

## The Journey of a Book

In only one year, Mai Emad El Sayed, a Professor at Assiut University, published five books her students wrote under her supervision. She is one of 75 academics out of 350 young community leaders who participated in capacity-building programmes that empowered them to be change-makers in their local societies in Egypt with Danmission's partner, CEOSS.



*Photo by: Mai Emad El Sayed*

During her Fine Arts studies at Helwan University in Cairo, Mai Emad found the theoretical subjects very rigid. Then, when she became a professor at Assiut University in Upper Egypt, she discovered the struggle of fitting into a new community and being accepted as a young, knowledgeable, and confident woman interacting with older, more experienced professors. She wanted to do something different.

This struggle is not only faced by Mai but by many others in Egypt as the Egyptian communities are facing a scarcity of opportunities for interaction among themselves, leading to stereotyping and misconceptions towards others.

Mai Emad was nominated by Assiut University to enrol in the young leaders' empowerment and capacity-building programme conducted by Danmission's partner in Egypt, the Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services (CEOSS). This programme enabled them to spread and promote a culture of dialogue through their institutions and in their communities.

"It was one of the greatest workshops I have ever attended. It was different. It taught us about the values of citizenship and how to practice these values with others in real life. We also learned the methods of dialogue and the importance of respecting each other and our cultures," said Mai during an interview.

### Enjoying the journey despite the challenges

When she decided to write her first book, Mai Emad was teaching the subject of Printing Technologies to third-year students. It was when she heard about a book written at Luxor University that the idea sparked in her mind. She went to Assiut University's management with her idea of letting the students learn the subject through writing a book instead of giving them rigid information. She had planned everything, from the group work to the distribution of roles, to using new methodologies and including the values of citizenship. The management did not quite understand her direction, but CEOSS's workshops gave her the legitimacy she needed to convince them of her vision.



*Mai Emad giving a lecture during one of her classes. Photo by: Mai Emad El Sayed*

As Mai started working with her students, she realised the effort it takes to introduce them to the values of citizenship, a topic they were unfamiliar with, and divide them into diverse groups with members from both genders and different cultures and backgrounds. She utilised the dialogue and conflict resolution techniques gained during the workshops to succeed.

“It was so coordinated that when you read the book, you think that only one person wrote it, while in reality, it was more than 50 people.”

Mai's biggest challenge was finding accurate information. Her students would find the same information in different versions from various sources, and throughout their research, they discovered widespread misinformation. Therefore, they resorted to sources written back when information was verified by specialists and governments before getting published, like old books, scientific magazines, and governmental newspapers.

### Realising an achievement through hard work

Mai Emad taught the subject of Printing Technologies to more than 50 students specialising in different art and graphic majors. For them, the assignment was to write a research paper to get a good grade at the end of the semester; even though Mai had told them that their work would become a book, they did not take her seriously.

Along the journey, the students learned new research methods, how to find accurate information, and how to choose trusted sources, all while understanding printing technologies.

“The book totally changed my perspective on theoretical subjects. I did not like theoretical subjects previously, but that changed after the book journey,” says Taleb, one of Mai’s students.

The trimester culminated in a 10-chapter book of about 500 pages, which not only amazed the students but also other professors and the university’s management.

“I consider this book an achievement, and I will adopt this idea with the professors in the Sculpture Department,” said Dr. Mohsen Slim, Director of the Sculpture Department.

The book was published online and available in the university’s library. The initiative won second place nationally for the best university students’ activity. It was the first time that a book was published with the students’ names on it.

After this experience, in the second trimester, four different books were published, each one written by a different promotion of students.

“My goal from publishing these books is to give the students and future generations trusted national sources of information,” expressed Mai Emad.



*Taleb, one of Mai’s students, working on the book with his teammates. Photo by: Mai Emad El Sayed*