Cairo's Informal Areas
Between Urban Challenges and Hidden Potentials
Facts. Voices. Visions.
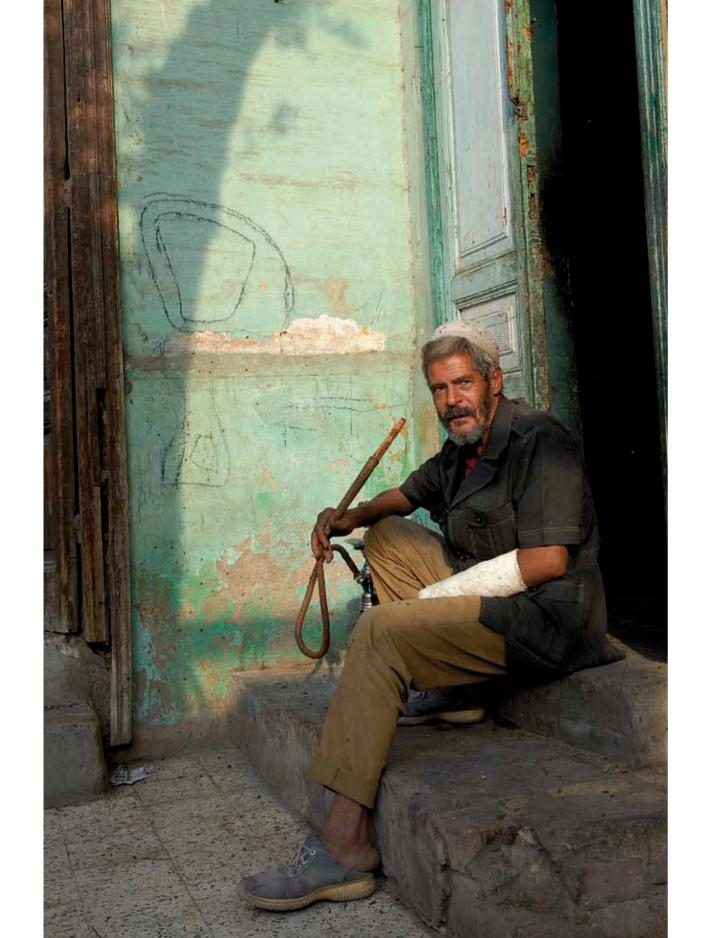
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COOPERATION

ARAB REPUBLIC OF
EGYPT

FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF
GERMANY

To all people living in informal areas.

Cairo's Informal Areas
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Facts. Voices. Visions.

Contents

Foreword

The challenges of an increasingly poor urban population, as well as the mushrooming of illegal or semi-legal settlements and slums, have been acknowledged by both local authorities and international development agencies. The insecurity of tenure, the poor housing conditions, the insufficient supply of basic public services such as water, sewage, streets, electricity, schools, and health centers, as well as the need for political and social inclusion, have been the focus of discussions at international conferences.

The response to these challenges has been articulated by an international consensus of comprehensive approaches for improving the living conditions in informal areas, raising the quality of life in poor and deteriorated districts, creating circumstances for long-term poverty alleviation, and guaranteeing legal and secure tenure. A commitment to the Millennium Development Goals by the member countries of the United Nations is assured by their having put these strategies on their national agendas.

GTZ has been engaged in urban and municipal development since the 1980s, and continues to practice its broad expertise in urban development projects as well as in multilateral initiatives. GTZ is an active member in the Cities Alliance, a global coalition of different countries whose aim is to improve the living conditions of the urban poor by concrete and direct measures. As a result, sustainable urban development as pursued by GTZ is helping to create liveable and socially inclusive cities for all residents.

In Egypt, GTZ supports governmental authorities of various levels in performing their tasks by adopting a variety of conceptual approaches, such as participatory strategies for upgrading informal areas and capacity development. GTZ also strengthens private sector and civil society organizations in recognizing and exercising their responsibility within the urban community and their roles in resolving existing problems.

This book features a comprehensive view of sustainable urban development, and of all stakeholders involved in that process. We hope it will be of interest to a wide range of experts concerned with urban development.

Jörg-Werner Haas   *Isabel Mattes-Kücükali*

A Common Call for Respect and Action

Looking back, the initial idea of this book was to give a voice to all—or at least most—of the stakeholders in informal area development. The intention was to ensure that the thoughts and opinions of the residents of these areas were represented. We hope that both the idea and the intention have been realized. The picture is certainly not complete, and never can be. Egypt is too multifaceted, too deep, and too many things are happening every day.

This book shows the complexity and the diversity of the situation. It is a look at, into, and out of the informal areas from the perspective of residents, governors, ministers, academics, consultants, and colleagues of development cooperation. Hopefully it will lead to a better understanding of those 60% of Greater Cairo's population who live in so-called informal areas, the majority of which are young, productive people, full of potential. They deserve our attention and trust, and they need our investment.

The book also attempts to serve as a platform for discussion and to stimulate further dialogue. Not only can it contribute to a better knowledge of the complex reality in these areas, but help decision-makers, investors, planners, and academics see the advantage that coordinated implementation has over separate planning efforts—an implementation that, instead of top-down measures, takes the needs of the residents into consideration. A common vision for upgrading informal areas is urgently needed. Seeing the magnitude of the challenge, stakeholders will benefit from joining forces in the development of informal settlements.

Financial resources are certainly limited. The governors have a pivotal position and they know their governorates very well, but they are without autonomous budgets. Nevertheless, there have been efforts on the part of national entities to direct financial resources toward the governorate level, such as the Egyptian government's launching of the Informal Settlements Development Facility (ISDF). And there is the Egyptian-German Participatory Development Programme in Urban Areas (PDP)—jointly implemented by the Ministry of Economic Development, the German Development Bank (KfW) and the German Technical Cooperation (GTZ), financed by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)—which advises its partners on informal area issues. There are many committed and motivated partners, and there is hope that Cairo's informal areas will see better days in the future.

This book is an eclectic mixture of academic contributions and journalistic articles, as well as interviews and speeches. The first chapter gives a broader view of Cairo and its informal areas. Chapter two presents a picture of daily life and work in informal settlements, as well as the problems, hopes, and concerns of the residents. The third chapter focuses on participatory methodologies and their implementation. Chapter four sheds light on the work of national and international cooperation partners, as well as other involved stakeholders. The final chapter stresses different perspectives, aims, hopes, and plans regarding the future of informal areas.

We would like to thank everyone who contributed to the book through their support, thoughts, ideas, articles, concerns, and visions. It shows that there are so many dedicated actors who are all willing to participate, to get involved, and to communicate their views on their capital city and its inhabitants.

Marion Fischer

01 ABOUT CAIRO AND ITS INFORMAL AREAS

Cairo: A Broader View

by REGINA KIPPER

Given the spatial and demographic size of informal areas, it is only a slight exaggeration to say that they represent the *normal* situation in Egyptian cities.

Cairo is a chaotic megalopolis where life is characterized by extremes, both of tradition and of modernity. When people are asked what the city means to them, individual answers vary tremendously, depending on a person's relationship to the place. Tourists, for example, or those who have not been there, may think of the pyramids, the pharaohs, the Nile, Islamic Cairo, or perhaps a generalized image of 'the Orient.' The responses of Cairenes, however, tend to describe aspects of their everyday lives, problems such as "traffic jams," "pollution," "noise," or "crowdedness." Today's Cairo, like any city of comparable size, can be a frustrating place for both residents and visitors alike. But Cairo is also a place where people find many occasions to celebrate together, and where visitors are welcomed with sincere openness. In short, Cairo is a diverse city of stark contrasts.

The importance of Cairo, the capital of Egypt, is highlighted by the city's several names—*al-Qahirah* ('the Victorious'), *Umm al-Dunia* ('Mother of the World'), or simply *Masr* (the Arabic name for the nation as a whole). Cairo is by far the largest city in the country, and its dominance is underlined by the fact that Alexandria, the second most populous city, is only one-third of the capital's size.

According to the 2006 census, around a quarter of Egypt's approximately 73 million inhabitants live in Cairo, amounting to nearly half the country's urban population. Egypt's other cities seem almost provincial by comparison.

It is not simply its physical size or the number of its inhabitants that account for Cairo's status as Egypt's principal city. The country's economic and political life is also concentrated there. Most of Egyptian industry, as well as many jobs in the secondary (manufacturing) and tertiary (services) sectors, are located in the capital. In the past, this centralization of jobs has led to a massive migration of rural populations to Cairo in search of jobs and an improved living situation. In terms of investment and development, Egypt can be seen as a country of two speeds, with a huge gap between the fast-paced city and the much slower rural and peri-urban areas. Everything in Cairo is faster than in other parts of Egypt: the growth rate of the city, the traffic, and the pace of life in general.

Cairo is also a historic city. Among the earliest settlements along the Nile was Memphis, capital of the ancient, united pharaonic kingdom, southwest of the future location of Cairo. Although little remains of this site, much of its stone was reused to build what is today known as Islamic Cairo. Because of the vast urban sprawl of Greater Cairo, the city now reaches to the very feet of the pyramids. Egypt's ancient heritage can be seen in various locations throughout the city, but air pollution frequently obscures the view of these large and most famous monuments.

Islamic settlement in the area of Cairo can be dated to 643 AD and the foundation of Fustat. The city known as Cairo was founded in the 10th century, and the monuments of the Fatimid and Mameluk dynasties can be found in the area that once comprised this medieval quarter. In fact, Islamic Cairo is said to have the highest concentration of

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Map of Egypt.

historical sites per square kilometer in the world: in an area of three square kilometers there are 500 registered historic monuments. Although some of these are in very poor condition, there are initiatives aiming at the restoration of historical areas and buildings. These areas—with their numerous mosques, minarets, and mausoleums—are surpassingly beautiful.

Cairo is a tourist city, as well. Because of its many monuments and sites, it is among the most popular destinations in Egypt. The most frequently visited are the ancient pharaonic monuments, as well as the Egyptian Museum. The Khan al-Khalili *souq* (bazaar) is also very entertaining for tourists. Often, tourists combine a visit to Cairo with a vacation on the Red Sea, perhaps only staying in Cairo for a couple of days. As the trip may be fully organized, they rarely have free time to discover Cairo on their own and so leave the city with a very limited impression of it. Cairo, however, has far more to offer than the official tourist highlights.

When living in Cairo, it is not necessary to leave the city to notice the surrounding desert. Many apartments have no air conditioner and windows are often left open to help circulate air. As a result, the floors, furniture, and other items in the apartment are quickly covered with a thin layer of sand and dust. Unfortunately, the sand is not only the fine yellow-whitish sand to be found in the desert, but is intermingled with exhaust fumes and other forms of pollution. In the spring, sandstorms known as *khamseen* blast the city with hot, dry winds, bringing great quantities of sand into the city. Furthermore, the city gets very little rain and so is not well prepared for it. Roads after a rain shower can resemble mud holes and are often impassable. However, the air is nice and fresh after one of these rare rainfalls.

Cairo is arguably the largest city on the African continent. Arriving by plane offers the observer a striking sense of the city's size and density. The vast dimensions of the urban agglomeration reach to the horizons. Although the size of the actual population is disputed, the official 2006 census puts the number at more than 16 million inhabitants. Local experts, however, believe that 20 million is a more accurate figure. The view of the city from outer space using Google Earth reveals a variety of settlement patterns, indicating the diverse eras of its development: the Islamic quarter with its narrow and angled streets, for example, or the Downtown area patterned after Haussmann's plan for Paris.

Perhaps the most striking feature of Cairo's urban settlement pattern is its alignment to the river Nile. Satellite pictures show the city sprawling out in every direction, expanding in the north toward the Nile Delta and encroaching upon its scarce arable land. Since ancient times, the river has been the lifeline of Egyptian society. This is still true, particularly with respect to agriculture and water supply. Since the completion of the Aswan High Dam in 1976, the annual flood cycle can be controlled. By reinforcing

the Nile's banks, construction along the river became possible, thereby increasing urban sprawl. As a result, this expansion has taken place on formerly rich agricultural land.

A closer look at a satellite picture also shows substantial development on desert land. Due to massive population pressure, city officials in the 1950s began developing land further outside Cairo in areas such as Nasr City. Beginning in the 1980s, so-called New Towns began to be planned. A number of these satellite cities have been built, but despite many incentives encouraging Cairenes to relocate, they have not prospered as they were intended to. Housing in the New Towns was and still is unaffordable for the majority of Egyptians. In recent years, urban development in desert areas has increased and much construction is currently taking place. These areas often feature decentralized housing and shopping facilities, and many businesses have relocated there. Universities such as the American University of Cairo are being shifted out of the city center to less expensive and more automobile-accessible desert locations. Some consequences of these developments are already obvious: the immense volume of traffic along the city's peripheral roads, and the impact on the environment.

The failure of the Egyptian government's housing policy to provide affordable, viable housing for a significant number of Cairenes has led many to build homes—either semi-legally or illegally—on privately-owned or public lands. These so-called informal settlements are where approximately 70% of the inhabitants of Greater Cairo are now living, and provide the subject of the articles included in this volume. They are probably not the first thing that comes to mind when thinking about Cairo. The present book, however, aims to broaden the picture of a diverse city, rich in contrasts, and to highlight the realities of the majority of Cairo's growing population.

Historical development of informal areas in
Greater Cairo since 1950.

Core Villages 1950
Situation 1977
Situation 1991
Situation 2000
River Nile

Kilometers
0   2   4   8   12

The History
of Informal Settlements

by MARION SÉJOURNÉ

Informal development has been, and continues to be, the dominant mode of urbanization in many developing countries, including Egypt. It occurs especially on the urban fringes, on privately-owned agricultural land, rather than in desert areas, which would be considered squatting on state-owned land. Despite 30 years of attempts by the government to limit unplanned growth and urban expansion on agricultural land around Cairo, as it has in most Egyptian cities and villages, informal settlements around Cairo sheltered more than 7 million inhabitants in 1998 (Séjourné, 2006). As of 2006, they are estimated to contain more than 65% of the population of the metropolis (10.5 out of 16.2 millions inhabitants), and the rate of population growth in these areas is higher than other city averages, increasing 2% between 1996 and 2006. (Sims & Séjourné, 2008).

In Greater Cairo, these phenomena began just after the Second World War (and later in the following decade for the rest of the country), when migration from Upper Egypt and the Delta caused housing pressures to become critical (Sims & Séjourné, 2000). Migrants, attracted by economic development then occurring in Cairo, coincided with the massive industrialization policy launched by the president, Gamal Abdel Nasser.

The earliest of these migrants, mostly young men, settled in central or historical districts, where they rented and shared flats or rooms. Later, after amassing some savings, some were able to buy and build upon land on the fringes of the villages located in the peripheral part of the city—such as Kit Kat in Imbaba or Mit Okba in Agouza, both of which are in Giza Governorate—where the land market was cheaper than in the central districts. This period also saw the beginning of the phenomenon of squatting on state-owned land, mostly in the eastern part of the capital, in places such as Manshiet Nasser and Kum Ghurab in Cairo Governorate.

During the 1960s, the informal urbanization process on the peripheries sped up, with a substantial increase of rural-urban influx to Cairo. The annual growth rate of Greater Cairo attained 4.4% between 1960-1966. This period marks the first expansion phase of informal settlements, mostly on agricultural land in the western (Boulaq al-Dakrour, Waraq al-Hadr, Waraq al-Arab, Munira) and northern (Shubra al-Kheima, Matariya) parts of the city. In spite of the good productivity of agricultural land, their sale for building was more remunerative than the revenues from farming, a fact that encouraged farmers to sell their parcels (Al-Kadi, 1987). Urbanization of agricultural land was the result of a horizontal extension of villages surrounding the capital, combined with a form of urbanization from the city of Cairo itself.

From that period on, the state reinforced legislation forbidding informal construction on agricultural land (Law 59-1966, subsequently amended many times). Nevertheless, these laws and decrees were ineffective, and housing demand was still growing because of migration and high demographic growth in the capital. The populist housing policy implemented by Nasser, in Cairo

in particular (with public housing called *masakin sha'biyya* and cooperatives), was also inadequate for creating shelter for low-income families and the cohort of migrants rushing to Cairo. Some new informal districts appeared, while others (like Dar al-Salaam, Imbaba, Zawyat al-Harma, Baragil, Saft al-Laban) continued to grow rapidly. Families who could not afford an agricultural plot built a house on land belonging to the state (*wada' al-yed*, or 'putting their hand on it'), almost all of which was desert land, or bought a parcel from local brokers. Thus, informal areas on desert land like Manshiet Nasser and Ezbat al-Haggana continued to grow heavily.

Starting in the 1970's, a new phase of informal urbanization began, larger than that of the preceding decade. In Greater Cairo, 84% of new units built during the 1970s were considered illegal (ABT et al., 1982). As a result of savings generated from work in the neighboring oil-producing countries such as Iraq, Libya, and Saudi Arabia, which had been suddenly enriched during the oil booms in 1973 and 1979, people invested in informal land and constructions. Emigration was made possible by Sadat's policy of economic liberalization (*infitah*), launched in 1974, which opened the economy to private investments and permitted Egyptians to travel more freely. Thereafter, many Egyptians emigrated to countries in need of manpower, and where salaries were higher than in Egypt. If people invested in the informal sector, it was because the supply proposed by the public sector was neither sufficient nor affordable. As a matter of fact, public housing units in the New Towns located in the desert areas surrounding Cairo were built for the upper middle class and not for low income and poor families.

Changes in urban social conditions and in residential migrations should also be taken into consideration when trying to understand the informal urbanization process. Young people intending to start a family, who until then had generally lived with their families, were now looking for their own houses. Because of the high value of the formal real estate market and the scarce opportunities for renting due to rent control laws, which left many flats empty and out of the market, these young people often had no choice but to seek housing in the informal market.

In addition, the 1967 and 1973 wars blocked all state investments in public housing construction. Most public funds were allocated to the war effort against Israel and so public units were massively lacking. The private sector stock, even if redundant due to speculation and accumulation of capital strategies, didn't meet the popular demand. Most of the units built were luxurious housing for sale, rather than for rent. On the other hand, the informal land and real estate sector answered the demand of both poor and middle class families who could not afford shelter in the legal city. Since then, the number of informal districts has mushroomed, growing rapidly on private agricultural land.

In 1977, Sadat introduced the New Towns policy. The goal was to solve urban problems that had become acute, particularly in Cairo, and to address the housing crisis and the urbanization of agricultural land. The challenge was to relocate the demographic growth that was occurring on agricultural land into public housing on the desert fringes of the city.

Beginning in the 1980s, the growth of informal areas in Greater Cairo slowed down to some extent (even if it remained very dynamic compared to the rest of the city). However, the New Towns policy had no effect at all on the slowing of their growth. The main reason can be found in the decreased emigration of Egyptian workers to oil countries due to oil prices tumbling in 1983-1984, and in the Iran-Iraq War of 1980-1988 (Sims & Séjourné, 2000). On the other hand, starting in the mid-1980s the national demographic growth rates and those of big cities began to diminish (the annual demographic growth rate of Cairo went from 2.8% per year between 1976 and 1986, to 1.9% per year between 1986 and 1996), and rural migration almost stopped (Denis & Bayat, 2000). This had a significant impact on demographic pressure in urban informal districts.

However, during the 1990s, although no new informal districts appeared as they had in the 1970s, the development of informal areas did not really slow down, in spite of coercive measures taken by the government against illegal urbanization such as the very strict Military Decrees (1 and 7), which forbid encroachment on agricultural land.[1] In Cairo, for example, informal areas extended considerably,[2] becoming very dense[3] and continuing to grow significantly. Between 1986 and 1996, the demographic growth rate of informal settlements reached 3.4% per year compared to 0.3% for legal areas, and informal construction growth was estimated to be 3.2% per year, compared to 1.1% in formal districts (Denis & Séjourné, 2002).

As during the preceding decades, one of the main reasons explaining the growth of informal areas is the inadequate public housing policy implemented by successive governments. Most of the units produced by the state in the New Towns are still unaffordable for poor and low-income families. They also face a problem of accessibility: they are too far from job opportunities located in Cairo's center, especially for people who do not own a private vehicle. Overall, the informal sector has "greatly benefited the urban poor, both in producing a massive amount of housing which offered a range of choices affordable to most if not all, and in allowing those of the poor with at least some equity to participate in the process and enjoy its rewards" (Sims, 2002, p. 99).

Given the spatial and demographic size of informal areas, however, it is only a slight exaggeration to say that they represent the 'normal' situation in Egyptian cities.

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[1] Those decrees imposed much higher penalties and even imprisonment for people building on agricultural land. However, they were repealed in 2003 by the former Prime Minister Atef Ebeid (Séjourné, 2006).

[2] Between 1991 and 1998, 2.6 hectares were urbanized illegally all around Cairo. The share of informal build-up was then estimated to be 13 000 ha or 43.5% of the agglomeration (Denis & Sims, 2002).

[3] In 1998, the average informal area density in Cairo reached 528 Inh/ha, compared to 300 Inh/ha for formal areas. Some informal districts such as as Manshiat Nasser have even higher densities of more than 1 500 Inh/ha. They therefore make Cairo one of the densest cities in the world (Séjourné, 2006).

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Satellite image of informal
settlements on agricultural land.

Beyond Rules and Regulations: The Growth of Informal Cairo

by ELENA PIFFERO

According to estimates by the United Nations and the World Bank, the world is becoming increasingly urban. *World Urbanization Prospects: The 2001 Revision* records, in parallel with the growth of world population overall, show a marked increase of the percentage of people living in urban and peri-urban areas (United Nations, 2001). In many cases, the consequences of this rapid urbanization have been particularly difficult to manage, especially in developing countries. In a context of structural adjustment, monetary devaluation, and cuts in public expenditures, rapid urban growth has become synonymous with 'favelization,' or, in the best of cases, with 'informalization.'

Cairo has been deeply transformed by the global dynamics of urbanization, which have increased the city's population by more than six times in the past 60 years. While the migration of rural populations has in the past represented one of the major factors fuelling this urban expansion, recent studies show that this is no longer the case. In 1960, an estimated 35% of Cairo's inhabitants were not born in the city. In 1996, only 12% were born elsewhere (Vignal & Denis, 2006). The capital's growth is now due mainly to natural increase and to the incorporation of surrounding villages and rural populations (Development Planning Unit & Urban Training College, 1999), while its growth rate of around 2% is not dissimilar to the one reported for the whole of Egypt.

A first glance at Cairo, whose built surface extends to the limits of the horizon, communicates to the observer a powerful impression of density, crowdedness, and constant activity. The view from any of the city's many minarets reveals a metropolis seething with life at every hour of the day or night. As the demographic, economic, political, cultural, and symbolic capital of a country that numbers between 70 and 80 million inhabitants, Cairo has been tellingly described as "an essay in entropy"

(Golia, 2004). This phrase seems to epitomize the quintessential problems of the city's "urban excess" (Denis, 1996), which includes traffic, pollution, infrastructure that is obsolete and inadequate to the needs of its nearly 20 million inhabitants, and the increasing dominance of informal over formal residential patterns.

