequate resources to conduct the activities.

Table O. Reaction to Green Corner Activities

90% said the children were “very enthusiastic;”
86% said the activities stimulated the children to use GC library materials;
81% said they received enthusiastic feedback from parents.

Table P. Green Corner Materials in Libraries

Most librarians were aware of GC materials in their library, but didn’t know even roughly how many items there were;
Only 33% said they participated in selecting the items.
Librarians thought most GC materials were appropriate for older children

- 71% thought the materials were good for ages 14-15;
- 76 % thought the materials were good for ages 10-13;
- 48 % thought the materials were good for ages 7-9.

All libraries had computers and video equipment, but there was a shortage of good locally oriented materials to use with the computers or video equipment (see **Table Q**). They want to conduct hands-on activities in the community with students such as field trips, garden projects, and community activities. They felt they needed more training in how to perform environmentally friendly practices and in working with children. They want more activity guidelines, books on the above topics, and Arabic language short videos (see **Tables R, S, and T**). The librarians want more training in English language, environmental education, and computers. In environmental education, they want training in how to do environmentally friendly behaviors, information about nature, and teaching techniques (information, behaviors, and methodologies). They are in line with the best practices of environmental education in wanting to do skill-building community projects

rather than stick to knowledge-based classroom activities. Many librarians drew on community resources, mainly nongovernmental organizations and parents (see **Tables U and V**).

Table Q. Resources Librarians Have

Computer	100%
Computerized library catalog	57%
Adequate resources to conduct activities	24%

Table R. Resources Librarians Want

Videos	86%
Activity guidelines	76%
Books	67%

Table S. Types of Training Librarians Want

English language	81%
Environmental Education	76%
Computer training	62%

Table T. Specific Types of Environmental Education Training Librarians Request

Information about environmentally friendly behaviors	49%
Nature information	23%
Teaching methods	13%

Table U. Types of GC Activities Librarians Want

Community projects	41%
Adaptation of materials to Egypt	18%
Field trips	14%
Garden projects	12%

Table V. NGOs and Parents are the Most Popular Outside Resources

Librarians who said they worked with:

Health NGOs	43%
Environmental NGOs	33%
Parents	33%
Government officials	24%
Government research center	10 %

All librarians said environmental concerns were important and 90 % said they were very important (see **Table W**). They list four major environmental problems in order of importance for Egypt—water resources and pollution, lack of awareness and problem-solving skills, solid waste/trash, and urban environmental issues. They list the same

issues in reverse order of importance for their community. Their major environmental concerns were about water resources and pollution, development of problem solving skills in civil society and government, solid waste management, and urban environmental issues (see **Table X**).

Table W. How Important are Environmental Issues to Librarians?

Very important	90%
Somewhat	10 %

Table X. Librarians Ranking of Environmental Problems

	For Egypt	Rank	Locally	Rank
Water resources and pollution	33%	1	5%	4
Lack of environmental awareness and problem solving skills	22%	2	10%	3
Solid waste/trash	19%	3	37%	2
Urban environmental issues	19%	4	42%	1

Note that the importance given to local problems is inverse to the importance given the problem nationally

Conclusions

Green Corner librarians are well educated, concerned about environmental issues, and enthusiastic about conducting Green Corner activities. Students and parents are also enthusiastic about Green Corner's activities. The librarians' instincts about what issues to address and what methods to use are compatible with the best approaches recommended by environmental education leaders in that they address local community issues by doing hands-on activities and field trips with a investigative, problem solving approach.

The materials selected for the Green Corner libraries are the best available from commercial publishers, but they are not the best available in terms of environmental education of Egyptian or local issues. The central librarians have located and purchased the best environmental materials available to them from commercial publishers' lists, but the materials that are needed by the librarians may not be available commercially.

The librarians have expressed a need for additional training especially about environmentally friendly behaviors. They have requested more materials that are on topics of local concern, and they want activities that involve community projects, hands-on activities and field trips.

Recommendations

1. Central office librarians selecting the Green Corner materials work more closely with the librarians conducting activities so that they select materials appropriate to their needs. Many of these materials will not be available from commercial publishers. Materials that focus on environmental issues, problem solving and community actions are more likely to be published by nonprofit organizations. Some materials may be available in Arabic and others may need to be translated and adapted from other world regions. A list of materials for consideration is attached. A central librarian involved in materials selection should be in contact with international environmental professional associations for sources of materials.

2. A plan should be made to increase the number of titles and activities in the following areas:

More materials are needed on these topics:

- Water resources and pollution;
- Solid waste;
- Urban environmental issues;
- Sustainability, especially how to examine your living situation for sustainable systems and practices.

