

## CASE STUDY

# How the USAID Women’s Economic and Social Empowerment Program Is Redefining Corporate Social Responsibility as Community Engagement

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) signifies a company's commitment to responsible corporate citizenship. But recent trends have seen the perception and practice of CSR shift away from a standalone philanthropic approach toward integrated community engagement for lasting social impact. Companies are increasingly realizing the importance of embedding CSR into their strategies and operations to drive positive change, a strong reputation, and long-term sustainability.

In its private-sector partnerships, the USAID Women’s Economic and Social Empowerment Program encourages companies to integrate community engagement initiatives into their core business models, seeking to co-create solutions that address community needs while delivering business value. Leveraging the success of the [camps for engaging men](#), which garnered significant attention from private-sector managers, the Program introduced the concept of Community Days: a series of events hosted within company facilities for employees and their families.

*Community day. Credit: Pathfinder Egypt*



*During a Program-sponsored Community Day, a group of children of private-sector employees engage in an interactive game-based activity. Photo: Pathfinder Egypt*

Community Days offer a blend of entertainment and cultural awareness activities that focus on the Program’s core themes—women’s socioeconomic empowerment, anti-violence against women (VAW) awareness, and financial inclusion—to foster a sense of community and belonging among participants.

The Program organized two Community Days for two private companies in March and November of 2023. Roughly 500 employees and their families attended these half- to full-day events, designed to be interactive and enjoyable for participants of all ages. Employees and their families participated in awareness sessions on key social and economic issues, lively games, and team-building activities. Their children engaged in art activities, games, and workshops focused on expressing emotions. Meals and snacks provided opportunities for informal dialogue and networking.



Both the management and employees of the participating companies felt that the community days fostered a sense of unity, learning, and collaboration. Participants reported an improved work environment and a positive shift in their understanding of gender equality, VAW, and family dynamics. Mohamed, 32, shared, “Today I learned that in a relationship it’s us not only me. It is important to understand that roles and responsibilities of men and women are different while both should be respected.”

Amira, 24, added, “A real man is a support system, caring and compassionate. He would never hit or violate women. Today I understood that violence can take many other forms than physical—and I will search for a partner to respect and share life with.”

The management of one of the host companies praised the initiative: “One thing we noticed is the power of bringing people together—having them spend a day or even just a few hours in the same space. The supervisor sitting with the manager, with the workers, and everyone together. People leave their titles at the door and come in as individuals, which allows for open, honest conversations. This really helps bring people closer, and it’s something we needed and focused on. It became especially clear during the last Community Day.”

This initiative is transforming the private sector's approach to CSR. Other companies are embracing similar community-based initiatives that directly engage and benefit their employees and their families. For example, Jade, a private-sector ready-made garment company, organized its own Community Day and invited the Program to attend and facilitate an awareness session on the effect of gender roles and the engagement of men and women in social empowerment.

Unlike traditional CSR activities, which can be perceived as distant from, or irrelevant to, the daily lives of employees, community-based initiatives align with the needs and interests of the people they are designed to serve. By hosting events that bring together employees, their families, and the broader community, companies can strengthen their relationships with the communities in which they operate. This helps to humanize the corporate entity, making it more relatable and approachable. It also demonstrates a commitment to the community's wellbeing, which can enhance the company's reputation and brand image. As a result, companies earn community support and trust—crucial for long-term success.

*Community day. Photo: Pathfinder Egypt*

