



Sawiris Foundation for Social Development: Decision-Making in Times of Crisis

In March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic began having a devastating impact on the Egyptian economy and people, and Noura Selim, executive director of the Sawiris Foundation for Social Development (SFSD), considered how the foundation should address the needs of the most marginalised populations. Up until then, SFSD had largely focused on improving the lives of poor people through education, and social and economic empowerment programmes. The pandemic posed a new challenge for the foundation, requiring rapid assessment and response to cushion the burden of potential economic and health shocks faced by Egypt's poor. How could SFSD address those needs quickly and effectively?

Background on SFSD

In 1950, Egyptian entrepreneur Onsi Sawiris, founded the leading global engineering and construction contractor Orascom Construction Ltd. The company had since been one of the leading partners in Egypt's major construction projects such as water treatment plans, railways, hotels and skyscrapers. His three sons Naguib, Samih and Nassef inherited their father's entrepreneurial spirit.¹ Nassef diversified Orascom Construction PLC (OC) into a number of other industries, including fertilisers, while Naguib and Samih grew and diversified the conglomerate into other businesses – Orascom Telecom Holdings and Orascom Development Holdings, respectively. As such, the Sawiris family built on their successes over generations and became one of the richest families in Egypt, with a growing reputation of giving back to their community.

It was Onsi Sawiris's wife, Yousriya Loza Sawiris, a financial auditor and development practitioner by profession, who instilled in her sons the importance of giving: "My family has always believed strongly in philanthropy and in charitable giving. I would take my three sons when they were younger with me to the garbage collector communities, where I was working through a non-governmental organisation so that they would see first-hand that there are many less privileged people living in difficult conditions. Together, we would think of what we could do to help them. These experiences stayed with them and entrenched in them the desire to give in the most meaningful, impactful and sustainable way. I also instilled in them that tithes were a main duty in life," she explained.²

This case was prepared by Dr Bheki Moyo with research associate Stephanie Townsend It is intended for classroom use only. It is not intended to demonstrate effective or ineffective handling of a business situation.

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