The origin of this process of urban informalization is to be found in the 1960s and 1970s when Cairo, as well as other major Arab capitals, witnessed the emergence of a peripheral form of urbanization. This was led by private actors and developed outside of, and without regard for, state building laws and regulations, particularly those prohibiting the conversion of agricultural land into housing plots. Informality became the solution to the housing needs of the city's lower and middle classes. It is estimated that between the 1970s and the 1990s approximately 80% of the new housing units in Greater Cairo were built informally. According to a more recent study published in 2000, at the end of the 1990s informal areas represented approximately 53% of the built residential surface of Greater Cairo and hosted 62% of its inhabitants (Sims, 2000; Séjourné, 2006).

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The area Kafr al-Turmus from above. Boulaq al-Dakrour.

In the majority of cases, this irregular urbanization has not meant land occupation or squatting on public land, but has developed around a non-official land market starting from private landholders. Previously cultivated areas are subdivided into smaller plots of 60 to 100 m² by farmers and middlemen, or by companies in possession of large agricultural fields, and sold to private owners and builders. The construction work starts with the employment of local labor and with the typical red bricks and cement structure (Sims, 2003; Abdelhalim, 2002). Buildings may be four or five stories high, and are normally devised for future incremental construction. The owner/builder might decide to keep one of the housing units for himself and/or his family, while the rest is sold or rented out. In these cases, the 'illegality' does not stem from ownership rights, but from the illegal conversion of previous agricultural land into building plots, as well as from the disregard of existing regulations concerning the sizes of the allotments and the standards of construction (El Kadi, 1987a, 1987b).

Aside from this first typology of residential informality—which is by and large predominant in Cairo—the city also hosts informal areas built on former state land, which spreads out from an initial 'authorized' nucleus. Manshiet Nasser, for example, developed around a core of garbage collectors relocated to the area by the government in the 1960s, and Ezbet al-Haggana was initially established as a settlement for the families of soldiers based in the vicinity. These neighborhoods subsequently expanded due to illegal squatting and the occupation of the surrounding vacant land. In general, due to a more elevated risk of eviction, housing conditions are poorer in these types of settlements. However, the building quality tends to improve in the older and more consolidated areas, where the higher level of perceived tenure security allows the residents to invest more in housing improvements and ameliorations.

Informal areas in Egypt host not only the urban poor, but also the young, the middle class,

educated families, university students, and public sector employees in search of accommodation at a reasonable price. In fact, the expansion of Cairo's informal areas is due not only, nor even mainly, to rising poverty levels, but has been fostered by the combination of a series of deliberate policy choices, as well as by market dynamics which were not properly dealt with. Public housing projects have been insufficient to satisfy the increasing demand, and since the 1970s housing production has been concentrated in the so-called New Towns, satellite settlements on desert land intended to divert urban growth away from rich and scarce agricultural land. These New Towns were expected to absorb half the projected population growth between 1998 and 2017 (General Organization for Physical Planning, 1998; Ministry of Housing Utilities and Urban Communities, 2000), but their distance from the core town, as well as their lack of services and of economic opportunities, made them unattractive to low-income families. According to the census, the residents of all New Towns in 1996 amounted to 149 000, and reached approximately 600 000 in 2006, an increase of 14.9%. This figure, about 3.7% of the population of Greater Cairo Region, is well below the government's expectations.

Since Sadat's *infitah* ('open door') policy, access to the formal rental housing market has been made extremely difficult because of the government's decision to opt for the provision of public housing mainly for sale. By contrast, a rental control law inaugurated in the 1940s and removed only in 1996 discouraged legal private investment in housing for rent. At the same time, legal facilitations for construction and land reclamation after 1974 made the real estate sector attractive to private companies, with the consequent development of a semi-luxury housing market targeting the upper middle classes and fuelled by the remittances of Egyptian workers in the Gulf (El Batran & Arandel, 1998). In addition,

the high requirements of Egypt's restrictive building codes (concerning the minimum areas of plots, the height, architectural characteristics, and density of the buildings, etc.), and the long, cumbersome procedures required to obtain an official building permit contribute to the exclusion of most members of the urban lower middle classes from formal housing circuits. All these factors have resulted in a paradoxical situation where nearly two million of the Greater Cairo Region's housing units are vacant, while its informal areas keep expanding and becoming more dense. According to the 2006 census, in the last decade informal areas have absorbed nearly 79% of the city's population growth.[1]

Although informal housing now represents the dominant residential mode, there are very few shantytowns and proper 'slums' in Cairo. Apart from some inner pockets and some of the more remote, recently urbanized fringes, the overall quality of construction in informal areas is reasonably good, especially where it has been consolidated. Nevertheless, because of their unplanned and 'random' construction—from which they derive their name in Egyptian Arabic, *'ashwa'iyyat,* meaning 'disordered' or 'haphazard'—these informal areas

Satellite image of informal
settlements on desert land.

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suffer from problems of accessibility, narrow streets, the absence of vacant land and open spaces, very high residential densities, and insufficient infrastructure and services (World Bank, 2008).

Informal urbanization, although contravening the standards established by the state, cannot be regarded as totally clandestine. Urban authorities, aware of what was happening outside official regulations, have for decades adopted a *laissez-faire* policy, supported by a well-consolidated system of clientelism and corruption that has ensured the *de facto* tolerance of the administration, while official speeches aimed at 'pathologizing' the phenomenon and at presenting it as social threat and a disease which should be removed from the city (Bayat & Denis, 2000). Undoubtedly, considering the nature of the phenomenon, the adoption of policies of brutal eradication (applied only in rare cases, as in the Cairo district of Tourgoman after the popular uprising of 1977) has not been a realistic option, at least in earlier periods when the attention of the Egyptian government was concentrated on the conflict with Israel (1967-1973).

Interestingly enough, in the transfer of the responsibility for the production of lower middle class housing to 'irregular' constructors, public authorities found a way to exempt themselves from one of their socio-economic obligations (Signoles, 1999). This disengagement of the authorities is indeed only too apparent, as is their "policy of negligence" (Harders, 2003; Dorman, 2007) towards informal neighborhoods, which actually reinforces the political dependence of the population. The inhabitants, knowing the impossibility of relying upon legal housing rights (since informality is by definition outside the laws), depend on the 'concessions' and the 'benevolence' of public authorities. Consequently, clientelism and patronage networks become the only system through which local communities can negotiate the tolerance of the government and/or the (partial) provision of the necessary infrastructure—a (partial) provision which, in fact, often coincides with the pre-electoral period (Haenni, 2005).

Rather than capitalizing on the investment capacities of low- and middle-income families, and on the added value to the newly urbanized land, the government has been reluctant in guiding this rapid informal building process through the provision of serviced sites. Instead, it has issued a series of decrees aimed at increasing the fines and penalties for illegal construction on agricultural land.

In order to address these pressures, as well as the security threat posed by the propagation of radical Islamist activism in some of these informal areas,[2] in 1993 the Egyptian government created a National Fund for Urban Upgrading. This fund, however, focused mainly on big infrastructural projects such as roads and bridges, which often bypassed informal areas to the advantage of richer neighborhoods (Madbouly, 1998). Moreover, the government, in an attempt to attract new financing for urban development, has tried to involve other international cooperation actors in the upgrading effort.

[1] David Sims, data presented during a Bi-weekly GTZ Expert Meeting, 3 December 2007, Hotel Longchamps, Cairo.
[2] In the early 90s, 31% of militant terrorist groups came from Imbaba and 24.2% from the PDP project area Boulaq al-Dakrour. www.echr.org/en/ws/02/Informal.htm.

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Governorates of Greater Cairo including formal and informal settlements.

Qalyoubia

Cairo

Giza

Helwan

6th of October

■ Informal Settlement
■ Formal Settlement
□ Governorate Border
▪ River Nile

Kilometers

0   2   4   8   12

Egypt's Informal Areas: Inaccurate and Contradictory Data[1]

by SARAH SABRY

This paper attempts to answer two questions. First, how many *ashwa'iyyat* are there in Egypt and in Greater Cairo (GC hereafter) and, second, how many people live in these areas? The short answer to both questions is that we do not know. Figures about the number of *ashwa'iyyat* in Egypt and their populations differ significantly among different government authorities, as well as within the individual offices and ministries. Accurate and consistent data and information about informal areas in Egypt does not exist. Having accurate data is a necessary prerequisite to formulating realistic, meaningful, and effective plans, budgets, and policies aimed at improving the lives of millions of residents in these areas. If, for example, an area is believed to have 10 000 people when in reality it has half a million, then the public services and infrastructure required will be completely different in scale. In such cases, planning and budgeting for 10 000 will result in areas which are perpetually under-served.

The table summarizes some of the different figures for all of Egypt. The latest figures include 1 171 areas with 15 million people in 2007 by the Information and Decision Support Center (IDSC); 16-21 million people in 2008 by the World Bank; and 1 210 areas in 2006, up from 1 174 areas in 2004, by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the Ministry of Economic Development. These considerable figures seem to finally acknowledge the large-scale of informal areas. Earlier figures, especially those of the Central Agency of Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS), severely under-estimated the populations of informal areas. In 2001, CAPMAS estimated that there were 909 slums with 5.7 million people *in all of Egypt*, although in 2000 GTZ estimated their population to be 8.3 million *just in GC*. Figures for *ashwa'iyyat* differ not only among government authorities, but also within them. Different levels of government, such as that of the governorate as well as locally, mostly have contradictory figures. In Dakahleyya for example, the local government says there are 121 slums, while the governorate claims they are only 27 (Ministry of Housing - GOPP and UNDP Egypt, 2006).

In GC, the problem of data about informal areas is further complicated by the fact that the city is divided over five governorates. Until May 2008, GC was awkwardly divided among three governorates: Cairo, Giza, and Qalyoubia. It included the Cairo Governorate as a whole, Giza City in the Governorate of Giza, and Shubra al-Kheima City in Qalyoubia Governorate (Sims, 2003; Soliman, 2004). As of 2008, this has become even more complicated. In May 2008, Helwan and Sixth of October City (both suburbs of GC) became part of two new, independent governorates. This complicates the task of getting precise information about GC, because the city is not handled as one but rather is managed by five different governorate administrative structures.

[1] This paper draws from a more detailed working paper: Sabry, Sarah (2009). *Poverty Lines in Greater Cairo: Underestimating and misrepresenting poverty* (London: IIED).

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Authority	Number of areas	Population	Publication Details
IDSC	In 2007: 1 171	In 2007: 15 million	(Nawar and Al-Qitqat, 2008)
UNDP Egypt and Ministry of Economic Development	In 2006: 1 210 In 2004: 1 174		(UNDP Egypt and Ministry of State for Economic Development, 2008)
The World Bank		In 2008: 16-21 million (depending on the definition of informal areas)	(World Bank, 2008)
Ministry of Housing		In 2005: 6.2 million	(Ministry of Housing—GOPP and UNDP Egypt, 2006)
Ministry of Planning (now Ministry of Economic Development)	In 2003: 1 133		(Ministry of Planning, 2003, Appendix 34)
Ministry of Local Development	In 2002: 1 221		(Ministry of Local Development, 2002)
CAPMAS	In 2001: 909	In 2001: 5.7 million (CAPMAS, 2001)	(CAPMAS, 2001; CAPMAS, 2008)

Moreover, the boundaries of the city are unclear and constantly changing. Current boundaries do not include many areas on the periphery, which are essentially a part of the GC agglomeration but are still considered rural areas due to unrealistic administrative definitions of what constitutes an urban area (Bayat & Denis, 2000; World Bank, 2008). With a majority of informal areas located in the periphery of the city, many of their populations are not included in figures for GC, even though in reality they are part of the agglomeration.

The available figures for GC are as follows: CAPMAS claims 174 slums (CAPMAS, 2001), the Ministry of Planning claims 171 (Ministry of Planning, 2003), the Ministry of Local Development claims 184 (Ministry of Local Development, 2002). As for their total population in GC, the following figures are from a review done by the Ministry of Housing (Ministry of Housing - GOPP and UNDP

Egypt 2006, p. 34). In 1996, CAPMAS claims 3.2 million, while IDSC claims 4.1 million, and the Ministry of Planning claims 4.5 million. In 2000, the population was either 2.8 million (Ministry of Local Development), or 7.1 million (Egyptian Center for Economic Studies), or 8.3 million (GTZ) (Ibid). According to the 2004 Egyptian Human Development Report, there were 7 million inhabitants of informal settlements in GC (figures supplied by the Ministry of Planning in cooperation with the GTZ) (UNDP Egypt and INP 2004, p. 106). A recent study estimated that 10.7 million people lived in *ashwa'iyyat* in GC in 2006, which is 65.6% of the city's population (Séjourné & Sims, as cited in World Bank, 2008). This basically means that today 'formal' areas in GC are the exception.

A closer look at one area, Ezbet al-Haggana, will further clarify the data problem, especially within CAPMAS, the single most important source of

population data in Egypt. The 1996 census states that 32 652 people lived there. Preliminary results from the 2006 census found that its population had increased to 39 433. In the CAPMAS master list of slums in Egypt, which lists the names and population figures for all slum areas in all Egyptian governorates, the population figure for Ezbet al-Haggana was 412 people in 2000 (CAPMAS, 2001). Other estimates are 400 000 (Soliman, 2004) and one million[2] inhabitants, which makes it the 14th largest slum in the world, a mega-slum according to Davis (2006). No sensible average can be concluded from the 412 to one million range. A visit to the area confirms that CAPMAS figures are a severe underestimation. To arrive at a population estimate, GTZ counts the number of buildings in the area using satellite maps from 2007 and GIS techniques. It is then assumed that each of the 8 503 buildings counted has five households with an average size of five people.[3] This provides a population figure of 212 575, and is probably the most realistic estimate. These undercounted figures by CAPMAS are not unique to Ezbet al-Haggana. Massive areas such as Boulaq al-Dakrour[4] and Manshiet Nasser are also given very small population figures in the CAPMAS master list of 2001, whereas independent figures estimate their population figures to be close to one million residents. Some areas such as Arab Ghoneim in Helwan, which houses tens of thousands of people, do not even exist in the CAPMAS master list of 2001.

CAPMAS's inaccurate and contradictory data is particularly important as it has significant consequences. All household surveys, which attempt to report about the well being of Egypt's population, depend on CAPMAS data for sampling purposes.

The data of surveys such as the Household Income Expenditure and Consumption Survey (HIECS), which use CAPMAS census data, then provide the 'knowledge' about poverty in Egypt. The probability of an area being part of these 'nationally representative' household surveys is proportional to its size in the latest census (World Bank and Ministry of Planning, 2002). The only GC slum survey which exists also uses CAPMAS data for sampling (El Zanaty & Way, 2004). It selects the areas from the CAPMAS master list of GC slums and their probability of being sampled is relative to their size. This is the list which severely undercounts their populations and misses entire areas. If the population of these predominantly poorer areas of Egypt are undercounted, or are missed entirely, by CAPMAS, then these areas are under-sampled in household surveys, which in turn underestimates the scale of urban poverty. This is perhaps one of the reasons why the GC slums survey, the only large-scale survey about slum areas in Egypt, has produced such implausible results. The report basically concludes, using a number of indicators, that there is not much difference between living standards in GC slums in relation to the rest of the city. Anyone who has done field research in informal areas will testify to the implausibility of these results.

So what are the conclusions reachable from such contradictory figures about millions of Egyptian citizens? Firstly, the actual size of informal areas, as well as their respective population figures, is unknown. Secondly, they are enormous, especially in GC, and they probably house the majority of the city's residents. Thirdly, GC houses the majority of Egypt's slum dwellers: 59% of the total Egyptian slum populations

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[1] The original source of these two figures is not known.

[3] This is a very rough average. The area has extremes in types of housing. The main streets have buildings that go up to ten floors and more. Many of these flats are empty. In many other parts, there are plots of land subdivided into small rooms rented out to a family each.

[4] The master list divides Boulaq al-Dakrour into ten ashwa'iyyat: Sidi Ammar (population: 8 778), al-Zohoor (14 349), al-Shorbagy (2 030), Zenein (6 300), Kafr Tohormos (7 000), and 5 other areas. The total population of the 10 areas is 58 150.

Rising housing pressure.
Boulaq al-Dakrour.

according to the Ministry of Housing (2006, p. 40). Fourthly, in GC informal areas are growing faster than the city's population as a whole. In 2006, a study estimated that they were growing at 2.57% per annum compared to less than 0.4% for 'formal' Cairo (Séjourné & Sims, cited in World Bank, 2008).

There are many reasons behind these different figures. Different authorities have different definitions for *ashwa'iyyat*. Even different data gatherers within the same authority were found to have different definitions of what constitutes an informal area (Ministry of Housing - GOPP and UNDP Egypt, 2006). Their figures are frequently underreported because their size can be considered representative of the government's failure in creating inclusive policies that factor in all citizens. They can also be a result of the government's ambiguous relationship with *ashwa'iyyat*, some being officially recognized while others are not. Perhaps they also reflect the limited

capabilities and skills of the bloated, underpaid, under-skilled, and unmotivated government bureaucracy.

Beyond a simple count of area numbers and populations, much more accurate information is needed about these areas. How many schools and health centers does each area have and how many are needed? Which ones are missing basic infrastructure such as water and sanitation? What are the characteristics of their populations? We generally know that these areas house middle class professionals as well as the urban poor, but in what proportion? Census information is available for the areas that are administratively separate, for example a *hayy* (district) like Manshiet Nasser or a *shiakha* (a part of a district) like Ezbet el-Haggana, but this is the same data that underestimates these areas' populations. For areas whose boundaries are different from the administrative boundaries of the census, even the inaccurate data of CAPMAS is not available.

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Narrow street in
Boulaq al-Dakrour.

Advantages of Living in Informal Areas

by DINA K. SHEHAYEB

A large portion of Egypt's urban population is faced with only three residential options: physically deteriorating 'popular' districts (*hayy sha'by*); mass housing in New Towns; and informal areas. Each one of these residential choices offers a different set of living conditions. The figures show that informal areas are the fastest growing alternative, while New Towns are suffering reverse migration. Why do people choose to live in poorly serviced informal areas, rather than inhabit the planned, 'modern' New Towns? To answer such a question we must look deeper and understand the economic, social, and psychological needs that people seek to fulfil in their residential environment, and thereby unravel the hidden attraction of informal areas.

Informal Areas: What They Are Not

Informal areas are *not* unstructured and unorganized; they are not chaotic. Unfortunately, however, such misconceptions are shared by many who do not know informal areas, including high-level decision makers and planners. As emphasized in a recent UN report, informal mechanisms, like formal ones, comply with rules. Social networks and cultural norms are the organizational bases that dictate those rules and the means through which they are enforced. Informal activity is not really 'outside' the formal sphere of the state, and should be recognized as intertwined with the state in complex ways. The persistent misconceptions of informal areas as being 'chaotic,' and their residents 'uncivilized' and ultimately a 'dangerous threat' and 'undesirable,' reflect ideas about the government as *controller* rather than as *guide* or *facilitator*.

Informal areas are not a burden. How could this be the case when, in 1997, informal housing was valued at 73 billion dollars? When state resources are limited or poorly managed, when the understanding of people's priorities and of urban development processes on which laws, policies,

and regulations are based is inadequate, and when government capacity to regulate is undermined by widespread non-compliance and disrespect for government institutions—under such conditions, informal areas develop to give rise to 'popular' urban districts that answer the needs of people under the local circumstances and constraints. They are the consolidation of ongoing 'private' investment and the effort of millions of fellow Egyptians to provide a liveable, appropriate, affordable living environment for themselves and their children, within the constraints of the available choices.

Last but not least, informal areas are not inhabited only by the poor. Authorities declare that almost 17 million Egyptians live in informal areas around cities. That figure includes many more than just the very poor. Studies reveal the profile of informal areas to include a wide spectrum of socio-economic groups; its resident could include street vendors as well as judges. Residents of informal areas include government employees, workshop owners, and artisans, as well as professionals such as doctors and lawyers. A common pattern is the family-owned apartment building, with maybe one or two poorer tenants renting on the ground floor. Who else lives

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in informal areas? Those with low car ownership (in many areas only 10% of residents own a private car); those who use mass transportation for their main means of transport; people many Egyptians meet on the street; the waiter, the taxi driver, a colleague at work or the fellow next to you at university. In short, almost any Egyptian may live in an informal area.

Informal Areas: What They Are

The growth of informal areas is the result of several conditions that have coincided to create demand on housing in certain locations. In Egypt, one driving force was the shift from an agriculture-based economy to an industrial- and service-based economy, which created more jobs in and around large cities and detracted from development in rural regions. An influx of rural migrants to Cairo and to other large cities started in the 1950s. At the same time, rent control laws were passed to grant tenants security of tenure. As a result, property owners stopped investing any money in maintenance, thereby accelerating the deterioration of existing housing stock in all cities. Also, tenants who moved out of their rental units kept them vacant for possible future use because the rent was ridiculously low. Recent studies have identified around 6 million vacant housing units in Egypt, many of which belong to that category. As a consequence, newly-formed households resulting from natural population increase could not find housing units in neighborhoods where they had grown up, married, and worked. In order not to be too far from their parents, property, and work locations, informal settlement began in the nearest available location; 65% of Manshiet Nasser residents, for example, are from the nearby Darb al-Ahmar and Khalifa districts. Thus, informal areas also received the 'spill-over' populations of the older districts of the existing city.

Informal areas are different from one another. Fourteen different types of informal areas have been identified. The most widespread type is made up of medium height, high density, brick and reinforced concrete buildings. In some informal areas, average building height is six to eight floors, with some structures rising to a height of more than 12 floors. On main streets in informal areas, one can hardly distinguish the difference between the urban scene there and in other parts of the city. In fact, recent conceptions regard them as an integral part of the city, and increasingly as the future of Cairo.

Informal areas are similar in form and process of development to the natural growth of cities prevalent in the pre-World War II era, before the introduction of industrial utopianism and social engineering into city planning. They are similar in a number of ways to many parts of the existing 'legitimate' city. The most striking visual differences in form and density are the result of constraints imposed on the informal area as a result of their unsanctioned locations, and the absence of the state's support.

Informal areas are a 100% self-financed, self-help housing mechanism. They are demand-driven, incremental in growth, yield a built form that is compact, low-energy-consuming, 'walkable,' with an efficient mixture of uses allowing work-home proximity and district self-sufficiency in terms of daily and seasonal needs. These are exactly what city planners, neighborhood designers, sustainability policies, and international environmental agendas are calling for.

