



## Redesigning the Zenien Market with Women

### The issue

Women's experiences in urban public spaces are often different to those of men. Women and girls may experience repetitive acts of sexual violence in public spaces and may fear such violence, which are barriers to women's access and enjoyment to city spaces. At the same time, public spaces, services and infrastructure are overwhelmingly designed by men, for men, with little consideration of women's needs and concerns, with a lack of gender responsive planning of urban and rural spaces. Making cities and communities safe requires measures to support women and girls' social, economic, cultural and political participation.

In Egypt, where around 14% of women were employed in 2018, versus 63% of men,<sup>1</sup> markets represent important livelihood options with the potential to reduce poverty and increase women's economic empowerment.

The Zenien market was built in the mid-1990s in the low-income neighborhood of Boulaq El Dakrou, in the Egyptian Governorate of Giza. The market lacked signage, ventilation, electricity, water or sanitation facilities, while its deteriorating infrastructure and scattered waste raised hygiene and safety concerns. Although the majority of vendors were women, the lack of lighting forced them to close their shops early. A dark, waste-laden back-alley also included a presence of drug users, sexual harassment of women,

and physical violence. Customers dwindled, reducing women vendors' sales and opportunities, and pushing many vendors to close their shops.

### Our strategy for change

Breaking new ground in gender-responsive urban planning, Zenien is the country's first market to be redesigned using an approach that creates a safe space for women vendors and customers. The majority of vendors in Zenien market are women (65%) and many are mothers. The market design process included six months of consultation with market users and vendors and studies conducted by specialists, including architects, environmental, waste and gender consultants.

A safety audit and needs assessment was conducted including focus groups and a survey, with the goal of safeguarding and empowering women to fully exercise their rights and enjoy this public space. The design of the market was carried out in close consultation with women and men vendors and customers, taking into account Egyptian and international design standards. Three proposals were presented using illustrated models and all stakeholders' feedback was incorporated in the final design selection.

Vendors were moved to a temporary location during the market renovations, which ran from October 2018 until June 2019.

<sup>1</sup> Source: CAPMAS (September 2019). "[Annual employment rate: Gender distribution, year 2018](#)".

### **Partnerships for change**

The redesign of Zenein market includes a strong partnership between the National Council for Women, Giza Governorate, local government, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in Egypt, UN Women and Takween Integrated Community Development.

### **Results**

The Zenien market was expanded by 750 m<sup>2</sup> and another 800 m<sup>2</sup> of well-lit tree-lined sidewalks were added, transforming unsafe and unused areas into safe, functional spaces for residents and market users. A firefighting system was installed, and concrete and ceramic building materials were used to ensure cleanliness and reduce fire hazards. At least 118 vendors, 65 per cent of which are women – who primarily sell vegetables, herbs, meats, fish and poultry – now have clean stalls with proper ventilation, waste disposal sites, electricity and running water. Visibility of the market has improved through signage and the elimination of the back alley. There is both natural and electric lighting which have increased both women vendors and market users' feelings of safety. The risk of theft and violence to all vendors and customers has been reduced.

Following recommendations from women users, the Zenien market has been made much more accessible to women, youth, and children, including those with disabilities. Ramps have been installed to accommodate strollers and wheelchairs. Sanitation facilities have been upgraded in the market which include clean public washrooms with greater privacy – equipped with nursing tables, and hand rails with increased hygiene among market users., As many of the women vendors are accompanied by their children or grandchildren, a playground was installed in the market helping to ensure children's access to safe play spaces

### **Cairo Safe City with Women and Girls**

The [Cairo Safe City and Safe Public Spaces Programme](#) was launched in 2011 and is one of the founding programmes of [UN Women's Global Flagship initiative Safe Cities and Safe public Spaces](#). Participating cities commit to ensuring that women and girls are socially, economically and politically empowered in public spaces that are free from sexual harassment and other forms of sexual violence. In Cairo, the programme targets low-income neighborhoods – namely Imbaba, Manshiet Nasser, Elhagana and more recently Boulaq al-Dakrou. It is implemented in partnership with the National Council for Women, Ministry of Social Solidarity, Giza Governorate, Care Egypt and three local NGOs based in the intervention areas

Beyond the physical infrastructure renovation, the programme has also included interventions to strengthen women vendors' skills. Financial literacy training was provided to help vendors run more successful businesses and increase their savings.

A management committee with gender-balanced representation was created, with a dedicated room built in the market to improve communication between vendors and authorities, as well as to ensure proper administration. The committee also aims to establish a market vendors association to protect their rights and interests and further enhance women vendors' roles and influence.

Awareness-raising sessions have been provided on women's rights as well as market vendors' rights and responsibilities. Women vendors have been linked with a wholesale market and encouraged to buy their products in bulk at discounted prices. Discussions are also underway with the Agriculture Bank of Egypt on ways of supporting women vendors through financial and non-financial services, including the Aman life insurance certificate. Such efforts seek to boost women's economic empowerment, through greater opportunities and financial independence.

## Lessons learned

Public spaces need to be conscientiously and sustainably designed in partnership with the community as part of a gender approach that responds to the different needs and aspirations of the women and girls and men and boys who use them. Building community trust, understanding and ownership of women's safety in public spaces takes time but has been an essential element in this programme's success.

The process in Zenien market helped to strengthen the capacity of local government to promote and mainstream gender and a focus on women's safety across local and municipal departments as part of an

unprecedented gender-responsive approach to urban planning. To foster ongoing learning and development, post-market surveys will assess the impact of the market redesign and inform future interventions.

## The Sustainable Development Goals



The re-design of Zenien market with a gender approach contributes to achieving several SDG targets such as SDG 5, on gender equality and empowering women and girls as well as SDG 11, on making cities and human settlements more inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.