More materials should be acquired that help build these skills in students:

- Issues identification;
- Investigating issues and forming conclusions;
- Examining an environmental issue from the perspectives of different stakeholders, cultures, and genders;
- Identifying environmentally friendly behaviors in people and practices in institutions;
- Communicating findings, conclusions, and recommendations about environmental issues to concerned stakeholders in order to improve environmental conditions.

More materials should be made available to librarians on:

- Fundamentals of environmental education;
- How to create and conduct environmental activities with groups of children;
- How to use the building and grounds as a laboratory for environmental investigations.

An ongoing training program should be developed to offer Green Corner librarians basic environmental education training, as well as, more advanced courses. This program should draw on the most experienced librarians and museum guides to train the new ones. It might be based on an adaptation of the guidelines for environmental educator training—originally developed in North America and now being translated into Arabic—that outlines the knowledge and skills necessary in a professional environmental educator.

3. Librarians should also receive annual training in conducting Green Corner activities and should be involved in developing activity plans. A system of using the more experienced librarians to help train the newer ones should be developed. This training network should be connected to regional and global environmental education networks such as the South and Southeast Association of Environmental Education and the World Conservation Union.
4. Eventually, a certification program in environmental education and communication should be developed using a set of guidelines that have been discussed and agreed upon by leading environmental educators.
5. A Green Corner Activity Guide should be developed that contains activity suggestions that are less than 60 minutes long and up to eight sessions to fit into the activity format used by the librarians. These activities should connect to the materials in the Green Corner collection. They should focus on community investigation and analysis of water, solid waste, and urban environmental issues, among other topics. They should be age appropriate for the different age groups. This book should be tested and revised by the librarians and a process should be established wherein new activities are submitted by librarians to a screening committee and if approved, included in an annual printing of new pages for the book that would be distributed to all libraries. In this way, librarians stay involved in the process of developing materials and appropriate new materials are generated annually.
6. A set of short videos should be collected and distributed to all libraries for use in conjunction with activities. These videos should be in Arabic or they can be wordless and animated. They should be clearly tied to the activity book.
7. A set of materials about environmental education—how to conduct EE&C activities—in Arabic and suited for use in Arabic countries should be made available to the librarians in all libraries.
8. Eventually a group of children's librarians and environmental educators should develop a set of guidelines for a well-balanced children's environmental library collection that could be used internationally.

GreenCorner Collection Evaluation Questionnaire

1. Is this material
 - Book
 - Video, films
 - CD
 - Working paper
2. Name of the material
3. Is this material part of a series
 - Yes
 - No
4. If yes, what is the name of the series?
5. What is the author's name?
6. What is the publisher's name?
7. What is the date of publication?
8. What country was it published in?
9. What language was used?
10. The organization of the library's files
11. What is the appropriate age for this material?
 - 7-9
 - 10-13
 - 14-15
 - Over 15
12. Choose the closest following categories for this material
 - Short story
 - Practical book for students
 - History of science and technical inventions
 - Life science
 - Directory /dictionary of animals and plants
 - Description of the environment
 - Environmental problems
 - Description of nature and its history
 - Health and human environment
 - Other

13. What is the subject studied by this material?
Animal/plant/natural environment
Solid waste disposal
Water source/water pollution
Air pollution
Urban planning and life styles
Plants
Energy
World issues/changes in
World issues/biological variations
Types of society and environment
Other, describe
14. Is the material written in:
Original Arabic
Translated Arabic
English
French
Other. Describe
15. What is the geographical area covered by the material?
This city
Egypt
Middle East
Other area
International
Not Applicable
16. Quality of the material
Great
Average
Poor
17. Is material
Clear and legible
Poor translation/technical jargon
Good
Excellent
18. Does it have pictures or illustrations?
Yes
No
19. In the case of pictures, are they:
Easy to understand
Clear and appropriate

Not appropriate, difficult to understand

20. What does this material introduce/provide?
Info
Understanding
Practical skills
Awareness
Other . Describe
21. Does the material motivate reader to read and be educated about the issue?
Yes
To a degree
Not really
22. Did the material introduce opinions on environmental issues?
Only one point of view
Two opinions
All concerned opinions
23. Does the material provide solutions to the problem?
Yes
To a degree
Not at all
Does not apply
24. Do you feel the material presents struggle between man and the environment or provides picture of sustainable development?

Sustainable
In between
Struggle
25. Does the material clarify cultural conflicts between peoples?
To a large degree
To a limited degree
Not al all
Not applicable
26. What groups does the material talk about?
Men and women
Boys and men
Boys and girls
Women and girls
All
None

27. Does the material give an opinion about the roles of men and women in society and the environment?

Yes

No

28. Does the material portray any of the following issues in a negative manner?

Men

Women

Boys

Girls

29. Does the material cover any cultures or civilizations in a coherent manner?

Population

Civilizations

Other groups