The Trade-Off:
Advantages of Living in Informal Areas

Housing research since the 1980s in Egypt has focused on the problems of informal areas, hardly attempting to explicitly address the advantages that have made this sector grow faster than any other housing sector in the country. Recent research on what makes the appropriate 'home' environment has brought together pieces of the puzzle and, adopting an experiential approach to the study of people's daily life, has highlighted a few spatial characteristics of informal areas that support positive aspects of the residential environment, such as "walkability," "self-sufficiency" in terms of daily needs, "convenience" and "home-work proximity", safety in residential streets, and resident participation in the provision of public amenities and regular upkeep. The following are a few highlights:

Self-Sufficiency:
All Needs Can Be Satisfied in the Area

Informal areas have shops and markets that fulfil all the needs of their residents. Residents also appreciate the fact that goods in those shops and markets are affordable, and perceive them positively as a source of income for area residents. The same can be said about the presence of workshops in such areas. Although residents also perceive these services and shops to cause nuisances such as noise or pollution, the positive value of their being in close proximity outweighs their negative effects. It should also be clarified that the geographic distribution of such uses is not chaotic. They are usually situated on commercial vehicular and commercial pedestrian streets, and hardly ever penetrate into the narrower residential streets, which consequently remain protected from strangers and allow them to function as extensions of the home.

Work-Home Proximity

Another advantage found in informal areas is the proximity of work and home locations. This measure of 'convenience' is evident in many areas, such as Boulaq al-Dakrour, where 60% of residents go to work on foot. The advantages of walking to work are numerous. Besides environmental gains from reducing energy consumption and pollution produced from vehicular means of transportation, walking to work saves money at the individual level and offers the opportunity to fulfil other needs and errands on the way. It is an activity pattern that saves time and effort, as well as money. Key characteristics in the urban pattern of informal areas that afford this measure of convenience include the distribution of non-residential uses, as well as the comprehensive diversity of those uses.

'Walkability': Saving Money, Saving Energy, and Community Building

Walking is the most often utilized means of transportation in informal areas. The compactness of the built forms, and the presence of commercial pedestrian streets tied to residential streets without interruptions by wide, vehicular traffic routes, are major factors. The restricted access, residential streets allow cars in at slow speeds, is reminiscent of the pedestrian areas in Europe. The second most used means of transportation is the microbus. There have been complaints from residents concerning the quality of the microbusses—that they are crowded, unclean, and sometimes unsafe—and therefore this could be an area of improvement where intervention would help regulate the system of transportation.

Participation

Services such as garbage collection, street lighting, street cleaning, and public landscaping are performed quite successfully in residential streets, where narrow widths restrict the access by strangers, and through-traffic allows those streets to be appropriated and controlled by their residents. People clean and maintain what they feel is theirs. The limit of resident participation in what should be governmental responsibilities stops at the main streets. Those streets are more public, shared by many, open to outsiders, and hard for residents to control. As a result, there are piles of garbage, inadequate street lighting, and poor pavement conditions. This is the territorial domain where the government should perform its public responsibility.

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Fruit shop in Ard al-Lewa.

"My Street - My Home"

The same stranger-free residential streets mentioned above allow these same streets to be an extension of the home: a private, protected place where children can play and women can sit in the afternoon and exchange news and knowledge. This appropriation of 'near home environment' serves several functions at the same time. It compensates for limited private space inside the apartments, for example. More importantly, it helps build community ties. When neighbors know each other, social solidarity increases, collective initiatives are easier to realize, and natural surveillance and self-policing occurs. All these factors together decrease the dependence on local authorities, which as a result saves the government money.

Sense of Safety

When a community's sense of safety is high, the opportunity to commit crimes decreases because people are out on the streets, leading to "more eyes on the street," stronger community ties, and fewer opportunities for troublemakers to infiltrate the neighborhood. It is therefore fortunate that most residents perceive informal areas as relatively safe environments, with occasional nuisances such as traffic accidents, hustling, or harassment. This is evident in the freedom of mobility for women and children, the unlocked doors and windows, and the types of accidents reported. An informal area is always less safe at the beginning of its development; with time, however, when commercial uses and the number of workshops increase, and when residents appropriate their residential streets, it can become much safer.

Social Solidarity and Community Building

A "sense of community," "cooperation," the "presence of family and kin," and "social interaction, companionship, and liveliness" are all advantages expressed by residents of informal areas. Residents stress the value of the community, the good neighborly relations, and the attachment and solidarity enjoyed within the neighborhood. These same people often describe informal areas as being a "popular district" in its positive sense: "lively, friendly, and alive around the clock." The density of inhabitants was recognized as one of the leading factors behind this "liveliness." The above advantages are the main ingredients of community building, and the physical environment either helps or deters this process based on the extent to which it allows residents to meet and to get to know each other. Informal areas, in contrast to modern, planned neighborhoods, increase these opportunities.

The above are some reasons why people live in informal areas. Professionals and policy makers should first admit that New Towns, in the way they are planned and designed today, are not as liveable for many people as informal areas are. They should then critically evaluate those areas, draw lessons from what works well, understand the needs and priorities upon which residential choices are based, and then revise the planning and design approaches they have been unsuccessfully pursuing for the past 50 years.

What is Truly Wrong with Informal Areas?

The constraints within which informal areas grow, their location on agricultural land or in unsafe geographical areas, the entrepreneurial initial subdivision, and the ex post facto introduction of infrastructure have all led to several major shortcomings in the quality of life for those living there. Also important in this regard are the poor quality of roads and of means of transportation, the poorly ventilated dwellings, and the unregulated construction, which may vary in terms of safety depending on the know-how of local contractors. These problems arise as a result of the absence of regulations.

In addition to the above, another set of problems arises in domains where the residents of informal areas cannot fill the government's role and help themselves. Such problems include inadequate garbage collection. Similarly, the domain of infrastructure networks is one where residents cannot do much to help themselves, and the attempt to do so often leads to major health hazards. Another inadequately addressed domain is public transportation, which, as mentioned above, can complement the privately-owned means of transport, as well as compel them to improve their quality. Vehicle-associated accident rates are higher in informal areas than in other districts, partly because of the unregulated microbus services whose drivers are often minors.

The above problems can be summarized as a lack of support on the part of the government toward its people, and a failure in its honoring their rights as citizens. The marginalization of residents of informal areas, the stigmatization of its youth, and the failure to protect its young people from drugs and hustling has caused these places to attract more illegal activity than other, better-protected districts. This contributes further to the marginalization of these areas and their residents.

The problems with informal areas should be more carefully articulated so that intervention efforts do not squander valuable resources on replacing what is already working relatively well; rather, intervention should be targeted at improving what works poorly, including filling gaps in infrastructure where services are completely lacking. While many problems in informal areas could be solved by informed intervention and political will, the challenge still remains of stopping such settlements from growing up in other, inappropriate locations, without the necessary guidance and regulation.

Housing Programs and Urban Development in Egypt

As has been repeatedly acknowledged, the phenomenon of informal areas is closely tied

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to the lack of an effective housing and urban development policy in Egypt. Although centralized decision-making and the imbalanced distribution of resources across regions are improving, a housing and urban development strategy for Egypt still takes the form of a series of projects, implemented but not monitored and evaluated so as to provide a strong basis for successful policies. Numerous New Towns in the desert were planned and implemented during the 1970s to accommodate the increasing urban population and to protect the Nile Valley from overcrowding to prevent loss of fertile agriculture land. These cities did not attain their target population despite the continuous efforts of the government to create job opportunities and healthy 'modern' housing. The problem is multi-faceted. First, there is the tendency of the government to tie the success of the New Towns to political agendas, which leads to a repeated denial of their failure. Another mistake has been to insist on following divisive master planning principles which have been shown to be unsustainable and do not yield liveable places in aspects such as safety, convenience, and community building. Very little time has been spent understanding how urban life and urban systems work, and the focus has been solely on speedy implementation and the meeting of political agendas.

Instead of providing land for people to build on under zoning regulations that ensure sustainable and adequately serviced extensions of cities and new communities, the government has taken it upon itself to provide a fully developed 'product' that residents should not change or develop further. The idea of government as provider of housing came after World War II to solve certain pressing problems, but has been challenged over the decades, being substituted since the 1980s with the government in the role of enabler or facilitator.

Another problem is the mismatch between housing demand and the housing that is supplied by the government. The norm is that the demand directs the characteristics of the supply. In housing, this means that the location, dwelling size, and neighborhood design are shaped by what people need most, accommodating variety in household size, priorities, and lifestyles. Research shows that in existing city districts, and surprisingly enough in informal areas, the housing supply does reflect this variety in the demand. Informal areas have dwellings that vary from one to five rooms, sometimes even more, and vary in size from 41 m² to 180 m². One problem is that when the government supplies the housing (whether directly by building it, or indirectly through private sector developers), the mass housing projects follow an industrial approach, with standardization as the main objective. For example, the latest target of 85 000 dwelling units annually are all 63m² two bedroom apartments. Filling entire neighborhoods and districts with thousands of apartments, all of which have the same design, is not realistic. Even if it suits some, it will not suit all, especially given that the largest portion of the demand (56%) is for three enclosed rooms.

The focus on initial cost reduction is another factor that compromises the quality of the neighborhoods provided by governmental programs. They build housing clusters around undefined spaces that are too expensive to landscape or maintain. They do not realize that alternative layouts would create open spaces and streets about which residents would feel a sense of ownership and where they would invest time and money maintaining, cleaning, beautifying, and protecting it. Instead of depending on local authorities to provide street lighting, garbage collection, planting trees, the maintenance of open space and protection from strangers, design and planning can encourage residents to appropriate space for themselves and do much of it at their own expense.

This long-term economic view would not only save on the operational, maintenance, and policing costs of the built environment; it would also contribute to increasing the future value of the neighborhood in question, as well as the properties within it. Raising the initial costs, by spending more on creative, participatory, and well thought-out design and planning solutions, would raise the quality of life in the area, making it more attractive to live in. Consequently, this increase in demand would reflect on property values positively, and the increase in initial cost would soon be recovered with a profit. Governments often cannot afford this increase in initial cost. However, they should realize that property owners, whose property value would increase over time, could contribute, even if those property owners were from the lower income groups. Applied research has shown that when the poor realize that investments in the built environment benefits them directly, they are willing to pay. The more value-for-cost, the more they pay. Once again, the informal areas hold lessons for policy makers in this regard. Unfortunately, the huge investments that residents are making is not recognized as a potential source of income by the government, and there is still a lack of interest in understanding when and why residents of informal areas are willing to invest in their residential environments.

Why does the government still insist on building neighborhoods that are inconvenient, wasteful, and unsustainable? One reason is that they look good on paper, with neatly-delineated shapes and separated color codes, and a neighborhood plan that looks like a Mondrian painting of the 1950s. They are easy for politicians to understand, and easy for contractors to implement. Such recipes, easy for consulting firms to produce and reproduce, save time and money, since more complex designs would require more than newly graduated youths with good graphic design skills; they would require multi-disciplinary teams and a participatory process with local authorities and user-representative groups.

They would also require considering change over a longer timeframe, and maintenance-specific zoning regulations and guidelines. It is easier and much less expensive simply to do what the government asks for, whether it yields liveable places or not. From such a perspective, it does not seem to matter whether these districts increase in value because of increasing demand on them (like many informal areas), or stagnate and remain deserted (like most New Towns). They only attract those who want to benefit from government grants and 'freebies,' or those who are relocated (against their will) to these areas as a result of natural disasters and urban renewal projects.

In any part of the city, old or new, we want to avoid neglect: heaps of garbage, dried up planting, broken sidewalks, and run down buildings. We want to avoid unsafe paths and deserted spaces, unwatched roads and no-man's lands. We want to avoid encroachments that serve one purpose but spoil another. Change is good, and people adding sheds and drinking fountains, benches, and landscaping in collective residential spaces is a positive thing and saves the government money, but it should be predicted and accounted for in the initial planning of the neighborhood. This adaptable planning of neighborhood is based on an understanding of human nature, and of the cultural norms of a society. Europe is investing major resources and effort in fixing large post-war housing estates that suffered dilapidation due to the inappropriate design and planning of standardized units around left-over, meaningless spaces: the kind we have built for the last 40 years and are still building today.

In Conclusion

People choose where they live for multiple reasons. It is simplistic to say it is just the cost of rent, or just the proximity to work, or the cost of transportation; otherwise, how could one explain

Renovated houses
in Boulaq al-Dakrour.

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the reverse-migration of industrial workers and their family from Tenth of Ramadan City? Those who were given modern apartments in Salaam City would not have returned to what professionals call 'slums,' and pay LE 25 000 as key money and LE 300 monthly rents. There are other important measures of liveability, also related to economics, which are non-monetary. These are about value-for-cost. For example, they concern safety for women who walk their neighborhood streets, or the chance for girls to continue their education, or access to better nutrition with the presence of walkable, fresh produce markets. They include people to watch out for you, who offer assistance in case of emergency. All of these are found in informal areas, but planning professionals and policy-makers refuse to learn them or take them into consideration.

Also, these advantages of living in informal areas are not always readily perceived by the residents themselves, who suffer the stigma of the negative image of their neighborhoods, an image that is emphasized by the government and promoted by the media. Instead of asking about media-influence preferences and real estate trends, planners should adapt a more experiential approach through a study of the activities and choices of daily life. This knowledge will serve to externalize what is truly valued in the neighborhood, and what is resented.

It is important to identify the trade-off between problems and gains that residents of informal areas experience in their daily lives. This is important for two reasons. Firstly, it provides a guide for intervention strategies. It develops understanding of what is working well but needs improvement, as well as what is ineffective and needs to be changed. If intervention is implemented without such knowledge, it might negatively impact certain advantages enjoyed by residents. The second reason is that it allows planners and policy makers to learn lessons in urban planning and development, in that

informal areas seem to be the preferred residential choice for many low- and middle-income families.

Lessons to be Learned

There are lessons to be learned by professionals, and by their partners and stakeholders, regarding the planning, design, and operation of both formal and informal neighborhoods, whether for new design purposes or for rehabilitation and upgrade. The first lesson is to recognize people as potential: to invest money, to manage and maintain the physical environment, and to participate in service provision. The second lesson is the need for the government to adopt an enabling approach that supports what people do, and to regulate to the benefit of the collective good. One priority should be the development of enabling/affordable housing standards, rather than standards so unfeasible that they leave most of the housing stock unregulated. The third lesson to be learned from informal areas is the importance of appropriate neighborhood planning: where street layout and distribution of commercial activities promotes sustainability, where value-for-cost is maximized, thereby allowing residents the opportunity to control and appropriate public space, and where people are encouraged to invest in the shared amenities and maintenance of their neighborhood.

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A Newcomer's Impressions:
Interview with Dr. Roland F. Steurer

by JÜRGEN STRYJAK

Dr. Roland F. Steurer has been the Country Director of GTZ Egypt since September 2008. He has almost 30 years of experience in development cooperation from working in various countries.

What was your initial impression of Cairo?

Dr. Roland F. Steurer: I visited Cairo for the first time in 1983, together with my wife. We traveled independently as backpackers throughout Egypt. We hitchhiked through the desert to the Farafra, Dakhla, and Kharga oases. There was no public transportation to those areas at that time, not even an asphalt road. We spent some days in Cairo, too, but the city did not feel welcoming to us and we had little contact with the locals. An Arab megacity was a completely new and strange experience for us. Seven years ago, we traveled to Cairo once again. This time we were able to acclimatise ourselves and find our way around. The city seemed to be more open and easier to get around. But once again, we were put off, mainly because of the traffic and the pollution. We thought that this overcrowded, chaotic city was not a suitable place for us to live in, that it would be far too wearisome of an experience.

Has living in Cairo changed your mind about the city?

My feelings have changed. Now, I see Cairo as an attractive city, undoubtedly because I have come to know it better. I have learned that Cairo, amidst all the chaos, has a lot of nice places, too: beautiful old buildings, beautiful parks, everything laden with history. There are so many aspects of Cairo to enjoy and to discover, such as strolling along the Nile.

Recently, an Egyptian newspaper wrote that Cairo is careering towards an urban apocalypse. The newspaper also suggested that Cairo's inhabitants, as well as the city's government, seem to have lost the will to prevent this apocalypse. Do you agree with this assessment?

No, not at all. Quite the contrary. They are trying hard to change things for the better. The current problems of Cairo have to do with the unrestricted growth of the city during the last few decades. But the population growth will slow down, and the rural migration to the capital has slowed down already. I don't agree with this newspaper's assessment. My wife and I feel very comfortable in Cairo. This may have to do with the fact that we have lived under much more difficult conditions, such as in Bangladesh. Beside this, we spent some years in Sri Lanka's capital, Colombo, during the civil war and when the tsunami hit the region in 2006. It was hard to adapt to the circumstances there, while Cairo seems to be easy for us. Compared to other places, Cairo is an attractive location. The only thing we suffer from is the air pollution. But other amazing things compensate us for this.

Given your earlier mixed feelings about Cairo, was the decision to move to the city a difficult one to make?

No, I decided it quickly, because I immediately talked to Germans who have lived here for years. And I heard a lot of positive things from different people. They all told us that after having settled in, we would either love or hate the city. And all the people close to us had a completely positive experience. If they like it, we thought, then we should give it a try.

Development work in some of Cairo's informal areas is a main part of GTZ's activity. How does it affect you personally to witness the often severe living conditions of the residents of these areas?

It is important to realize that many of these informal areas aren't exactly what we call slums. Compared to international standards, compared to slums in other countries, on other continents, a number of Cairo's urban neighborhoods score well. The people live in these overcrowded areas in simple buildings along narrow alleys, but in many other countries such quarters are already considered to be regular neighborhoods. Many buildings are connected to the drinking water supply; some have sewage disposal and other services.

At the same time, many other of these urban settlements are actually underserviced. I feel saddened when I enter these quarters and see the living conditions there. It is deeply worrying to see how at risk people are in terms of health care and education, as well as socially and financially. The migration from the countryside to Cairo has strained the responsiveness of the authorities for decades.

Which positive conditions support GTZ's work in Cairo's informal areas?

Our work here is a very special challenge to us. We are pleased to have the possibility of working in these areas. We have a big responsibility, and we want our program to develop a successful and sustainable model for participatory urban development. We cooperate with highly qualified and motivated high-level partners like governors and several government ministries. And the inhabitants of the informal areas are willing to spend energy and creativity to change their living conditions. But apart from these two levels, the situation is characterized by a lack of knowledgeable administrative staff, many of whom need to be trained for the new challenges.

An advantage of these areas is the relative proximity of the neighborhoods to more developed parts of the city, and therefore to employment, markets, and important administrative offices. These informal areas are already part of the city, and nobody needs to integrate them into the municipal fabric of Cairo, as they already belong to the city. But they need more and better services.

At the governorate level, especially with the governors themselves and their closest staff, we see a strong desire to change the situation for the better. Our concepts and consulting efforts are welcome. But we are confronted with a number of shortcomings on certain administrative levels. We find welcoming conditions and understanding in the highest levels of government, as well as with the residents in the informal areas, but to connect these two levels to each other still requires a lot of effort from all involved. For example, ministries may decide to build new quarters for the poorest, but these new apartments don't always go to those who really need them.

Years of development activities in Cairo's informal settlements have produced a wealth of experience. Does GTZ utilize this experience for its work in other parts of the world?

GTZ runs for a similar project in Sri Lanka's capital, Colombo, for example. Our participatory approach in Cairo provided us with important experiences for the project there. When I was working in Colombo, we transferred concepts and strategies from Cairo to our work there. We at GTZ always exchange experiences in an effort to get the best possible results.

In your opinion, what is the most important step for improving the lives of people in informal areas?

My greatest desire is to see that the inhabitants of the informal areas enjoy having a land title for the places where they live, and having formalized workshops. Only a clear legal situation minimizes risks for them. It will give them more security and the possibility of making serious plans for the future.

02   DAILY LIFE IN INFORMAL AREAS

Three Areas: Manshiet Nasser, City of the Dead, Boulaq al-Dakrour

by JULIA GERLACH

When residents of informal areas compare their housing conditions to similar kinds of housing in formal areas, they feel it is unfair that the government is not taking care of them. Bad living conditions, along with the feeling of being unfairly treated lead to the frustration of many people residing in informal areas.

Cairo's residents proudly call their city the 'mother of the world.' The city contains not only some of the world's most spectacular ancient sites, but also several of the world's best-known informal areas. There is, for example, the 'City of the Dead,' where thousands of people have made their homes in a cemetery, or Manshiet Nasser, where a good part of Cairo's rubbish is brought to, sorted, and recycled, and which was recently in the world news when rocks fell from a nearby cliff, killing many. Apart from these 'more famous' informal areas, there are many that are less well known. Approximately half of Greater Cairo is comprised of so-called informal areas. This means that more than nine of the 16 million inhabitants of the megacity live in these areas. The areas differ in size, shape, and living conditions. What they all have in common is that they were not planned, but rather grew spontaneously. The informal neighborhoods are located either illegally on government land or in areas that used to be agricultural land. Despite the illegality of both locations, the construction of houses is nevertheless tolerated.

Informal areas in general have very little infrastructure, and services such as schools, hospitals, and other government bodies are very poorly funded. The composition of the inhabitants, as well as the broader social fabric, differs from area to area. As it is not possible to characterize all of the different neighborhoods in detail, the present focus will be on some particular examples.

Manshiet Nasser was an area outside Cairo proper until the 1950s, when people started to settle there. They worked in the stone quarries on the foot of the Moqattam Mountain. Today, it is home to 800 000 people. Most of the families living here today have their origins in three distinct areas in Upper Egypt: Qena, Fayyum, and Sohag. Extended families live together, and family ties are very strong. Economically, people tend to be either rich or poor. People in the area claim that intermediate strata of the society have vanished. Many of the rich people are traders, and have businesses in the Khan al-Khalili bazaar, or elsewhere in downtown Cairo. Others own workshops and manufacture the products for these shops. Many of the very poor in the area mention that they once worked in these workshops, often beginning as children, but as the market for products like rugs and other handicrafts has now come to be dominated by cheaper products from the Far East, they have to juggle from job to job. The social strata are reflected in the geography of the area, with the richer merchants living in the prestigious first row next to the main street where the four to five storey houses are well-kept. The closer one gets to the rock cliffs, the poorer the people become. The same is true for the vertical direction. Poorer people live uphill. In the beginning, the land was desert and a no man's land. Later, the government claimed ownership. Most of the houses are built without the people actually owning the land they are building on. In recent years, electricity, water, and sewage have been installed. Thus, not all sections of the area have these basic services. In September 2008, a large rock fell down from a cliff

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Street scene in
the City of the Dead.

of the mountain, burying some 35 houses beneath. This catastrophe was not the first of its kind, and experts are warning that it might happen again.

One part of Manshiet Nasr is inhabited by the *zabaleen*, or garbage collectors. As one of many similar districts in Greater Cairo, it is home to some 50 000 people. Here, the social network is extremely tightly knit. This is due to their stigma as rubbish collectors, and to their history of being displaced many times. People here also have their origins in the upper Nile Valley. Beginning in the 1920s, the impoverished Christians settled outside the city and collected rubbish. It was mostly paper and organic material, which they fed to their pigs. As the city of Cairo expanded, it got nearer to their area. As the smell of the animals was abhorrent, the *zabaleen* were forced to move. The community was moved a total of eight times, finally settling in the area between the rock cliffs of Moqattam and the northern cemetery, where they were sure that nobody would be close enough to take offense and send them away. In the *zabaleen* area there is a monastery and one of the largest churches of the Middle East, St. Simon the Tanner, which is built into the rock. The area has developed significantly over the last 30 years. With the help of foreign donors, people received credits to purchase recycling machines. Houses were built and the standard of living has risen.

At the foot of Manshiet Nasser there is a large cemetery, also known as the **'City of the Dead'**, inhabited by the very poor. Some of the mausoleums date back hundreds of years. There is a long tradition of living on the cemetery among the tombs. Egyptians bury their dead in chambers under the earth. A small house with an open yard is usually constructed above this chamber. This allows the relatives to mourn in peace, and take shelter in case they want to spend the night. There have always been poor people living in the mausoleums and

taking care of the graves. Since the 1950s, more and more of these caretakers began to bring their families with them, and had children and grandchildren. These residents usually don't pay rent. Instead, they care for and keep guard over the grave in return for being allowed to stay. Many graves have electricity, and some have water. In some areas of the cemetery, real apartment blocks have been built. A medical center, a post office, and two schools are to be found there now.

Boulaq al-Dakrour, which has between 1 and 2 million inhabitants depending on the definition of the border of the district, is on the west bank of the Nile. The area stretches from Faisal Street all the way to Arab League Street. It is separated from Mohandessin and Dokki by the tracks of the Metro. The area used to be agricultural land. The farmers sold the land to people who started to build houses. The streets of Boulaq al-Dakrour are very narrow, straight, and extremely long. The pattern of the district follows the old pattern of the drainage canals of the former agricultural land. Houses are generally five to seven floors high. As there are nearly no open spaces in the densely populated area, lack of ventilation and light are an issue. The social fabric is more diverse than in Manshiet Nasser. Many of the people of Boulaq al-Dakrour moved here from other districts within Cairo such as Saida Zaynab, Agouza, or Imbaba, all of which are popular quarters that started to become overcrowded by the end of the 1980s. Boulaq al-Dakrour is popular because it is quite cheap and its location is central. Many people work as employees in ministries elsewhere in the city. Even though there are the extremes of very poor and very rich people, most of the people are part of a broader middle class.

Abu Adham with his son Adham. Boulaq al-Dakrour.

Me and My Neighborhood

by JULIA GERLACH

Umm Ahmed shakes her head in dismay. "These people down there don't know what they are talking about," she says, and points to the skyline of Cairo. From her balcony she has a spectacular view of the entire city. A housewife in her mid-forties, she lives in one of the tall houses near the Autostrade (motorway in the city of Cairo) in Manshiet Nasser. "Unfortunately, there are quite a few people down there who believe that we are all uneducated and poor, and that Manshiet Nasser is a very dangerous place," she says. Sometimes her children tell her that their friends at university give them a hard time when they tell them where they live. "But this is not fair. They think we are all the same here. Manshiet Nasser has a very bad reputation, and there are many problems. But we have nothing to do with these problems and these people." She points over her shoulder towards the inner parts of Manshiet Nasser. Umm Ahmed's father was one of the first to settle in the area in the 1950s, and the family of traders owns a five-story house.

In fact, Umm Ahmed has very little in common with people like Umm Amr and her family, for example, even though they live in the same quarter only a few streets away. Umm Amr, her husband, and their three children live in one tiny room on the ground floor of an old house close to the cliff of the Moqattam Mountain. "When we go to sleep we put the two boys on the bed, my daughter and me sleep here on the floor and my husband on the bench," she explains. She shares the bathroom with the other families living in the same building and she gets her water from the neighbors across the street. "We wanted to build water pipes," she says, "but they said we shouldn't because the house is too old and the walls are rotten. The water would bring the house to collapse." But since September 2008, all these problems seem minor to her. "Since the rock fell on the houses over there I can't sleep any more. Every time I hear a loud noise, I think: Oh God. Another rock is falling."

As already mentioned, she does not have very much in common with Umm Ahmed. They live in the same area, but they seem to belong to different worlds. What they have in common is the feeling of injustice. They feel discriminated against by the people 'down there'. 'Down there' stands for everything beneath the slope of the Moqattam Mountain, and includes the government and the society at large. People living in informal areas often have the feeling of being treated as second-class citizens. Services, infrastructure, schools, and hospitals are not of the same standard as in formal areas, and many feel that the society treats them with prejudice. As people constantly cross the borders between formal and informal areas, they know how life can be in other areas, and they compare their own lives to the standard of living in other quarters.

INFRASTRUCTURE

"These bandits! I can't believe it. It's getting worse and worse!" Soheir Hamid Mohammed is getting excited, and Abou Haitham puts his hand on her arm and offers her a seat in front of his stationary shop at the beginning of Sabir Nofal Street in Boulaq al-Dakrour. "What happened?" he asks.

Selling gas bottles. Boulaq al-Dakrour.

"I just bought a bottle of butagas (cooking fuel). Shouldn't the container be two and half pounds? And this guy took seven pounds from me! Where is this going to end?" The boy with the donkey cart traveling the street with his load of gas containers looks back at her with a mixture of enthusiasm and panic in his eyes as he kicks the donkey to go faster, away from his discontented client.

"The problem is that things are getting more and more expensive. The people here were not rich in the first place, but now they don't know how to survive," explains Abu Haitham. The 60-year-old retired government employee is the good soul of his neighborhood. He sells ballpoint pens and envelopes. But most of the time, people come to see him because he has other services to offer: he listens to them, helps them with paperwork and bureaucracy, and tries to find simple solutions for big problems. "There are certain products like butagas bottles and bread for which the government fixes the price. But in fact it's very difficult to get to the place where these goods

are distributed and many people try to make business out of this," he says. Butagas is just one example. Boys know when and where the truck with the subsidized bottles comes, and buy as much as they can carry. Subsequently, they travel the streets on bikes or with carts selling the bottles. Looking for opportunities like these is one of the ways people survive in economically difficult times, but Soheir Hamid is not willing to look at the positive side of the bad deal she just made. In order to announce their service, the butagas boys hit the gas container with a small metal ring. The characteristic, pling-pling, sound is deafeningly loud in the narrow Sabir Nofal Street.

In Boulaq al-Dakrour, people do not talk about 'down there.' There, people refer to the Egyptian society as the 'other side.' In Boulaq al-Dakrour, the railroad tracks mark the border between them and the others. "And all this because we don't have natural gas coming to our houses like in all the other parts of Cairo!" says Soheir Hamid, and points in direction of the railway tracks. "Can you tell me

why those people over there get better streets, better water, and better everything than us? Are they worth more, just because they live in Mohandessin?" In a perfect gesture Abu Haitham offers a chocolate to the angry lady. She smiles.

As she is strolling off, there are five teenage boys coming along. Abu Haitham opens the door to a room next to his shop. He has installed table tennis and snooker tables. "There is no place to go for these kids. There are some youth centers, but apart from being very run down, they are in the hands of certain gangs who make others pay for the use of the facilities", he says. The boys pay him 50 piasters for a game. As there is no green, open space in the densely populated quarter, Abu Haitham and his family prefer to leave the area on their weekends. They go to cafeterias along the Nile. "It is so crowded here, we sometimes need to get some fresh air," says Aisha Ibrahim, aka Umm Haitham.

The streets of Boulaq al-Dakrour are very narrow and extremely long. As most houses have balconies and these balconies are used to dry laundry, the sun has only a very small gap for penetrating down to the street level. "This is just very dangerous," exclaims Daulat Guindy, a woman in her mid-forties, who wears her hair up in a ponytail. "Imagine there is a fire. We don't have a fire truck in Boulaq al-Dakrour anyway; it has to come from Mohandessin. And when it comes here, it cannot go into these streets. It has to stay on the main road and try to reach the fire with a long hose. But look at the street. Have you ever seen a fire hose this long? Imagine there is a fire in the middle of the street. There is no way to reach it with a hose."

Another problem is water pressure. Because the pressure is very weak, residents of a house usually collect money to buy a pump to get the water from street level up to the apartments. And because rents have been frozen by the government on the level of the 1980s, landlords and homeowners are usually

not willing to invest in the maintenance of the houses and apartments. They leave investments like the water pump, as well as the maintenance of the house, to the tenants. Most of them concentrate on their direct environment, so the staircases of many buildings display a great variety of patterns and materials according to the taste and financial means of the people living on each floor.

"We just pray that no fire, house collapse, or other catastrophe hits us," says Guindy. It is Sunday and she is on her way to church. The Abu Rihan church is located near the railroad tracks. The spacious building, with several churches and chapels, a shop, and children's facilities, was inaugurated in 2006. It is one of three churches in an area with 56 mosques. "There are many Christians living around here," explains the man sitting at the entrance of the church selling bread to the people coming to worship. "This is an informal area and Christians are to be found in poor areas," he explains. "Before, we went to church on the other side, because the other church here in Boulaq al-Dakrour was in the garbage collectors' area and the stink of the garbage and the pigs was unbearable." For him, life has become much better since the new church was built.

Many interviews began with questions about the disadvantages of living in these informal areas. People see rising prices and the difficulties of young people finding jobs and earning a decent income as the biggest problems. The phrase, "2008 was the darkest year ever!" is frequently used. Especially difficult is the crisis of the bread distribution. As a consequence, many women have to spend one or two hours a day queuing outside the government kiosks to get subsidized bread for their families. In referring to these and other problems of Egyptian society in general, the Arabic word zahma, meaning crowded or congested, is often used. Noise, the lack of open space, and poor facilities and infrastructure (such as roads) are also seen as major problems.

Pedestrian bridge between Boulaq al-Dakrour
and Mohandiseen.

On the other hand, when asked to compare their own lives to those of family members in the countryside, or even the standard of living of their parents, many see that their present standard of living has greatly improved. "Look at what we have, all these things like television. We were able to build this house, and our parents and grandparents used to live in very small and shaky huts," explains Umm Amr. He is taking a break from his work sorting out the garbage he has collected from a big company. His daily work is still dirty, and his wife just lost her eyesight from Trachoma, a disease transmitted by flies, but he makes LE 1 000 to 2 000 a month, and yet he says that he is quite happy about his standard of living—at least when he thinks about his father's life. He is sitting in the middle of large piles of plastic, smoking a cigarette. "I am not educated, but I try to give my children a better future by sending them to school." This feeling, that they want their children to have a better life, is widely shared, and many believe that education is the key to this improvement. At the same time, the schooling situation accounts for the frustration that is felt in many informal areas. A lot of people who were interviewed expressed their pity for the next generation. "We can only pray for them, because their lives are going to be very difficult," says Said Ramadan, a resident of Manshiet Nasser and father of five.

Education

Aida Galaa al-Din is not willing to accept this. Her ambition is for her two daughters to have better lives somewhere away from the narrow alleys of Boulaq al-Dakrour. "My elder daughter is in grade three. Imagine: there are 75 children in the class. No teacher can take care of all the children at the same time, so they chose some of the brighter ones and concentrate on them. The others are left behind." She works with her daughter as soon as she comes home from school because she wants her to be one of the happy few. She also sends her to one of the so-called 'groups' in the afternoon, which are private classes to help the teachers supplement their meager government salary. Some parents, however, do not dare to keep their children away, as they don't want to infuriate the teachers. Thirty pounds per subject and child is quite an investment, even for one of the better off families like Aida's. There are 55 school buildings in the area of Boulaq al-Dakrour. This is not enough for a population of approximately 1.2 million. Many of the buildings are used by several schools, with younger children usually taught in the mornings and older students, grades three and above, in the afternoon. This explains why the official number of schools is much higher. There are 101 schools using these 55 school buildings. Some school types are not to be found at all in Boulaq al-Dakrour. High school girls, for example, have to go to school in Mohandessin. In Manshiet Nasser there are 26 primary schools, two secondary, and three specialized secondary schools for 800 000 inhabitants. Aida's younger daughter is enrolled in an Islamic preschool at the local mosque. "Many families send their children to kindergarten even if the mothers are staying home," she says. "It's because children must be encouraged right from the start. Otherwise they don't have a chance." She chose the Islamic daycare because it's cheap—only 30 LE per month—and because she believes that learning by heart (the method used in these schools) is good for young children. She does not let her girls play in the street, because she does not want them to mix with children of parents that are not as ambitious as she is: "The bad influence, you know."

On the other side of the street there is a private daycare. There is not much space, but the kids are having fun on a five by five meter indoor playground in the entrance hall. "Sure they shall also play, but certainly our main focus is to prepare them for school," says one of the teachers from the daycare. There are six groups for children of different ages. The smallest children are just a few months old.

"Aren't they enjoyable," says one of the two women sitting in the middle of a room with small ladder beds on the floor, two toddlers on her soft lap. "I like my job, because I like these kids. But if you ask me: If I had any education, if I knew how to read and write, I would not work here. I would find a better place."

Karma Bolis says she used to believe in education, as well. The mother of six lives on the top floor of a house in the *zabaleen* area in Manshiet Nasser. "I worked hard and saved money to get my oldest son through school and he got his *diplom tigara* (high school certificate in commerce)," she says, and one would expect the illiterate woman to be proud of her son. "But now I see it was a waste of money and time: What can he do with his diploma? He can't find a job, not even an unqualified job. So when my other sons have problems in school, I let them drop out and send them to look for work at their very young age. That's better for the family income and better for them," she concludes.

Rahma Fadallah was lucky. Right after finishing her *diplom tigara*, the 19-year-old got a job in a call shop in Sabir Nofal Street in Boulaq al-Dakrour: "I like this job, even though it's sometimes boring because I am there all on my own." She earns LE 180 per month. She likes the area where she lives and works, although she says that the harassment and insults by the young men are getting on her nerves. "I can understand that they want to have fun, but this is too much. I think they do this because they don't have jobs and they want to fill their time," she says. She is not sure if the harassment is really worse in informal areas than in others. "There are more young men hanging around here, but on the other hand I think they are more under control by the neighbors (who know them) than in other areas where people don't know each other so much." According to her, there is also a kind of competition between boys and girls. Shop owners and company directors prefer to employ girls because they are easier to handle, are

Umm Amr and her children. Manshiet Nasser.

One room for everything. Manshiet Nasser.

more ambitious, and can be paid lower salaries. That leaves the boys unemployed and without income. "That's difficult for them, because a man needs an income to marry. It's difficult for them to see that we do better," she says.

The shop where she works belongs to Abdel Basset Abdel Massoud Yunis, an agricultural engineer who bought a piece of land in the beginning of the 1980s in Boulaq al-Dakrour. "At the time, I had a good job in Saudi Arabia and we invested some of the money in the land and we built this house." There are three floors on top of the call shop: one for himself and his wife, and one for each of his two sons. As homeowners, his family is better off than many. Most people in the area rent their flats from individual homeowners who constructed their dwellings at the same time as Abdel Basset. The large majority of people came here in the 1980s, when more central popular quarters became too crowded. After coming back from the Gulf, Abdel Basset worked for the Ministry of Agriculture, as many

people on his street do. The call shop was meant to earn a little extra money after his retirement, but he is not happy. "Prices for mobile phone calls have gone down and people use prepaid cards. There is not much money to be earned here."

Informal State of Mind

"Why do you think the government built such a high wall next to the railway tracks?" asked Alaa Abdel Basset, the son of the shop owner, joining the conversation. "There is no reason to build such a massive wall just to stop people from jumping on the track. No, I believe they did this so that they can close the area here if there is any trouble. They just have to close the three bridges and we are trapped," he says. Whoever wants to enter Boulaq al-Dakrour needs to use one of these bridges. The railway tracks are more than just imaginary borders. Nevertheless, Alaa Abdel Basset doesn't see any hints of an uprising, or even of public protests by the residents of the area. "People are very frustrated, but they are busy trying

to get along and to survive. They simply can't afford to take a day off to got to a demonstration, and they can't take the risk of getting arrested and loosing their jobs," he says. He says that he quite often feels discriminated against because of his address. "If I get into a police checkpoint somewhere downtown and they see that I am from Boulaq al-Dakrour, they treat me badly and with arrogance."

"The problem is that the government is just leaving us alone. They have never cared about us and they do nothing for us. They say that it was not allowed for us to build on this land. But why didn't they say that when we first came here? They didn't care then and they don't care now," his father continues. This feeling of being second class citizens and neglected by the government when it comes to public services such as schools, sewage, water supply, and streets makes what he calls the "informal state of mind." People stop caring for others and their environment. They will take care of their flat, they will get the neighbors together to share the costs of the water pump, or they will contribute to buying a wireless Internet connection that serves several families, but that's the limit. They just think about how they can solve their own problems and get along. His wife shares this view: "Sometimes people come here and tell us that we should plant trees to make our street nicer. But you can't ask people like this to make their environment better. I don't believe in this."

People in informal areas compare their standard of living to that of people in formal areas. In many cases, formal areas stand as a synonym for better-off

areas. This is especially the case for people in Boulaq al-Dakrour, looking at the level of infrastructure and services in nearby Mohandessin and Dokki. People feel discriminated against, because rich people get better services and are treated with more respect by the officials. When people compare their housing conditions to similar kinds of housing in formal areas—as with the people living uphill in Manshiet Nasser looking at people in the new apartment blocks of the Suzanne Mubarak project—they feel it is unfair that the government is not taking care of them. Bad living conditions, along with the feeling of being unfairly treated lead to the frustration of many people residing in informal areas.

Fatin Abbas. Boulaq al-Dakrour.

Voices of Women in Boulaq al-Dakrour

by MONA GADO

Women of Boulaq al-Dakrour represent a range of different social strata and live in a variety of social conditions. This challenges one of the preconceived ideas about informal areas: that they are inhabited only by poor, uneducated residents. In Boulaq al-Dakrour, there are women who belong to the lower middle class, the upper working class, as well as to the working class. Many basic facilities are nearly absent in informal areas such as Boulaq al-Dakrour. There are no nurseries, social or sports clubs, libraries, parks, or green areas. In addition to this lack of facilities, unemployment often leads to young people getting involved in drugs and street gangs, which in turn can result in a sense of insecurity for women and their families.

Although housing conditions constitute a problem for women in Boulaq al-Dakrour, many try to make their homes more beautiful. Insherah, for example, coped well with a flat that initially had no kitchen, and was gradually able to create one. Faten and Fakiha, although they live as a large family in a one bedroom flat, do not complain. Strong family ties, as well as strong sense of community, make up for the absence of facilities.

Some women hold formal jobs. Wafaa, for example, holds a managerial post with the Egyptian Railway. Amani works at a career development center at Cairo University. Insherah works for an NGO. In Egypt, because a minimum wage policy has not yet been introduced, wages are low. However, these women are passionate about their work and like their jobs.

I met many women in Boulaq al-Dakrour, I talked to them, spent time in their houses, met them at their workplace, and walked the streets of their neighborhoods. The aim of this article is to provide a glimpse into the lives of some of the women I met, all of whom belong to diverse socio-economic settings and age groups.

Fakiha

Fakiha is a woman in her mid-fifties. She is married to a construction worker and has five married children. She has been a resident of Boulaq al-Dakrour for 30 years. She used to live in the area with her family in a single room, and in 1980 she moved to a one bedroom flat. She worked for a year as a cleaning lady at the Agricultural Museum, but had to give up her job due to illness. She enjoyed the job. "Work is a psychological relief," she said. "I felt that I had a place in society. I was on good terms with my colleagues and really enjoyed their friendship. We had a good chat together and we exchanged experiences."

Talking about Boulaq al-Dakrour, she mentions several things that she dislikes. Street cleanliness is a problem, for example. Such problems did not exist when garbage was collected from houses on a daily basis by private collectors. Now the government has taken over, but has not provided sufficient containers, and as a result people throw their garbage in the street. According to Fakiha, the merit of Boulaq al-Dakrour is its people. "I love the people of Boulaq al-Dakrour. We support each other at all times. However, social ties are growing weaker lately because they are affected by poverty. People are immersed in their problems and feel desperate. Many young people are unemployed and linger about at

night doing nothing until six o'clock in the morning." Although Fakiha is illiterate and has only one year's work experience, she has a clear vision of the core problem of Boulaq al-Dakrour. She confidently states that unemployment and lack of opportunities for the area's youth constitute a great problem in the district. When young people cannot find work, they try to make a living by selling things in the street. Police then come and confiscate their goods. Therefore, their investments and the opportunities they tried to create for themselves are lost. Fakiha finds it difficult to accept that the basic needs of young people are not catered to. "In the past, rents were reasonable and salaries were good. But now the cost of living has gone up and young people need to live, work, and start a family. If they spend their day working hard, they will sleep at night and will not get involved in trouble or drugs. Young people are the future; they are the ones who will perpetuate life. If Egypt were to suffer an aggression, who do you think would defend our country, if not the young? How can they do so with drug problems and unemployment? They need to work; work is not luxury; they need to feed themselves."

When Fakiha came to Boulaq al-Dakrour 30 years ago, the drug problem was even worse. To protect her son, she encouraged him to work during the summer vacation. As for her daughters, she befriended them. "I was a friend to my mother and when I had daughters myself, I took them as my friends. The only thing I wanted was peace for my kids. I watched them closely. If I heard people quarrelling in the street, I would run to make sure my son was safe. I took them to school in the morning and made sure they entered through the school gate. I would even wait at the gate until recess time, buy them biscuits, and go home reassured that they were safe at school."

Speaking about her role as a mother, it is obvious that Fakiha believes that Boulaq al-Dakrour will improve when parents fulfill their duties towards their children and take better care of them. She believes that the media does not fulfill its role in educating the people as to the best ways of raising children. For Fakiha, social improvement is the responsibility of the government, the media, and the family.

Aisha

Um Haitham, also known as Aisha, is of Nubian origin. She was born and brought up in Dokki, a district in Cairo, and moved to nearby Boulaq al-Dakrour nearly 20 years ago with her husband, who is a teacher. Although she still cherishes the scenery of the Nubian mud-built houses overlooking the green patches and the Nile, she is happy to live in Boulaq al-Dakrour. Her house lies in a narrow, cozy, and clean street. "I feel safe in my area and I never feel bored," she says. "The movement in the street continues until late at night. I can go out on the balcony and greet my neighbors. They offer help by doing some shopping for me and even used to baby-sit for my kids when I had an errand to run."

Aisha is a housewife whose life revolves around her family. She holds a Bachelor of Science in Commerce degree, but chose to devote her time to her three daughters and her son. She spends most of her time at home with her daughters, and they do everything together. They cook and tidy up, and she encourages them to discover and pursue their own hobbies.

Despite the different social and educational backgrounds of Fakiha and Aisha, both strongly believe that the family constitutes the core of social change in Boulaq al-Dakrour. "If women wait for their husbands, they will never achieve anything. Men spend their time meeting friends at the café. They may remarry or are on drugs. It is useless to argue. Kids are the losers in this situation. The best thing for the wife to do is to focus on her kids and give them all the love and care they deserve."

Aisha is also well aware that families alone cannot bring about the desired social improvement: "The government has a role to play toward (helping) the people of Boulaq al-Dakrour. Basic needs have to be catered to and perhaps then people will start to change their behavior."

Insherah

Insherah has been a resident of Boulaq al-Dakrour since 1983. She is in her late forties and of rural origins. She received a primary education and was married at the age of 19. Coming to Cairo for the first time at the age of 15 to visit her relatives, she became interested in working as a hair dresser. She knew the minute she entered the hairdresser's shop close to her relatives' house that it was what she wanted to do, and her family allowed her to work there. Her career as a hairdresser was just the beginning. She also worked at Kaha Factory, and for 15 years at the Agricultural Research Centre where she prepared the lab for researchers. Everywhere she went, she was respected for her dedication and her sense of discipline.

Insherah feels that she belongs to Boulaq al-Dakrour. She feels comfortable in her area, Abou Atata. At first, she was unhappy with her flat since it did not have a kitchen, and she had to prepare her meals in the living room. Because the flat was located in a nice area and the rent was reasonable, she made compromises and learned to accept it. Eventually, Insherah persuaded her tenant to annex part of the inner court of the house to it, and Insherah finally became the proud owner of a kitchen.

Since Insherah is childless, she decided to volunteer for an NGO affiliated with al-Taqua Mosque in Boulaq al-Dakrour, where she oversees a workshop that provides jobs for quite a number of women. Asking her about the needs of her community, Insherah answers without hesitation: "Abou Atata needs culture and re-education. It needs to rid itself of the 'begging culture' and replace it by the 'work culture.' Abou Atata needs to learn that work is more beneficial than begging and dependence."

Amani

Unlike Aisha and Insherah, Amani, a young woman in her early twenties, does not feel that she belongs to Boulaq al-Dakrour. She perceives her residency in the district as a hindrance to improving

her life and to finding a better job. Her father did not like the area either, but was obliged to live in the family house to be close to his elderly mother.

Amani does not hide her hatred of the district: "Mentioning Boulaq al-Dakrour others think negatively about me. My character may impress people, and the minute they discover that I have a Boulaq al-Dakrour address they start to think negatively about me. I know of an engineer who possesses exceptional capabilities and yet is unable to get a job because of his Boulaq al-Dakrour address." What Amani hates about Boulaq al-Dakrour is the lack of cleanliness, and the poverty, ignorance, and street fights that are linked to unemployment. Her father was always keen on protecting his kids. He used to smell his sons' fingers and look into their pockets to make sure that they were not on drugs. He wanted to be close to support his kids in case of problems. "The area provides no facilities to protect the youth. There is a library with no books and a so-called garden with few flowers used only by drug addicts." Amani also hates busy, crowded streets. "The street literally comes to a halt in Ramadan with all the different sellers using the street as a market. One day I reached my house in 2 hours instead of 2 minutes and collapsed when I finally got there. The only beauty in the place is the strong sense of neighborhood. I really feel happy when I see the strong bond among people and the way they share moments of happiness and of distress. My dad's funeral was packed with people coming from everywhere to pay their condolences."

Amani holds a Bachelor of Science in Commerce and has pursued a career in human development. A year ago she moved out of Boulaq al-Dakrour to al-Haram, an area near the pyramids. "Although I was keen on moving out of Boulaq al-Dakrour, I still feel it is home." According to Amani, Boulaq al-Dakrour will improve when the government intervenes: "People need to see tangible

improvement in the external conditions and then they can take part in bringing about change. The government is the initiator of change and it needs to gain people's trust in order to turn them into 'agents of change'."

Faten

Faten is another young woman, aged 25, who lives in Ard al-Lewa, a neighborhood in Boulaq al-Dakrour. Her mother works as a cleaning lady and her father is employed at a cigarette company. At the age of twelve she started work in order to finance her own studies, and she graduated from the Computer Science Institute. She wishes she could have had the opportunity to study computer science at university, but she could not afford it. She was so dedicated to her studies that she even prevented herself from falling in love with a colleague who was studying at the same Institute. "I was afraid. I did not want to get distracted by a relationship. I worked so hard to reach that level of education and did not want to lose what I had achieved." After graduation, Faten eventually got engaged to her colleague and she plans to live in Boulaq al-Dakrour. "I feel at home in Boulaq al-Dakrour," she says. "I have lived all my life here."

Women have to work hard in Boulaq al-Dakrour. To support her family, Faten's mother sometimes held two jobs at the same time. She worked at the al-Dakrour District Administration in the morning, and in the afternoon worked at a hospital where she would often stay as late as midnight. Sometimes, she had a night shift at the hospital and would leave there to go straight to her first job without having slept. "Women work very hard. I have seen many examples around me in Boulaq al-Dakrour of women and daughters working hard to support their families while their husbands stayed at home with no job. The secret of a woman's strength and perseverance lies in her children." Faten plans to

have one or two kids and would do her best to support them. She will not expose them to the hard life she has lived: "I will never make them work while they are still kids studying at school."

Wafaa

Wafaa lives in Kafr Tuhurmous, another area in Boulaq al-Dakrour. She holds a managerial post with the Egyptian Railway, and is politically and socially active. She is a member of the Egyptian Union of Workers, and the women representative for Kafr Tuhurmous at the National Democratic Party. Being a resident of Boulaq al-Dakrour, she knows its problems quite well and tries to find solutions for them.

The idea that motivates and inspires her in her social and political activities is the hope that any improvement she achieves in the public world will reflect positively on her private world. "There are no facilities for young people: no library and no place where they can play sports. With high rates of unemployment, crime and prostitution also increased. If I participate in improving conditions for young people, I will be ultimately protecting my own sons." It is her positive attitude towards her family and towards society that shapes Wafaa's thoughts and actions. I have to ensure that my children get a good education I teach my sons to behave responsibly towards society."

Wafaa is well aware that social change is not easy to achieve. "The path is difficult and I do my best to get things right and to work hard until things change," she says. She is also aware that social improvement is not an individualistic process. The government has an important role to play in putting things right. "There must be somebody to look after the needs and problems of the people."

Like the city of Cairo itself, the informal area of Boulaq al-Dakrour is a place of contradictions. Drug problems and street quarrels intimidate most women

in the area. Yet the women still feel secure and comfortable within their environment.

I was personally enriched and inspired by the women I met in Boulaq al-Dakrour. They have an impressive sense of community, and their poverty does not prevent poor residents like Fakiha from being concerned with public as well as private issues. For her, the problems of all the young people around, and not just her own, are high on her list of priorities. Most of the women I met believe that the people of Boulaq al-Dakrour are responsible for social regeneration. Some problems, such as cleanliness, drugs, and poor manners could be addressed through individual and family responsibility. This, however, does not rule out government responsibility. Government intervention is indispensable in order to improve infrastructure, to provide proper facilities for the area, and, ultimately, to change the living conditions of its residents for the better.

Family living in a tomb. City of the Dead.

Life Is Not Always Bad

by JULIA GERLACH

Cairo is a noisy, crowded city. Being alone is therefore a rare occurrence, and one of the very few places where one can enjoy this feeling is in the City of the Dead. The sweeping area between the Autostrade (motorway in the city of Cairo) and Salah Salem Street is full of graves, mausoleums, and mosques. "I have been living here since I was a teenager," explains Am Mohammed, who is now in his 60s. He came here with his family because his father held a job as guardian of the grave of the famous Egyptian singer, Abdel Halim Hafez. After the death of his father, Am Mohammed took over his duties, married, and raised his children. The yard around the grave is well kept, and Am Mohammed takes care of watering the flowers and raking the gravel. In return, the owner of the grave allows him to stay in the two rooms of the mausoleum. They have electricity, running water, and even a toilet. "We chose this grave at the time, because it has these nice windows. It's like a real house," Am Mohammed recalls. The famous person in this particular grave, the good condition of the building, and the fact that he has been living there for many decades, makes him a respected and influential person. People looking for new places to live will consult him, and he is often asked to act as mediator when there are conflicts among the residents of the area. "In fact, we don't accept newcomers here," he says. "This graveyard is too crowded already, and there are no more good graves available where people can have a decent life."

Not all graves are inhabited. Often the owners do not want people living on their property. Sometimes, however, when the patriarch of one of the owners' families dies, and a new generation is taking over responsibility for the maintenance of the family grave, they may change their mind and allow people to move into a mausoleum. This is one of the very few occasions when new people can move in. "But we try to serve the sons of our community first," Am Mohammed adds. There are many who want to

start a family and who need an apartment, and Am Mohammed spends long evening hours sitting in front of his house dealing with them. "It used to be very quiet at night. Now there is quite a bit of traffic on this road and it is not as idyllic as it used to be. But still, I like my area. I couldn't live in such a crowded area as Manshiet Nasser."

Umm Khaled also sticks to this well-established tradition of guarding graves. She also spends half the night sitting on a stone in front of the gate to 'her' grave. She was born in the area. Her father died in the 1970s, and when her husband passed away some 10 years ago, she took over the duty of overseeing graves. In fact, she had to change graves several times, making her hesitant to invest too much in the furniture of her house, which is limited to a gas stove, primitive shelves, and a bench. She is growing a small lemon tree beside the bench where she keeps watch. The tenants of the grave on the other side of the dusty road have made a small coffee shop out of the yard, selling tea, coffee, and cookies. Down the road there are an auto mechanic and a small supermarket. "We are a nice little community, and we know that people like the silence and serenity of our area," explains Umm Khaled.

She finds it quite normal that people from other parts of town drop by, not only on holidays when they visit the graves of the dead, but also just to walk around. The City of the Dead has become a tourist attraction and quite a few of the people interviewed had already talked to other journalists and researchers. Visitors are welcome in this area, and not only because *baksheesh* is a mayor source of income. "People here are very poor," explains an employee of the local post office. "We have only one client with more than 10 000 pounds in his account, we have three with around 4 000, and the majority has no more than 500 to 1 000 pounds in their savings book. If people get a monthly pension, few receive more than 50 to 120 pounds," he explains. He used to work in a branch in Nasser City and admits that he was not so happy when he first found out that he had been transferred to the City of the Dead, as the post office there is not only far from his home but also has very limited services and less interesting daily work. "Now I am quite happy here, because people are very friendly. They treat each other with respect and they are not arrogant as some of the rich clients in Nasser City," he says. At a small medical center next to the post office, the doctor on duty also stresses that she enjoys the very friendly and respectful environment. "People here may be poorer than in other popular areas, but in fact they seem to be healthier," she explains. The reason might be that the area is less crowded and the level of stress, pollution, and noise is not as high as in other poor areas.

The City of the Dead is not only socially vibrant. It also has a number of lively businesses based there. Several blocks closer to Salah Salem Street, a man is sitting on the street, smoking a water pipe and resting. "I have just come up from Aswan, and now I am waiting for them to reload my truck before I go back to the south later today," he says. Trucks coming from far-away destinations are loaded here. Small trucks bring goods from various factories and store them on the sidewalk. When all the desired goods are piled up, the heavy trucks pick up the load and head to the nearby Autostrade (motorway in the city of Cairo). Driving schools bring their students to practice in the quiet side roads of the cemetery. Construction supply shops selling plaster and stone works can be found in several graves close to main roads. The yards around the tombs are perfect showrooms for such products. The area is also known for good service in car maintenance. In fact, quite a few auto mechanics from other parts of Cairo come here to wash cars and change oil, leaving some parts of the district highly polluted.

For people outside of Cairo, the idea of people living in a cemetery is repellent. For many residents of the crowded quarters of the megacity, however, the idea of living in the relatively green and spacious area of the cemetery may be quite attractive, and many visitors walking around the tombs comment on the serenity of the area and view it as an oasis with trees, coffee shops, and friendly residents. For these reasons, the City of the Dead is often mentioned to emphasize that there are good aspects to living in informal areas.

These more positive aspects are not limited to the City of the Dead. Many residents of Manshiet Nasser, Boulaq al-Dakrour, as well as other informal areas, also note the benefits of their environment. Most people move to informal areas because the cost of living is more affordable, or because they were not able to find apartments in other parts of the city. Very often they live in close proximity to their relatives. "Our street is called *'Saidi Street'* because almost everybody in these houses here originate from Upper Egypt," says Jihan, a woman of the neighborhood. While she is explaining the relationship between herself and the two women already sitting in her living room, Farhan is coming from upstairs. "I need to go to the market. Could you just take care of Adnan for a little while?" she asks, pushing a two-year-old into the room. "In

general, Boulaq al-Dakrour is like anywhere else in the city. People live next to each other and don't care too much about each other. But in our street it is different," Jihan says. Most of the people around her come from the same village near Aswan. "Sure I would like to move to a better place, have a more spacious apartment," explains Gamal Abu Heiram, also known as Abu Adnan, who has dropped in as he came up the stairs and found the door to Jihan's apartment open. "But it will be difficult to find a place that is big enough for the whole family—I have another four sons and some of them are ready to get married. And what about all the others, the cousins and aunts around us?" he asks. He works as a driver for a family and with his salary of LE 650 per month, it will be difficult to find a better place somewhere outside Boulaq al-Dakrour.

"I still think people here know each other better than in other parts of town," says Rahma Fadallah, the young women working in the call center on Sabir Nofal Street. "People watch each other and they know who is who, and who is the father of whom," she says. For her, this is one of the reasons why the streets of Boulaq al-Dakrour are safer than elsewhere. "If anybody does anything wrong, it will get back to his family," observes Umm Amr, a mother of three in Manshiet Nasser. "There are crimes and we hear about criminals coming to our area as well. But I think the social control is still very strong," agrees Mustapha Abul Ella, who runs a small publishing company in Boulaq al-Dakrour. "I would even say that a young man hustling girls in the street—even though there are many and they get on my nerves here—are more to be found in better off areas like Mohandessin or Dokki," explains Rahma Fadallah. These might in fact be the same boys, but in Mohandessin they enjoy the anonymity of the modern shopping atmosphere.

Mohammed Abdel Aziz, a tuk tuk (auto rickshaw) driver is one of those young men from Boulaq al-Dakrour who likes to spend his Thursday nights

(the last day of the work week) in Mohandessin. "If we have a problem with the guys from Mohandessin, we have the advantage," he explains. "We can just call our friends to come and help us to beat them up. The guys from Mohandessin would rather call the police. This is not making a big impression on us." he says. He claims that growing up in an informal area is an advantage in other ways, as well. "I think," he says, "that I am more able to cope with difficult situations in life, like looking for a job, than these guys."
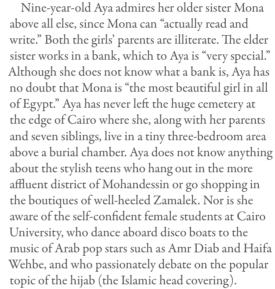
Another advantage of life in informal settlements is the informality of the building schemes themselves. Visiting Said Ramadan in his new apartment in Duwaiqa al-Gedida in Manshiet Nasser makes this very obvious. The two bedroom apartment, with a kitchen, bathroom, and living room, is sparsely furnished. The plastic carpet and the wooden bench look displaced in the construction-kit flat. "Look, I have three girls and only one boy," explains a next door neighbor. "It is not very smart that the rooms are pre-fabricated. It would be much better if everyone could arrange the pattern of the apartment according to the needs of the family." She was used to this flexibility in her former house. "We just built according to our needs," she explains. "And we used to have chickens on the roof. Where will I put my chickens here?" she asks. It is very difficult for architects and developers to consider all the individual needs of the future inhabitants of a building, especially if the construction has to be done quickly and on a very limited budget.

Looking at older examples of state planned and built apartment blocks shows that the inhabitants know how to solve the problems or adapt the spaces for their own use. Some build balconies for their animals, for example, while others enlarge small apartments by constructing an extra room outside the kitchen window or on the roof of the building. There is much informality to be found in formally built apartment blocks.

Mona writing in her notebook. City of the Dead.

The Girl from the City of the Dead

by GERHARD HAASE-HINDENBERG

Nine-year-old Aya admires her older sister Mona above all else, since Mona can "actually read and write." Both the girls' parents are illiterate. The elder sister works in a bank, which to Aya is "very special." Although she does not know what a bank is, Aya has no doubt that Mona is "the most beautiful girl in all of Egypt." Aya has never left the huge cemetery at the edge of Cairo where she, along with her parents and seven siblings, live in a tiny three-bedroom area above a burial chamber. Aya does not know anything about the stylish teens who hang out in the more affluent district of Mohandessin or go shopping in the boutiques of well-heeled Zamalek. Nor is she aware of the self-confident female students at Cairo University, who dance aboard disco boats to the music of Arab pop stars such as Amr Diab and Haifa Wehbe, and who passionately debate on the popular topic of the hijab (the Islamic head covering).
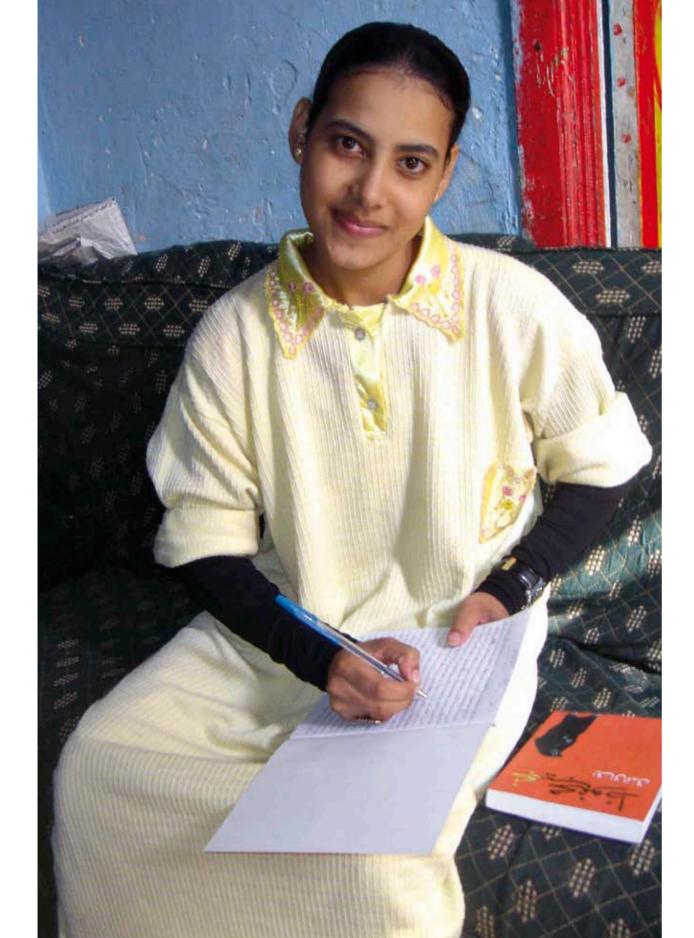
The necropolis around the famous mosque of Imam al-Shafi'i is home to ten of thousands of people. The majority of inhabitants arrived within the past thirty years. In that time, more than 10 million people have migrated from villages in Upper Egypt and the Nile Delta to Cairo, the poorest among them seeking shelter in the necropolis where the well-to-do classes bury their dead. They live in mausoleums beside giant sarcophagi, and above burial chambers in little rooms where in earlier days families spent the Islamic holidays. Those who live above the tombs are often illiterate, and at best may have temporary jobs with craftsmen in the neighboring district of Tonsy. Officially, the topic of Egypt's inhabited 'Cities of the Dead' (as they are often called) is taboo. Although electricity and water have long since been provided, and schools and hospitals built in abandoned tombs, one does not usually talk about the inhabitants of the cemeteries, and even less to them.

Nineteen-year-old Mona has for a long time been keeping a diary of sorts. She takes note of the astounding in a tattered school copybook. She stands in front of the mirror and reflects upon her life, while her family sleeps huddled together in the narrow room. Then, sitting in the courtyard atop the burial chamber, she writes. Yet it is not only about her own uncommon living area that she writes. She also compares the people living within the necropolis with those living outside. Mona writes about discrimination she experienced in the preparatory school in the nearby Tonsy district. Only a few children from her elementary school in the cemetery make it to that preparatory school, and when they do, hell awaits them.

"My female classmates from the Tonsy area regarded themselves as something better," recalls Mona. "Everyday they annoyed me. They yanked my barrettes out and threw my school stuff out of the window." The graveyard girl, though, did not let anything show. Crying at night, she wrote about her heartache in her diary to get it off her chest.

Mona often flees into a dream world. She is certain that kismet—as she calls fate—has a better life in store for her. She reveals the secret of her first foray into a very different, unknown world. She had heard of discos located below-deck on the Nile boats, and

on her 18th birthday she, along with two girlfriends, put together the little money they had and took a bus straight through the Egyptian capital to the river. On the Nile they engaged in conversation with young people who spoke of things that she and her friends did not understand. Mona kept her origins a secret, but continues to dream of the world she visited that night.

Kismet seems to mean well for her. A cousin of a friend of her father's got her a job as a charwoman at the Egyptian Central Bank. Then, the chief secretary took note of the pretty, intelligent girl. She sent Mona to run other errands in Cairo's lively business and shopping district. The inexperienced girl from the necropolis at first had difficulty crossing the busy streets. Slowly but surely, however, she got to know the area of Downtown Cairo. She admired the window displays of the fashion boutiques, even though the skimpy dresses clash with her moral standards. She observed the lines in front of the cashiers of a US fast food chain, whose products are hardly different from those of the falafel stand on the corner, but which cost four times as much. Finally, she did what in Tonsy would be unthinkable for a girl—she entered an *ahwa* (coffeehouse), sat down at a table and nobody seemed to bother. Every night Mona returns to the cemetery, where she entrusts to her copybook what most moves her—conflicting sensations gathered during her wandering between the two worlds of her work and home.

Soon, Mona was strolling more confidently through Kasr al-Nil, one of Cairo's traditional fashion districts, and her growing self-confidence led to very new and different encounters for her. One of these was with Khadija, a feminist and activist whom Mona met in front of the *ahwa*, and who invited her to a theater performance. Young amateur performers, whom she also got to know, were performing a piece dealing with female circumcision. Mona, like almost all of the girls in the City of the

Dead, had been circumcised at the onset of puberty. The performance took place in the hall of a social center and portrayed circumcision as a form of mutilation and as a crime in terms of Islam. "If the Prophet Mohammed would have wanted us girls to be circumcised," Mona heard one female performer say, "then he would have also circumcised his own daughters."

The same night Mona wrote down her memories of that "dreadful day" when the barber came to the cemetery. She also wrote about four colleagues from the cleaning crew at the bank, who had each proposed marriage to her. They were simple, young men, and yet they were the reason why Mona ultimately decided to quit her job and bid farewell to that other world outside the City of the Dead. If she had revealed her true background to them, the aspiring lovers surely would have withdrawn their proposals. They would thereafter have treated her as a leper. At least, that is Mona's fear, and given her past experience it is not unjustified. She "simply does not

Mona in the mirror. City of the Dead.

belong there (at the bank)," is what she wrote in her exercise book on the night of her last working day.

It was by coincidence that Mona and I met one another. With the Egyptian translator Hoda Zaghloul, I was in the City of the Dead to do research for a report. Near the place in the cemetery where Hoda's mother is buried, we encountered Mona's family, and her sister Aya immediately* began to gush about her older sister. When we finally came to meet Mona, she brought forth her tattered copybook and began to read—the unusual thoughts and authentic impressions of a young girl living in a cemetery. I suggested to Mona that we should collaborate in writing down the story of "The Girl from the City of the Dead"—based on the nightly vignettes—but she was hardly able to imagine what I had in mind. I purchased an Arabic edition of Naguib Mahfouz's Midaq Alley for her. The work

of the Egyptian Nobel Laureate was the first novel that 19-year-old Mona had ever held in her hands. She reads and reads, devouring the portrayals of the simple people in the bazaar district of Khan al-Khalili. When she finished she asked me: "When do we start?"

That was the beginning of a wonderful, month-long collaboration. In the end, Mona stipulated that no one was to find out her full name. At the same time, she did not mind having her picture on the cover, a picture that depicts one of the most beautiful girls in all of Egypt—and not only from the point of view of her sister Aya.

"Das Mädchen aus der Totenstadt" released in German by Heyne-Publishing House. Publication in the Czech Republic and Brazil is underway.

Polluted canal. Boulaq al-Dakrour.

Problems to Face

by JULIA GERLACH

Manshiet Nasser is not what it used to be, or at least that is what Said Ramadan thinks. "Since the rocks fell in the beginning of September, the society here is falling apart," he says. He was lucky. When the rock fell from the cliff of the Moqattam Mountain onto the houses of al-Duwaiqa, an area of Manshiet Nasser, killing at least 108 people, it hit only half of his house. He and his family were sleeping in the other half. He survived, but what makes him suffer now are the looks he gets from the people around him, looks of envy and mistrust. The reason for these negative responses is the fact that Said Ramadan got what everyone around him wants: one of the new flats in al-Duwaiqa al-Gedida. The government began some ten years ago to construct apartment blocks around Manshiet Nasser. The original plan was to evacuate people from very poor areas, to demolish the houses there, and to reconstruct the areas afterwards. In September 2008, 3 300 apartments were handed over to the residents of Manshiet Nasser. Since the rocks fell, the distribution of these apartments has accelerated. In the direct aftermath of the catastrophe, 2 000 flats were given out and another 1 000 were distributed to inhabitants in the following weeks. It is the mechanism for distribution which is the cause of public frustration and anger. "I know that many of the people living around me cheated and lied to get the apartments. They told the officials that their house was destroyed and their family was killed by the rocks, but I know that they have never been living anywhere near al-Duwaiqa."

The other reason why Said Ramadan is upset is obvious to everyone who enters his new flat. Water is dripping from the walls. The fresh paint falls from the ceiling in large pieces. The flat that so many dream of is Said Ramadan's nightmare. "I am going to the local administration everyday to complain about it. They need to send plumbers to repair the pipes in the walls," he says. When he waits in front of the building of the local administration to ask for plumbers, he stands in line with other people asking to be moved to one of the new flats.

"I just want to have a place that is humane. I live here with my husband, two sons and my daughter," says Umm Amr, as she opens the wooden door to the small room on the ground floor of a very old building near the cliffs. She feels guilty for not being able to offer a better spot to her children, and since the collapse of the cliff her only thought is to move away. The cliff above her house shows cracks. Water is dripping down from the house that is constructed on the edge of the cliff. From the roof of the neighboring house the cracks look even more frightening.

The room on the rooftop has new tenants: Mohammed Ismael and his family. "We survived the rock slide because we were on holiday in Alexandria," the bearded import-export specialist explains. He believes that he should have gotten one of the new flats, but unfortunately all his papers are buried under the rock. "I cannot prove that I used to live here," Umm Amr looks at him with suspicion. Can he prove what he is claiming, or is he one of those taking advantage of the catastrophe? Since the disaster, the Governorate of Cairo accelerated its

Unsafe housing on Moqattam Mountain. Manshiet Nasser.

efforts to evacuate people from so-called dangerous areas. Residents of houses near the cliffs get priority to move into the new flats. There are still 3 700 already built housing units waiting to be distributed to inhabitants of Manshiet Nasser. Some areas are known to be on top of the evacuation list. "There are real estate agents specializing in the field. They take 10 000 pounds for the procurement of a flat in one of the dangerous areas, and if the plan works out and his client is moved into one of the new flats, the agent will ask for another 15 000 pounds," explains Khalil Shaat, advisor to the Governor of Cairo and head of the Manshiet Nasser GTZ office. As long as there are apartments left and people still have hope to be among the lucky ones who are able to move in, the anger about the unjust distribution mechanism and the corruption and cheating involved is limited. But what will happen when all the apartments are gone? In fact, many parts of informal areas are considered dangerous. The people living in them face severe risks because they live under cliffs, high

voltage cables, or very close to railroad tracks. The example of Manshiet Nasser shows that it is not only the immediate risk of being killed or hurt by a foreseeable catastrophe that threatens the inhabitants. The consequences of such a catastrophe are also a threat to the harmony of society.

In all the informal areas, houses are usually built without permission, and without regard for zoning laws and safety regulations. Many of the houses are not planned, nor are they constructed all at once. They are works in progress. If the owner has the means, often a new story may be added to a building. "I started with the ground floor," says Sheikh Abdel Hamid. The bearded man, who wears the characteristic dress of the Islamist movement, runs a small food store in Boulaq al-Dakrour. "Afterwards, we built two floors for ourselves to live in, and then some for my sons. Now we have a total of five stories and—thank God—all my sons are happy. The building would collapse if we needed to build more," he adds. Every week the Egyptian

press reports about the collapse of houses, accidents that leave the tenants either severely injured or dead. People building in informal areas claim that they are not allowed to build anything, and that they will have to bribe officials anyway. In this sense, it does not matter whether or not they violate the building code, or if their construction is against the safety regulations. In either case, the result means they must pay a fine.

People from other parts of the city tend to avoid visiting informal areas because they have a reputation for being dangerous. They are known to be hotbeds of Islamic radicalism. In the early 1990s, the district of Imbaba was one of the centers of the Islamist movement. In 1992, 20 000 troops besieged the area in order to arrest one of the leaders of the movement. "There are people with radical ideas around, but this is not a mayor issue any more. Not like it used to be twenty years ago," says Mohammed.

Sheikh Abdel Hamid, the owner of the grocery store in Boulaq al-Dakrour, confirms this—very much to his own regret, it seems. He does not find much positive to say about the new generation. "In general, people are getting more religious these days," says the man sitting at the entrance of the Abu Rihan church in Boulaq al-Dakrour, who sells bread to the people coming to pray. "This is true for Christians and Muslims, you see more and more women wearing the *niqab* (a veil that covers the face) and more men with a beard, and the Christians are also much more aware of their religion. This makes Christians and Muslims move away from each other. Before, there were some radicals and the rest of the society, Muslims and Christians alike, would confront them. Now there are two communities," he explains. "I think the reason why there is less radicalism amongst young Muslims is perhaps because there are now so many different directions in Islam. There are so many different preachers and they are not all marching in one direction as they used to 20 years ago."

Ahmed Abdel Hafiz, 27, gives a different reason why there is very little mention of radical Islamists in the area. "It's all about drugs here!" he says. He is an unemployed taxi driver and has plenty of time to watch the other unemployed men around him. "Our street is a real drug center. There are people from the street and people from other parts of town coming here to sell and buy drugs. They don't even care if anyone sees them. They just smoke hashish in the street." He believes that approximately 80% of all people his age and younger use drugs, including marijuana, hashish, and pills. "I think these drugs are sent to us by the government. If they wanted, they could stop the drug dealers but they don't. I think they encourage the consumption to keep us quiet. Nobody is interested in anything anymore. It's only about drugs all the time."

Many of the people interviewed in Boulaq al-Dakrour and Manshiet Nasser mention a growing drug problem. They recognize dealers and consumers from other parts of the city coming to their area. In fact, the drug trade seems to be limited to a few streets, and it does not seem to exceed the level of trade or consumption of other parts of Cairo. Smoking hashish in the streets and consuming hallucinogens is nothing new, but it seems to be especially widespread amongst the young crowd of tuk tuk (auto rickshaw) drivers in Boulaq al-Dakrour, for example. As residents of the area depend on this means of transportation, they are especially alarmed by this phenomenon. Accidents with these unstable, three-wheeled motorcycles are frequent and often severe.

Another threat to residents of informal areas derives from unhealthy living conditions. Disease and infection are threats to residents, especially in the areas where the *zabaleen* (garbage collectors) live. Trachoma, an eye infection that leads to blindness if left untreated, is widespread in many informal areas. The *zabaleen* in particular are in

danger of being infected with Hepatitis B. Many of the women sorting the garbage refuse to wear gloves. They claim that they can't move their hands quickly enough. Furthermore, there are many stories told in the community about women finding gold and other valuables in the garbage. The women do not want to miss the chance to retrieve the valuables in the trash because they are wearing gloves. Infected needles and hospital waste are the main source to Hepatitis B and C infections. According to Ezzat Guindy from the NGO *Ruh Al-Shebab* ("Spirit of Youth Association"), 60% percent of the inhabitants are infected. In other, more rural areas like the island al-Qorsaya, infection with Bilharzia is still a real health threat.
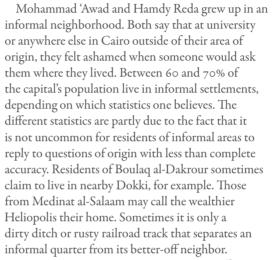
In fact, the view of Umm Ahmed, a woman living in Manshiet Nasser, seems to be correct: life in informal areas is not as bad nor as dangerous as public opinion in Egypt holds. There are some special threats to people living in these areas resulting from the non-observance of building codes and traffic laws. Some areas are built in dangerous environments. Yet when it comes to criminality or drug use, no significant difference between informal and formal areas of the same social level can be found.

A success story can happen anywhere.
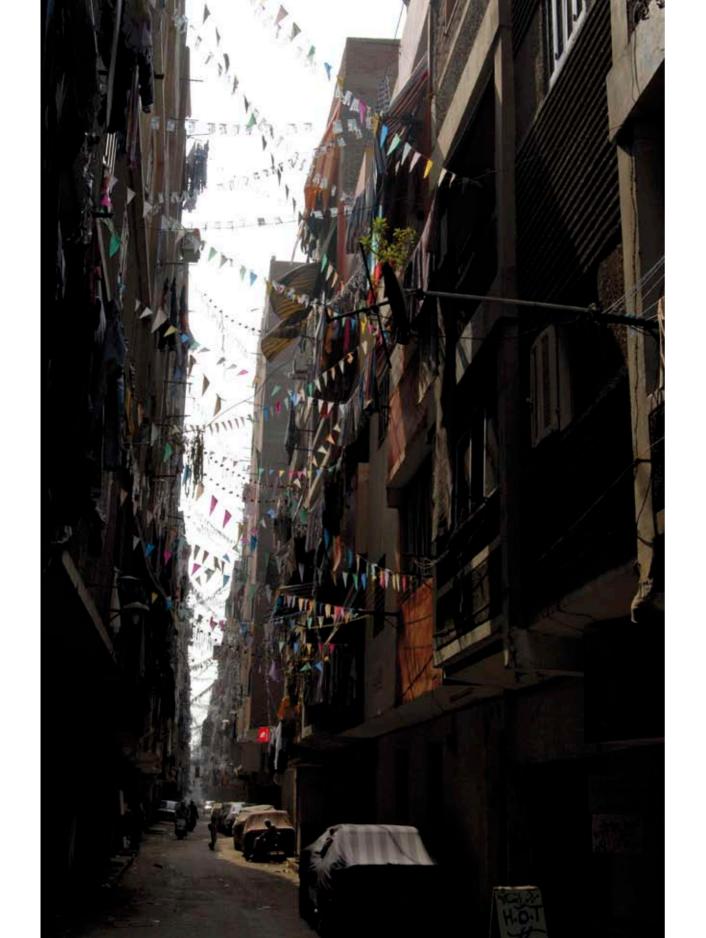Street in Boulaq al-Dakrour.

Success Stories

by JÜRGEN STRYJAK

Mohammad 'Awad and Hamdy Reda grew up in an informal neighborhood. Both say that at university or anywhere else in Cairo outside of their area of origin, they felt ashamed when someone would ask them where they lived. Between 60 and 70% of the capital's population live in informal settlements, depending on which statistics one believes. The different statistics are partly due to the fact that it is not uncommon for residents of informal areas to reply to questions of origin with less than complete accuracy. Residents of Boulaq al-Dakrour sometimes claim to live in nearby Dokki, for example. Those from Medinat al-Salaam may call the wealthier Heliopolis their home. Sometimes it is only a dirty ditch or rusty railroad track that separates an informal quarter from its better-off neighbor.

Egypt is a status-conscious society. Many affluent Cairenes have never crossed those ditches or railroad lines into the much poorer informal world of Muhammad 'Awad or Hamdy Reda, even though it may only be a ten minute walk away. Now however, for both men, their humble origins are no longer a problem. They haven't become rich, nor do they own a luxurious car or a membership card to one of the city's posh social clubs. In fact, they still live in their original *muntiqat al-'ashwa'iyya*. The difference is that they are no longer embarrassed by where they live.

Muntiqat al-'ashwa'iyya simply means 'unplanned, randomly-built neighborhood,' though the term hides more than it reveals. It aptly describes the way homes and workshops were built in these areas, but it does not convey that for most of the residents, planning is almost impossible. When 'Awad grew up in Boulaq al-Dakrour, he couldn't imagine that he would one day end up managing a successful graphic design and printing house in Mohandessin. While his office is near to where he still lives, he has traveled a long path to reach his present place in life.

Born in a small Nile Delta village, his family followed his father to Boulaq al-Dakrour when

'Awad was 10 years old. His father worked in Cairo as a *bawwab*, or doorman. Their first home was in Barrageel, a wretched corner within the already poor area of Boulaq al-Dakrour inhabited by the zabaleen, or garbage collectors, who make a living collecting the household waste of Mohandessin's middle and upper class residents. "The area wasn't connected to the drinking water supply," recalls 'Awad. "The neighbors had a groundwater pump, but we were forced to buy our drinking water from a tank lorry. The conditions at home were very difficult, especially our financial situation." For this reason, he started to work at an early age, first only during school holidays, and later after his lessons in the afternoon or in the evening.

His state-run school was located in Mohandessin, far from his home, but near to the places where he was able to earn some cash, especially after his father died. A construction company hired the teenager as a sidekick. At a supermarket, he worked for one and a half Egyptian pounds per day, a poor salary that was not enough to support the family. "I was only 14 years old then," he remembers, "but I sometimes didn't leave the supermarket until after ten at night. I was very tired and had not even time to eat." But

as informal districts are unplanned, so also can life develop without a plan. Three years later, in 1997, 'Awad's brother-in-law spoke to Ehab Abdel Dayem and took the chance of asking him to find a job for his relative. The brother-in-law was a watchman at Look Advertising during that time. Ehab was a senior designer there, but ran his own company, Promo Design, after working hours at night.

Ehab hired 'Awad as an office boy. In the morning, he went to a university in Nasser City to study quality control. In the afternoon, he arrived at the design company to brew tea and coffee for the employees, or to run errands. His life changed enormously. The salary, though still small, helped 'Awad to continue his studies and even to prepare for a marriage. At night, after most of the employees had left the office, he started to play with the computer. "I liked the computer. At the university we worked with quite old equipment, but here we had the latest software. In the afternoon, I sat with the graphic designers and watched how they worked, and at night I tried to copy this. I played around designing greeting cards, letterheads, and such things. Later, Ehab asked me to do simple jobs on my own, such as flyers. He felt that I was talented. I got myself CD-ROMs with training courses to help me understand all this. I wanted to know everything." Flyers, brochures, invitations—the number of orders increased, and so did the challenges. Later, 'Awad started to do the color separation and finally even went to the printing house to oversee the final steps on many printing projects.

In 2008, Ehab Abdel Dayim began to suffer from a heart problem. He underwent surgery and afterwards stepped back from the company. He chose 'Awad to continue most of his work. 'Awad's first completed order was in 2004, an invitation flyer for a dance club party. He still keeps it at home. Now, only four years later at the age of 29, he is responsible for most of the company's daily business.

He receives customers, creates their printing orders, supervises five other designers, and has the final say on everything produced by the printing house.

'Awad was lucky that someone discovered his potential and was willing to support it, something that rarely happens to those living in informal areas. When asked whether he is proud of what he has achieved, he replies awkwardly. "I was tired in the past, but God is providing." 'Awad's current salary, five times higher than that of an average government employee, affords a decent lifestyle for him, his wife, and their two small children. He is able to support his four sisters and one brother if necessary, and he even bought a used car. Despite his success, 'Awad sees no urgent reason to leave Boulaq al-Dakrour. He is satisfied with his life there.

Hamdy Reda, born in 1972, moved with his parents to Ard al-Lewa when he had just turned 16. He immediately felt that something was fundamentally wrong with the area. Until that year, he had spent his life in Boulaq Abul Ella, a working-class neighborhood near Downtown that in some places looks like an informal area, but which has a long history. "The governmental school I attended there was an old one," he says. "They applied rules

and methods that date back to the era of Nasser or even the days of King Farouk. Things seemed to be more organized there." After relocating to Ard al-Lewa, his new school was, according to Reda, an educational mess, with overworked, lowbrow teachers who were exhausted by the motley crowd of rampant informal area kids.

Ard al-Lewa, the 'Land of the General,' is the informal settlement twin of the adjoining Boulaq al-Dakrour. Reda began to play hooky, spending complete school days with friends in coffee shops and in the street. At home, he and his siblings often found themselves left alone, since both of their parents worked hard to make ends meet. There, Reda devoted much of his time to drawing pictures. His father did not discourage his interest in art, although he hoped Reda would pursue a military career.

In 1992, he joined the University of Helwan's Faculty of Fine Arts in Zamalek. "It was not really a good education," Reda smiles, "but it was okay for meeting people." Art always meant communication to him, and having the ability to interact with reality and society. For this reason he left the Faculty of Fine Arts, where he had worked as an assistant for two years after having completed his studies. He started to earn his living by taking photographs for magazines and newspapers. He continues to do so today, working as a successful freelance photographer for institutions like the British Council in Cairo and the United Nations. In the meantime, he has met his own artistic needs with his camera. His works have made it into photo exhibitions around Egypt, and in Switzerland, Germany, and Cuba.

In 2006, he founded the Artellewa Gallery Space for Contemporary Arts, in Ard al-Lewa, the district where he still lives in his parents' multi-story building. For Ard al-Lewa's residents it is strange to see affluent art lovers coming to a visit their area, but it makes

them proud. "Don't you want to see art?" Reda asks his neighbors. "Sure we do," many of them answer.

Occasionally, he ponders the question of what success means to him personally. "I don't have much money, no fancy apartment and no stable work," he says. That he lives in a poor, informal neighborhood like Ard al-Lewa is only of marginal importance to him. "I always thought I lived in a middle-class district," Reda laughs, "until a German friend of mine told me: 'No, Hamdy, I know middle-class in Egypt. You don't belong to them.'"

Like Muhammad 'Awad, Reda does not have a problem living in an informal settlement. He has dreams and wishes, but leaving the area is not necessary to make them come true. As the biographies of both men show, it is not about a place being shabby or poor or lacking infrastructure. It is rather the lack of opportunity and a fair chance that can hurt one's self-esteem.

The Art Space "Artellewa" Art Education in an Informal Area

by VERENA LIEBEL

What would you say if someone told you about an art initiative in a so-called 'informal area' of Cairo? About contemporary art exhibitions and film screenings there? About organized weekly painting and drawing courses for children, and a variety of workshops in the fields of photography and printmaking? For many, the most common reaction might be astonishment, followed perhaps by a critical comment questioning the necessity and use for art in informal areas.

The Area of Ard al-Lewa

Far away from Downtown and Zamalek, where most of Cairo's art galleries are located, the Artellewa Space for Contemporary Arts was established in December 2006 in the district of Ard al-Lewa, an area of large red-brown buildings on the outskirts of Cairo. The densely populated district—known mainly by those who enter Mohandessin from Sudan Street and pass the crowded Maslaan, the 'entrance' to the area—is filled with mini- and microbuses, taxis, tuk tuks (auto rickshaws), donkey carts, motorcycles, grocers, and kiosks. Filled with incredible noise and smell of burning rubbish, Ard al-Lewa is an informally built up area that confronts many of the problems of other poor areas, including a high rate of crime and a large population.

These images and associations are true to a certain point, but the ordinary daily life—including football-playing children, shouting vendors, mechanics and craftsmen, sheesha-smoking, tea-drinking men sitting in coffee shops, joking and laughing—is similar to scenes of daily life throughout the side streets of Egypt in any other 'formal' area such as Abdeen, Ramses, or Agouza.

Bringing Art to the People Bringing People to Art

In the heart of the area, the art space Artellewa was initiated by the Egyptian photographer Hamdy Reda, who has been living in the area since his early teens. Being a son of Ard al-Lewa, and having had the opportunity to study Fine Arts, Reda wanted to share his ideas with the people of his neighborhood. With support from other artists and cultural coordinators, he started the initiative of bringing art to the people of Ard al-Lewa in quite a simple way—by using a small shop on the ground floor of a building as an exhibition room.

Reda and his colleagues share the conviction that art is not an elitist, exclusive pursuit as some assume, but should be brought to the whole of society. Furthermore, Artellewa is built on the belief that art should be used as an educational tool, in the form of workshops for children on various subjects, and that due to its 'special location,' it can be used to raise awareness of informal areas and help correct the common misperception of Ard al-Lewa as a 'no-go-area.'

Since the day of its founding, the 9 m² space has been a venue for art exhibitions, small concerts, and others events, which have been taking place on a regular basis over the past two years. Furthermore, the rooftop of the building has been used as a space for different workshops for children and youngsters.

Artellewa Gallery. Ard-al-Lewa.

Development of the Space

Since its inception, Artellewa's activities have been developed and expanded. It started with regular art exhibitions, and after a short while weekly painting and drawing courses for children were added, as well as film screenings and a recently established artist exchange-program, artists-in-residence, in cooperation with independent art spaces in Spain. Artists-in-residence offers artists from abroad facilities in which to live and work for a period of three months, as well as an exhibition at the participating art space.
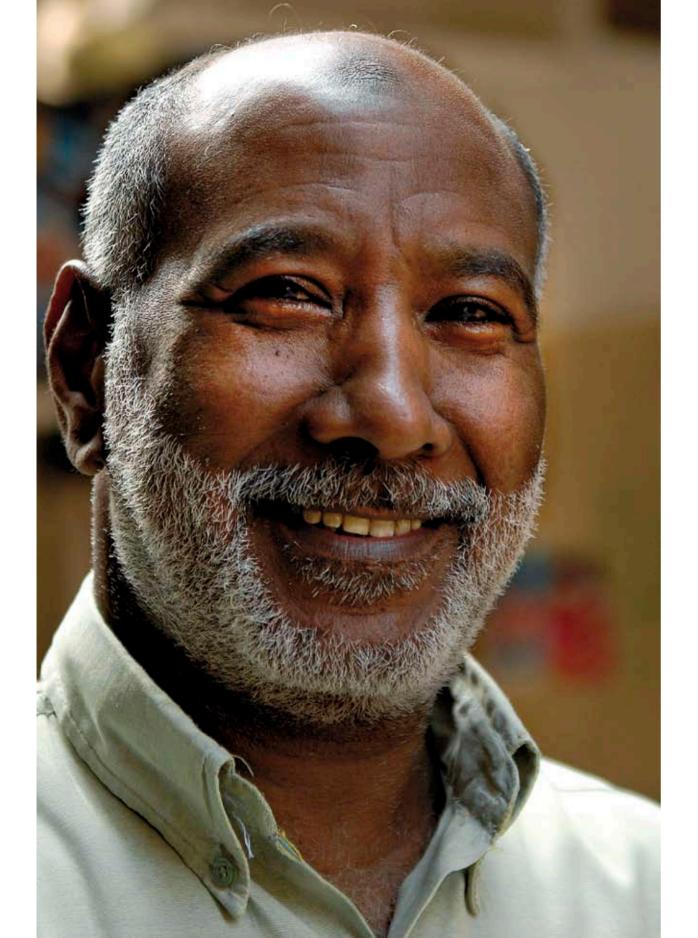
The Artellewa staff has expanded as well, with artists and cultural activists joining the project and actively contributing to the space in a variety of ways, such as voluntary teaching of children, musical performances, and by conducting workshops. There are around four volunteers working on different topics, and 20 children attending the weekly courses.

In the beginning, the children of the area were the only ones who visited the space, especially enjoying the painting workshops. Now, after two years, neighbours have come to accept the space as part of the scenery, and people come to visit the monthly exhibitions. Although they may have difficulties in comprehending the exhibits (which frequently happens to visitors of contemporary art exhibitions)], they enjoy the opening ceremonies with its gathering of people and music. As Reda reports concerning the acceptance of the space and its activites there: "The parents don't discuss the classes for their children, but they do say 'thank you' to me."

Abu Haitam.

Natural Leaders

by JULIA GERLACH

Hagg Hashim Abu al-Dahab is the type of person who makes other people search for the most polite and respectful expressions in their vocabulary. He is not tall, but is not easily missed as he stands on the stairs to his house in Manshiet Nasser. He wears a black blazer over his *galabeyya* (a typical Arab garment). The white scarf around his neck and the silver ornamented cane in his hand gives him an added touch of elegance and grandeur. He seems to come from a different time, and is reminiscent of one of the patriarchs of a Naguib Mahfouz novel. The Hagg's active eyes watch the street, looking for the expected visitor. As soon as he has spotted the person, his serious and proud face changes into a warm and welcoming smile. "People come to me because they have some kind of problem with their neighbors or with people in their family. Sometimes there are also problems with the local administration or the police, and I try to help them to find a solution," he explains. On a normal day, five to six people come to him and tell him about their disputes. "It might be the owner of a house who wants to dismiss the tenant of an apartment, but the tenant has children and doesn't want to leave. Or it is someone who has gotten into conflict with the law and has a problem with the police. We attempt to get people involved together and listen to the different points of view. At the end of such a session, we try to reach a solution that everybody can accept," he explains. People prefer to come to him to get their disputes settled, because his method is much more effective and much faster than going to the police station or to court. "And people don't want to spend money on a lawyer, which is another reason why they come to me," he says.

Nearly every afternoon, Hagg Hashim is to be found in the building of the' Sons of Banga in Cairo Cooperative'. This is one of the biggest associations of its kind in Manshiet Nasser. It was founded by rural migrants coming from the city of Banga in Upper Egypt. The members originally got together to help

each other in times of crisis, and maintained it as a savings cooperative and funeral expenses fund. "Now we have a beautiful building with three floors that is used as a cultural club, and where we offer many different services such as teaching the Qur'an to children or helping the poor. As times have changed, the cooperative has changed as well," he explains.

Hagg Hashim does not have an official position in the local administration, but he still plays a role. Nearly every day there is a big crowd of people waiting outside the office of the district chief. Some want to ask for a plumber to come and repair the broken pipe in the street near their house, others ask for a new flat or want to complain about the situation in the local school. Especially in the weeks after the rocks fell, when the newly built apartments were distributed, the crowds in the hall of the district building increased and people grew more and more angry waiting here. Hagg Hashim is one of the few people who can just walk past these crowds. When people see him entering the district building with his cane, they make way so he can enter the office of the district chief "nearly at every time, when it's necessary," Hagg Hashim explains. "The reason is that I don't have any interests myself. I don't ask for an apartment for my daughter or a job for my son, and the district chief knows that I look carefully into every single matter before I address him. I am only bringing people with me who really have the right to get help and whose claims are justified. The people in the administration know that I will not help liars and beguilers."

His great legitimacy gives him the freedom to scold people, if he thinks this is necessary. Originally, people chose him to be their arbitrator because he was one of the first people to settle in the area and had a successful business. He came in the 1950s to Manshiet Nasser and built up a trading company. His five-story house in the first row of Manshiet Nasser, right at the Autostrade (motorway in the city of Cairo), shows the wealth and the power of Hagg Hashim and his family. He is very

critical of people taking advantage of the rock slide, and who lied to get one of the new apartments. He cannot stand the attitude of many young people waiting for the government to help them and to offer them an apartment, a job, or an income instead of making an effort themselves. He is also impatient if he sees that projects started by international donors seem to fizzle out. "I am wondering when they will finish this asphalt resurfacing project at the Autostrade," he says. Most of Hagg Hashim's authority is based on the service he is offering to the community. People come to him because he is trustworthy, and has not been corrupted.

Mohammed Abdel Meguid aka Abu Haitham is a different example of a so-called natural leader. In 1983, when he got married and moved to Boulaq al-Dakrour, he worked in the Ministry of Education, and when he retired he started a small stationary shop. "I realized that I still have a lot of energy left and I don't want just to sit down and drink tea and do nothing. I want to do something for the community. That's what God made us men for," he explains. He is very religious, and his appearance—carefully trimmed gray beard, a *zabeeba* (a callous formed where the forehead touches the floor during prayer), and the fact that he remains very physically fit—makes people trust him. Often, when Abu Haitham talks about the problems of his area or the situation of certain people in his neighborhood, he seems moved. His eyes tear up. He is a person who shows sympathy and respect for people.

He would have become a natural leader even without the GTZ project, but it was the beginning of the larger community participatory project in 2004 in Boulaq al-Dakrour that gave Abu Haitham a push. "There was a man coming to us from the German project and I was talking to him. After a while he asked me if I wanted to join them. I liked the idea," he recalls. He helped to organize a system of street leaders. "In every street we chose one or two people, whom we knew would be listened to and respected. Most often

these persons were elderly men, but there are also streets with young leaders," he explains. The duty of the street leaders was to collect information about what the inhabitants of their street wanted, and to get involved when people in the street had problems with each other. Abu Haitham was selected leader of the whole *shiakha* (a part of a district). "In fact, we had leaders in 600 streets and the system was working well in the beginning," Abu Haitham explains.

After the first enthusiasm, however, when the nearby main road was paved and parts of the vegetable *souq* got a new roof, the pace of the improvement seemed to slow down. That, at least, was how the people perceived it. "People asked me, 'where is the money?' They believed that the Germans would bring money, and that the people taking part in the project would get their share of that money. It's difficult to explain to them that it is more about participation and changing attitudes." Many of the once-enthusiastic street leaders have reduced their level of engagement. "People come to me and tease me. They say: 'Hmm, you have been working with the Germans for five years now, and what did you get, if not for you, then for your environment?' I show them the street lamp outside my shop, but they laugh. 'One street lamp after five years of work? It would have been easier to buy the lamp yourself,' they say."

While he might have gotten his initial legitimacy from working with GTZ, now it seems that people consult him as a leader because they respect him, and not only because he is close to a source of donor money. Abu Haitham helps people who do not know how to fill in official forms, or how to address government bodies in their paperwork. He listens to them and helps with whatever is needed. He likes what he is doing and he wants to change, if not the world, than at least the lives of the people around him. "The most important thing is to motivate people to think positively and to take their affairs into their own hands. That's difficult, because the conditions in this area are depressing. People are tired."

Abu Haitham offers an example: "We try to motivate people to clean the streets and people believe that this is a good thing. But then look, the only time when the district administration cares to clean the streets is when officials come to visit the area. People here see this and understand that the reason why the workers of the district come and sweep the streets is because they have to make them look good in the eyes of the officials and not as better service to the people. In this sense, helping the district to clean the streets is not perceived as an act of community service, but an attempt to curry favor with officials. Once the official guests are gone, people throw everything in the street again, and in just a few hours it is looking worse than before. This practice sets the wrong example. People feel neglected, and they feel the arrogance of the powerful."

Meanwhile, Abu Haitham opens a glass of cinnamon: "How much sugar do you want in your cinnamon drink?" he asks Hagg Hamdy, an elderly craftsman sitting and resting in front of his shop. They are having a chat about the cost of rice and macaroni, and about life in general. Why do people become criminals? Is it because of their bad nature, or are the hardships of life making them thieves and liars? Abu Haitham, normally calm and thoughtful, is getting emotional in this discussion. The reason is a disappointment he experienced earlier that same morning when he left his shop unattended for several minutes to get hot water from his apartment, and someone came into the shop and stole his mobile phone. "I can't imagine who took it. People here know me and they know that I am not rich, that I can't afford to buy a new one, and they know that I need the telephone—not for myself but in order to help others."
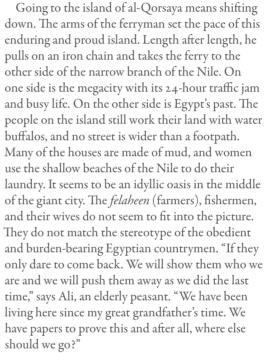
In informal areas, government authority is often absent, and because people feel neglected and mistreated, official bodies do not have much legitimacy. People obey the police and the powerful because they are afraid of the consequences if they refuse to do so,

but many of the people interviewed do not believe that the officials are either willing or able to solve their problems. Therefore, it is only natural that they choose other trustworthy individuals to help them deal with their affairs. In many of the more traditional communities such as Manshiet Nasser, tribal structure and kinship, as well as seniority, are important criteria in selecting leaders. In more fragmented, urban communities like Boulaq al-Dakrour, seniority and personal integrity are the basis for leadership.

Nevertheless, it is not only older men taking on leadership roles. Youngsters with a good education, who sacrifice their time and energy for the community, and who follow the rules of tradition, morality, and respect, can also play an influential role. Many of the natural leaders increase their power and influence by having access to the local administration or to foreign donors. The local administration, as well as international organizations, use these people as channels to get their message through, to enforce their orders, or to get information from the community. Being chosen by the local government to be such an intermediate person, however, is not enough in itself to become a leader. Many people interviewed mentioned examples of corrupted middlemen. In the City of the Dead, for example, residents complained about a system that uses people from the community to serve the district government's interest in monitoring illegal building activities. Instead of bringing offenders to justice, these middlemen are said to collect bribes and share the money with the employees of the local administration. Such reports are difficult to verify, and are quoted here only to show what distinguishes a legitimate leader from a person with power but without real authority. Who is accepted as a real leader can change from situation to situation, and some leaders have followers from within their own small community, while others play a role in a larger area. In fact, the concept of 'natural leadership' is as informal as the living conditions in the informal areas.

Ferry leaving al-Qorsaya.

Al-Qorsaya Island: A Struggle for Land

by JULIA GERLACH

Going to the island of al-Qorsaya means shifting down. The arms of the ferryman set the pace of this enduring and proud island. Length after length, he pulls on an iron chain and takes the ferry to the other side of the narrow branch of the Nile. On one side is the megacity with its 24-hour traffic jam and busy life. On the other side is Egypt's past. The people on the island still work their land with water buffalos, and no street is wider than a footpath. Many of the houses are made of mud, and women use the shallow beaches of the Nile to do their laundry. It seems to be an idyllic oasis in the middle of the giant city. The *felaheen* (farmers), fishermen, and their wives do not seem to fit into the picture. They do not match the stereotype of the obedient and burden-bearing Egyptian countrymen. "If they only dare to come back. We will show them who we are and we will push them away as we did the last time," says Ali, an elderly peasant. "We have been living here since my great grandfather's time. We have papers to prove this and after all, where else should we go?"

In the past, the small island south of the Nilometer, on the island of Manial, was flooded in the summer months. After the High Dam of Aswan began operation, farmers from nearby Dahab Island moved here. Other people came and settled as well. In the following years, government agencies came to the island and registered the inhabitants. Since then, Ali and the other farmers pay a yearly lease to the government. Today, there are approximately 5 000 people living permanently on al-Qorsaya. Most of them make a living fishing and farming, while some of the younger generation work in the city.

"We came here more than 20 years ago," says Mohammad Mustapha. "This was when we moved back to Egypt from Germany." The doctor, his Swiss wife Brigitte, and their two children rented a piece of land from one of the farmers and built a house. They masterminded initiatives to bring electricity, fresh water, and telephones to the island. Mustapha also convinced the artist Mohammed Abla to become a resident of al-Qorsaya. "The whole island is my atelier," says Abla. He is painting the life of ordinary people: farmers, men in *galabiyyas* (traditional Arab garment), women washing. His pictures of proud Egyptians, painted with big strokes and strong colors, make him one of Egypt's most famous artists. His work is displayed all around the world. The island also hosts a small house for artists-in-residence. Swiss artists come here for some months to enjoy the contrast between past and present, old and new, slow and hectic. The distant sound of cars honking mixes with birds twittering and chickens fighting for a worm. The skyline of the city as the background of the rural scenery is a contrast many artists are looking for.

For some time there have been new themes and strange objects entering Abla's work. Soldiers, military boats, and enormous diggers destroy the harmony of his landscapes. "It all happened in January 2008," recalls Mohammed Mustapha. "Suddenly and without any warning, a ship with some 200 soldiers embarked on the island. First they went to our neighbors over there." He points

Al-Qorsaya. The island from above.

Farmer. Al-Qorsaya Island.

to the house some hundred meters from his own. The officer told this farmer that he would have to leave the island. "The neighbor alerted all of us and when the soldiers saw all those people, they retreated to their ship," says Mustapha. His hands are shaking a little. The memory of the incident makes him still angry. "Afterwards they came here to us. I guess they thought: Look, this doctor is a stranger to the local community. His house will be easy to take." This was a miscalculation. A large crowd of peasants and fishermen rushed to the doctor's house. He talked to the officer who told him again that he and his men had been ordered to clear the island of its inhabitants. "When the officer touched me the crowd got angry. People started to push the soldiers, and when they were pushed back, they started to throw stones, bottles, and whatever was at hand." "It was extraordinary," says Ali. "We are not used to disobeying a police officer." In the end, the soldiers and officers went back to their ship and left.

"The strange thing is that we never heard anything from official sources about the background of this operation," Abla says. Rumors are that a big investor wants to buy the island, but nobody knows if the deal has already been signed. Speculations are in the air about what the plan for the island might be. Some suggest that the investor wants to construct a luxury compound with villas, while others believe that there is an amusement park being planned. Big developers from the Persian Gulf have been quite active in Egypt recently. A prince and businessman from Saudi Arabia, who already owns part of the neighboring Dahab Island, is also the subject of speculation. Until now, there is only one big villa under construction, owned by an influential businessman and Member of Parliament. It is not known whether he is planning to live on Dahab Island, or if he is in any way involved in the planning. "There is something very fishy about all of this," adds Dr. Mustapha. "At first, the official newspapers wrote that it was nothing but rumors and that there

were no investment plans. Later on, they printed an official statement saying that investment plans for the island had been dropped. How can one drop plans that did not exist in the first place?"

The military may have retreated under pressure in that instance in January 2008, but they have remained in other ways. Some adjacent swampland was filled in, which enlarged the island, and soldiers have set up tents there and are standing guard day and night. Diggers have been working on a dam. By now, nearly the whole island is encircled by a high wall built of white limestone.
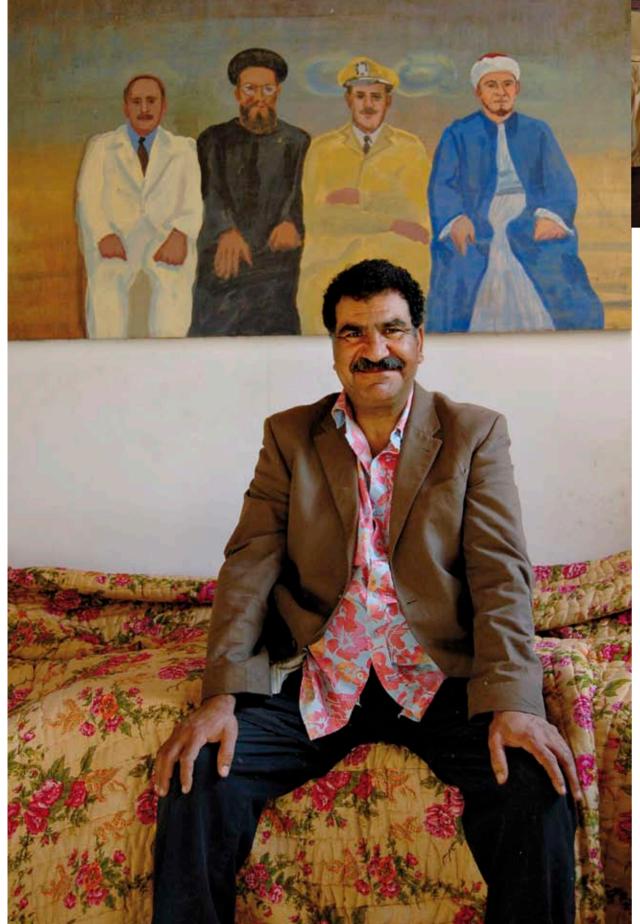
"They are cutting us off from the Nile," complains Umm Mohammed, an elderly resident of al-Qorsaya. She is kneeling in the water in front of her house doing laundry. "We used to have easy access to the Nile," she explains. "All of this was reed and our *felucca* (a sailing boat) could easily pass through. Because some of our land is on the island over there." She points in the direction of Dahab Island. "Now they built this," she says and makes a derisive movement with her hand over to the filled-in area, the military camp, and the dam. "Now we have to sail our *felucca* from our neighbors' land. And look what happened to the water in front of us. It's all filthy and full of rubbish. We used to drink from the Nile, but this is impossible now," she explains.

In fact, she should also refrain from sitting and standing in the water now. Once the water of the Nile stops flowing, the danger of an infection with Bilharzia is very high. "Just today there is the funeral of one of the peasants. His liver was all eaten away by

the parasites," explains Dr. Mustapha. "Today at 10 o'clock meeting for the burial of...," announces the Imam of the local mosque, whose loudspeaker voice is calling the inhabitants of al-Qorsaya to convene. "Since the incident in January, and since we showed the military that we are not so easily scared away, we are getting even closer. We used to be very close before. But now we are even more aware of the community," explains Umm Mustapha. She has a small shop and sells vegetables and tea. Most people take the ferry and go to the market in Giza for shopping. For those who forget something, or who are reluctant to leave the island, Umm Mustapha has the supplies.

"We are all born here and we have our children here. Where else should we go?" says Zainab Mahmoud, who comes over to chat with her. "Nobody has told us what they are planning, and nobody has told us where we should go to live," she says. "If they would offer us nice apartments somewhere, I might see things differently." She is interrupted by a younger woman who, out of curiosity, came over to see what the discussion is all about. "No, no," she says, "they can offer me what they want! I don't want anything from them. I just want to live in peace here at the place where I belong." The women start an extended argument about what they expect from the government. Do they need more services? What about a bridge instead of the rusty ferry boat? "It would make it much easier for the children to get to school. Instead of taking the old ferry," argues Zainab Mahmoud. "No way! A bridge would kill the island. Think of all the people that would come here," replies her neighbor.

However, inviting people over to the island has been the strategy adopted by the inhabitants to protect their island. "We are having parties all the time. We bring musicians, do art workshops for children, and we have guests as often as possible," explains Dr. Mustapha. "There are many artists and intellectuals coming to these events. There is a

Umm Mohammed. Al-Qorsaya Island.

Previous page
Artist Mohammed Abla. Al-Qorsaya Island.

whole community of people discontent with official politics," Brigitte Ritter-Mustapha explains. "They are joining us here. These events are constantly monitored by the police. You will find a dozen guys from the state security standing around the lawn watching children painting. It's absurd!"

"The thing is that nobody understands why all this should happen," her husband adds. "Why should we or the people here give up our homes so that any big investor can earn a lot of money? If they were to build apartments for the poor, or hospitals, or anything else, people would react differently. But in this case: No!"

There is a small fishing boat passing by Dr. Mustapha's garden. The fisherman, named Ramadan, is in his mid-twenties. Born into a fishing family, all he owns is on his boat. His wife stores the small cooker under the bench to make space for the two girls to play. "We have nothing else. We work, eat, sleep, and do everything else on this boat," Ramadan explains. At night he looks for a good and protected place to moor their boat. From this perspective the dam is not so bad. "But I think the fish don't like the area so much any more. Since they built the dam, I am not catching as many fish as I used to," he says. "The fishermen on our island see these poor fishing families with their boats all the time. They know that if they lose their land here on the island, they might end up like them," says Mustapha. This example makes the resistance stronger.

Al-Qorsaya has become a symbol of popular resistance. On a late November evening,

Mohammed Mustapha and Mohammed Abla are giving a press conference on a bench beside the Nile. Abdel Halim Qandil, along with other celebrities of the Egyptian opposition, is present. A poet stands up. He has made a poem to honor the brave people of al-Qorsaya. A representative of the al-Kifaya movement gives a speech. They have all come to celebrate the victory of the people of al-Qorsaya in front of the Administrative Court.

Since the inhabitants did not want to sit and wait to see what the future will bring, they went to court. They wanted an official verdict stating their right to live where they do. "According to the law, people who have leased a piece of land for more than 15 years acquire a preemptive right, so that they can buy the land in case it is for sale," explains Abla.

Going through the court procedures was a new and strange experience for the people of al-Qorsaya. On a sunny morning in October, some 50 inhabitants of the island, men and women, gathered in the yard of the house of the neighbor where the military first landed in January. They had tea and then they boarded a water taxi that took them downstream to the Administrative Court of Cairo. It was not the first time they had all appeared in court. Judges had already postponed their case several times. "We are not giving up hope, because we have no choice," says Abla. Finally, in November 2008, the court ruled in their favor. The judges declared that the people of al-Qorsaya should have the right to stay on their land.

"We had a very big party after we heard the verdict," Mustapha recalls. "Now we have to see what this verdict means in practice. Will we really be able to buy the land we are living on? As all the actions of the military were very unofficial and without any written order, I am not so sure that they will leave us in peace now." But this much is obvious: The people of al-Qorsaya are very proud to have won the case, and to be the symbol of resistance that might be successful for other Egyptians living on disputed land.

The Other Side of the Tracks

Ezbet Arab Abu Regeila

by MANAL EL-JESRI

This article was first published in the October 2008 issue of Egypt Today magazine. It is printed here with permission of Egypt Today magazine.

Residents of the nation's shantytowns are often invisible to the rest of society, until a disaster such as the Duweiqa rockslide or the fire at the Qale'et El-Kabsh slum. Those living in Ezbet Arab Abu Regeila say they would rather be invisible than face the disaster in front of them: eviction.

Together to stop the demolition of the homes of 5 000 families living in the Abu Regeila district"—this is the title of a recently formed group on the social networking site Facebook. It is through this group that many journalists and activists were able to find out about the predicament of thousands of residents of the Gisr el-Suez slum, allegedly ordered out of their homes by the military police June 15.

Although most residents of Ezbet Arab Abu Regeila are illiterate or barely literate, they understood a concept that many Egyptians are starting to realize as well: Make a big ruckus, get your voice heard, and you just may get what you want. The children, those who were not out looking for scrap cardboard and plastic to sell, attacked the soldiers and officers. Some women and children lay in front of the bulldozers, vowing to die rather than see their homes crushed, much like Palestinians whose homes and olive groves are crushed by Israeli bulldozers to make way for new Israeli settlements.

The residents were able to put off immediate eviction and demolition, though the officers promised to come back on June 30. No one showed up on the designated day, except for hundreds of journalists and activists who had found out about the residents' problem either online or through the press. The media campaign seems to have worked, at least so far.

Today, while the dwellers of Ezbet Arab Abu Regeila have waived the immediate danger of being evicted from their simple homes, they fear a repeat performance. What they want is a guarantee that they will not be moved. Many have lived here since the early 1970s, and their livelihood—collecting and selling scrap cardboard, fabric and plastic—is connected to the area. Although they have no amenities such as electricity, water or sewage, all they want from the government are registration documents proving their ownership of the land and homes, their only refuge.

Substandard suburb

It is not difficult to reach Ezbet Arab Abu Regeila. Our guide, a field researcher from the Egyptian Center for Housing Rights (ECHR), led the way. Media reportss about the area had made us believe that this slum, housing thousands of Egyptian families, was situated in some forsaken area. But the fact is that a 10-minute drive from Nasr City will take you to the beginning of the stretch of land flanking the Cairo-Suez train track. It lies across from the Badr recreational park, just a few minutes away from Oruba and Tayaran Streets.

Being so close to 'civilization' makes entering Ezbet Arab Abu Regeila a real culture shock. The minute we reached the train tracks, accessible only on foot, we were greeted by the thundering sound of an approaching train. Any attempt to walk on would have been an act of suicide. The only way to get to Abu Regeila is by walking on the train tracks, so we waited in a shed that must have housed railway inspectors in the past. The dust was suffocating, the commotion ear-splitting.

Once the train passed, we were able to proceed. The area seemed deserted. It was almost noon, and most of the residents were out working. A few children poked their heads out of windows that were almost level with the ground. Residents have built rickety steps leading to their humble homes, some of which are nothing more than a few wooden planks put together with a few nails, and some scrap fabric to protect women from prying eyes.

Ahmed Ali, our guide, is a familiar face here; otherwise we would not have been able to proceed. Strangers are not welcome here, at least not these days. Ali calls his contact person, Saad Mohamed Farag El-Soweifi, who comes out of his home/warehouse to greet us.

As we cross a wooden fence, the stench of urine punches us in the face. We cross a cluttered courtyard full of hundreds of stacked flat cardboard boxes, as a dog, apparently trapped beneath one of the stacks, barks in protest. El-Soweifi welcomes us into his wooden home. Satellite television blares loudly, and swarms of flies attack anyone who dares stay still.

We are soon joined by El-Soweifi's neighbor Mahmoud Taha Mahmoud Abdel Dayem, a retired transportation worker. Before we are allowed to ask any questions or turn on the recorder, El-Soweifi calls Mohamed El-Helw, the director of the legal affairs sector of the Egyptian Center for Housing Rights. I met El-Helw a few days prior, so the lawyer clears my name, and we are allowed to proceed with our interview.

"Pardon me, but we do not want to talk to just anyone. A guy came by the other day, and wanted us to sign a petition about the prices." El-Soweifi explains. "He wanted to drag us into politics, but we do not want that. We want a decision allowing us to own this land. This is all we want."

Abdel Dayem agrees: "We want to continue living the way we are living now. We all have work here, we cannot move."

Attempted eviction

This area, also known as Ezbet Abu Regeila, Arab Abu Regeila, or Abu Regeila for short, is only one of over 80 slum areas that have mushroomed over the years across the nation. According to a 2003 UN report, one in every three people in the world will live in slums within 30 years unless governments control unprecedented urban growth. According to the UN human settlements program, UN-HABITAT, urban slums are growing faster than expected. The same report points out that Africa now holds 20% of the world's slum dwellers. On the UN-HABITAT website, on the page dedicated to Egypt, the figures reveal that of the country's total population, 43% are urban dwellers. The ratio of slum to urban population is 40%, as per HABITAT's 2001 estimates.

El-Helw explains that Abu Regeila is one of many cases volunteers and workers at the center deal with daily. "Abu Regeila is one of the areas that grow outside the law," he says. "The people who live there are the people we hear officials talking about every day, the limited income groups. When people can find nowhere to live, they move to any vacant piece of land and start to build huts. The Abu Regeila residents started doing this in the 1970s."

El-Helw points out that the government is not only well aware of the problem of slums, but has also addressed it on many occasions.

"The government has acknowledged the existence of slums. In 1995, a Cabinet decree recommended that the problem of slums be solved, and the

President, during the last elections, promised to devise a plan to solve the issue of slums," the lawyer explains. "Based on this promise, Law 138 of 2006 was issued, stating that all buildings built without permission are to receive municipal services. All areas that are suitable for living are to be developed, the law stated."

What happened June 15, according to El-Helw, violates international and Egyptian laws.

"A number of military police cars visited the area, complete with officers and soldiers, followed by two bulldozers," he says. "The army surrounded the area. The soldiers carried demolition tools. The women and children screamed and threw stones at the cars, while the men refused to budge or to sign anything. The officers said they would be back on (June 30), promising to shoot whoever dares to stay in their homes."

The involvement of the army, a force that does not fall under any of the three civilian forces recognized by the Constitution, was illegal. "The law recognizes that the legislative, judicial and executive entities that have the power to deal with civilians." El-Helw says.

Representatives from Abu Regeila, together with ECHR lawyers, went to the offices of the prosecutor general, filing complaint number 11374 on June 23. "Some of the residents were interviewed at the El-Salam prosecutor's office, and we demanded that the entity that ordered the military police to move be named and prosecuted," El-Helw says. "If what happened was official, then it is against the law. We also demanded that the people be given ownership of the land they live on; to give them protection against any unauthorized orders of eviction."

According to El-Helw, the Cairo governorate is the only authority that can clear the problem. "We have demanded that people be given ownership because it is what the President and the law has promised. The matter is still with the prosecutor general, who has not investigated the matter himself.

We are waiting for a decision by the attorney general, but the judicial system is a little slow in our country. It will take some time."

On June 30, the day designated by the military police as the final day for eviction, and following a June 29 press conference at the Press Syndicate, El-Helw was one of hundreds of activists who visited Abu Regeila early in the morning, and stayed there until late afternoon. According to the lawyer, the only officials who showed up were some officers from Amn al-Dawla (State Security). "They said they have never received any orders or even information about the will to evict the area and destroy it," El-Helw explains.

Afraid to build

Despite the reassurance by high caliber members of Amn al-Dawla, the residents of Abu Regeila are still frightened. El-Soweifi says he has been suffering from nightmares because he is scared for his livelihood and his children and wife. El-Soweifi has been married five times, and has six children. Mohamed, 13, Mostafa, 10, and Mayyada the toddler are the only three who currently live with him.

Mohamed left school four years ago, and Mostafa never went to school. Every day, they take their donkey-cart and go out to forage for unwanted cardboard and other scrap material. The area is surrounded by a number of factories, so the pickings are rich. Their father has stopped going out with them ever since he underwent a kidney operation. He says he is only 45, but looks much older. All his front teeth are missing, and his face is wrinkled beyond his years. Both he and his neighbor Abdel Dayem have tired, red eyes. El-Soweifi explains that he is half blind.

Abdel Dayem's story is heartbreaking. "I have lived here in the Ezbet for the past 15 years. When God improved my conditions and I retired, I received LE 14 000, so I decided to leave my rented rooms and

build the piece of land I had bought right here in the Ezbet," he says. "Over the years, I have built one room after the other. One month I would buy some wood, some cement, or some bricks, enough to build a wall or two. Everything I own I used to build my home. My source of income is my pension, LE 500."

El-Soweifi has refused to build a brick home, opting for a wooden abode. "I am afraid to build. This is not against the law," he says, tapping on the walls behind us. "Brick homes are against the law. I will only build when I have a piece of paper proving that I own this land. I need a license from the municipality."

One of the oldest residents in the area, El-Soweifi says he has lived here since he was 15, when his father decided to move his family from Upper Egypt to Cairo after the half feddan of land he was given by then President Gamal Abdel Nasser was taken away from him.

"Gamal Abdel Nasser himself gave my father the deed to the land. My father went to al-Azhar, and received the deed from Nasser's hand," he remembers. "When Gamal died, the land was taken from him. If it were not, we would still be in Upper Egypt."

Much has happened to El-Soweifi during these 30 years. "I worked in Iraq and came back, I worked as a bawwab all over Cairo, yet I always had my home here to come back to," he says. "But then I decided to settle and work in the scrap business full time. My sister lives here too, and works in the same field. Almost everybody here works in collecting scrap."

It is a lucrative business, enough to put food in their bellies, says El-Soweifi. "A ton of cardboard is sold for LE 600 or 700 if wet, the dry is sold for LE 300. Plastic bags are LE 3.25 a kilo, scrap fabric is 40 piasters a kilo, and some kinds are LE 1.25 or 1.50." he explains. "Is that a good job or not, you tell me? Is it not better than thievery, than drug trafficking? It is hunger that drives us to this job; do not think it is a pretty job. The other day, my kids who are 13

and 10 found a severed head in a barrel. Now I only send them out during the day, and only in the areas around us."

As El-Soweifi is a well-known resident of the area, the alleged military police trucks stopped in front of his property on June 15. "They had four higher officers, and 82 soldiers. I said 'sir, what are you doing' and one of them said 'we are evicting you. We are to destroy this area,'" El-Soweifi recounts. "I told him you can do whatever you want if you have a official papers from an official entity. I was carrying Mayyada, I placed her in front of the bulldozer, and I took my galabeyya off. I kept shouting, 'we are Egyptians. Go do this in Israel, where they attack us everyday across the border.' The kids threw stones at them, and they left."

The residents knew that the only way out of their predicament was to be heard loud and clear.

"I wrote a number of complaints. I made 16 copies," El-Soweifi says. "We went to the Radio and Television Building, but they threw us out. We went to the People's Assembly, where I told them my uncle used to be a Member of Parliament. Two decent journalists came out and took the complaints, which is how our story reached the human rights people. Ustaz Mohamed (El-Helw) came and took us to the court."

Following the eviction threats, nine of the older residents, including Abdel Dayem, were taken in for questioning by the military. El-Soweifi refused to go. "I know all about the military court. I know martial law," El-Soweifi says. "It is not official. They can make a lion profess to be a woman."

Abdel Dayem quickly explains that things were not at all bad during the military questioning. "They treated us really well. They asked us why we killed a soldier, and we said we did not kill anyone. The kids threw stones at the soldiers because they were afraid for their parents, but no one was killed. They asked us to explain this again in Abassiya, where we were

asked to sign our consent to eviction. We refused to sign anything, and were taken to the prosecutor's office the next day.

"At the prosecutor's office, they said 'don't you know this land belongs to the government?' We said no. Some of us have lived here for 20 or 30 years, and we never saw any officials, barbed wire or soldiers. Some of the people paid the Bedouins who lived here before us, and some just lived on the land," he explains.

El-Soweifi points out that those who paid for their land, unlike him, were given no contracts. "It was all unofficial," he says.

Surviving on pride

If it were not for the satellite dishes adorning some of the roofs, one would not realize that Ezbet Abu Regeila exists in the twenty-first century. It is certainly an area bereft of any government attention.

"We steal electricity; I will not lie to you", El-Soweifi says. "We also have no water. We used to buy water from a man who had some pipes extended to his place, but sometimes the factories give us water for free. As for sewage, we dig holes for barrels that we empty once they are full, but at the moment I have no barrels. The barrel costs LE 60, but it is LE 150 to dig one hole. I cannot afford it at the moment."

The area smells of human and animal refuse. Flies form a cloud that hovers over everything and everybody. The children look malnourished. Ten-year-old Mostafa, El-Soweifi's son, could be mistaken for a six-year-old. Yet the residents insist they want nothing from the government, not better housing, not even water and sewage. All they really want is to be left alone, and to be given access to the land.

"We are used to our lives here. If they move us, who is to guarantee the sort of people who will end up living with us?" El-Soweifi says.

Abdel Dayem beseeches us to make people aware of their problems. "We just want the land. We are

willing to pay for it. We want to stay here, where we have always lived."

Umm Mahmoud, who lives in the home behind El-Soweifi's, invites us into her home. She has lived here for six years, and has no means to go anywhere else. She lives with her four children, one of whom is her daughter, divorced after a car accident left her paralyzed from the waist down. Umm Mahmoud shows us a little table on which she displays her meager wares: some tissue boxes, some cigarette packs, and a little candy and biscuits. "Please lady, help us," she says as we leave.

Further down the road is the home of Ibrahim Ahmed Ibrahim Moftah, a 54-year-old army veteran with an amputated leg and fingers. The father of seven, whose children all work in collecting scrap, also has a heartrending story. In 1978, he lost his leg and fingers while in the army, and was so shell-shocked after the incident, that he was amnesic for five years.

When he regained his memory, all his army records were lost, and he was unable to claim his pension. He moved to Abu Regeila 20 years ago.

"We would all rather die than leave," Moftah says. "The area is full of mosques. We might as well die, and then go back to the village to be buried. We are like fish, if you take us out of our water, we die."

His wife, Umm Mohamed, was little Mayyada's comrade in protest. Together, they lay down in front of the bulldozers.

"I threw myself on the ground," Umm Mohamed says. "I told the soldiers 'kill me, I do not care.' They were going to kill me anyway, so they might as well do it properly. Isn't roaming around the streets homeless with my daughters who are all young women a form of death? You know what men are like. Can I live with these young women in a tent? Who knows what men will do to them? We are used to the train, and to the lack of water and electricity. All we need is a roof over our heads."

An official blind eye

The topic of Ezbet Abu Regeila is a popular one online. Many groups have shown an interest in helping the residents by tutoring the children, still others have declared they are going to organize a caravan of doctors and medical supplies to attend to the residents' pressing problems.

"Many groups have shown an interest in helping the residents of Abu Regeila after seeing their inhumane living conditions," El-Helw says. "(The opposition groups) Tadamon and April 6 in particular have shown the most interest."

So far, however, this interest has been mainly virtual. One main reason could be residents' unwillingness to be dragged down a road that will turn their problem into a political one.

"I tore up the signs the April 6 group put up, and you can tell Ustaz Mohamed all about it," El-Soweifi says. "The man who came here to ask us about prices wanted us to sign complaints about politics. We understand what he wanted to do. We do not want to be dragged into this. We only want to win the right to live here. We never asked the government for anything, and we never will."

As the September rockslide that destroyed Manshiet Nasser's shantytown of Duweiqa made news around the world, the nation's longstanding problem of slums is starting to show its ugly face. According to UN-HABITAT's 2003 report, "Slums are the product of failed policies, bad governance, corruption and a lack of political will. Very few countries have recognized this critical situation, and very little effort is going into providing jobs or services."

At press time, nothing had changed at Abu Regeila. Residents were still holding on to their homes, and no official statement regarding their status could be obtained.

But in view of the lack of a major plan to address the problem of slums as a whole, we will see a new

Abu Regeila every day. Although the families we spoke to insisted their area was safe, conditions inside their homes were extremely bad. They refuse to acknowledge the danger of living along train tracks, or the danger of living in an area that even the police are unwilling to visit after sunset, according to anonymous sources.

Still, people cannot be asked to submit to eviction without first providing them with decent interim housing, which was the case with Qale'et El-Kabsh in Sayyeda Zeinab, after that shantytown was destroyed by a fire in March 2007. Even then, not everybody was given new homes.

El-Helw says that unfortunately, this is exactly what many slum residents are facing every day. "We were lucky enough to stop the demolition of Abu Regeila, but in many cases, we are not so lucky. Sometimes we are notified after people have been evicted, and their belongings destroyed.

"We see a lot of cruelty in dealing with slum dwellers. Most of the time, this cruelty is perpetrated at the hands of the police," the EHCR lawyer alleges. "In many cases, the government is the entity that instigates these sudden evictions. This puts our center in confrontation with the government. Some of our members were arrested, our headquarters here were once searched, and the police took away one of our hard drives. In Manshiet Nasser and Duweiqa, even the decent tents we gave the people were confiscated. If they acknowledged the tents, then they would have to acknowledge the people's problem, which they don't."

Marquetry workshop. Manshiet Nasser.

Workshops in Informal Settlements
Interview with Prof. Dr. Günter Meyer

by JULIA GERLACH

Günter Meyer is Professor of Economic Geography and Director of the Center for Research on the Arab World at the University of Mainz/Germany. He is the initiator and author of a long-term study of the development of small-scale manufacturing enterprises in informal areas in Greater Cairo, which he has surveyed since the mid-1980s.

Professor Meyer, please tell us about your project.
With regard to informal areas, the discussion is generally focussed on people's housing conditions. But, in fact, these settlements are also areas with a high output of all kinds of manufactured goods. Numerous small workshops are producing a large variety of articles not only for customers in the specific area itself, but even for the national market. In 1986, I started my research in order to analyze the importance of the small-scale manufacturing sector. I wanted to find out how these micro-enterprises are able to survive during a time of massive increase in competition from large manufacturing plants.

Furthermore, the Egyptian market has been flooded by cheap imported goods, especially from China. At the same time, the general economic situation for low-income people in particular has been declining. Unemployment is increasing and many inhabitants of the informal areas have been forced to reduce their demand for consumer goods.

I have done my field study in six densely populated low-income areas in Greater Cairo. Four of these quarters are located in informal settlements. One of them belongs to Manshiet Nasser, a typical illegal squatter settlement. People had settled in an abandoned stone quarry on the slope of Moqattam Mountain. The other three informal quarters are parts of semi-legal settlements in Boulaq al-Dakrour, Dar al-Salaam, and Matariya. Here people had bought agricultural land on which they built their houses, although this is forbidden by law. The remaining two areas of study are located in the traditional centers of small-scale manufacturing in the old city, in Bab al-Shariya and al-Gamaliya. I chose this setting in order to be able to compare the development of the workshops in the central parts of Cairo with the informal areas on the periphery of the metropolis. More than 2 300 small workshops have been analyzed in these areas. Every three years I go back and check what has changed.

What did you find out?
I started my research in the boom years. Eighty five percent of the existing enterprises were established in the 1980s. From the beginning of the 1970s until 1986, there was a massive economic upswing due to millions of Egyptians working in oil-rich Arab countries and investing their foreign earnings at home. In these times, there was a shortage of workers in Egypt and even those staying at home earned comparatively high wages. Then came 1986, the year when the price for crude oil crashed, and many Egyptians returned home from the Gulf. Two years later, after the end of the Iran-Iraq war, most Egyptian migrants who had replaced Iraqi workers lost their jobs. In 1990, after the Iraqi attack on Kuwait, about 750 000 Egyptians were forced to return home.

Educational toys workshop. Manshiet Nasser.

Unemployment rose dramatically and simultaneously the Structural Adjustment Program was implemented in 1991. The economy was liberalized and inflation accelerated. As a consequence, people had less and less money to spend.

In 1990, the number of workshops stopped growing. Since then, we have a relatively stable situation. That's an interesting finding. How did the small workshops manage to survive in spite of a deteriorating economic situation? First of all, they adjusted to the declining demand for their products by reducing the number of workers. In 1986, we had an average of 3.6 workers per unit; now we are down to 2.1. Wage laborers were mostly replaced by family members and child labor. The rate of children below the age of 15 has increased to 23% of the total number of people working in the small units.

The worst conditions were found in the aluminum workshops, where the rate of children between 6 and 9 years reached a record of 12%. Spending long hours in badly-lit rooms, breathing air contaminated with gray aluminum dust, tormented by painful noise and permanently threatened by the unprotected rotating parts of the lathes—these working conditions are hardly bearable for adults and completely intolerable for children. I have seen quite a few boys who had lost their finger tips doing this job. However, this sector of small-scale manufacturing has suffered a lot over the past years and the number of aluminium workshops has decreased significantly. So this is a positive side effect of the economic decline: fewer children have to work under such bad conditions.

And what was the reason for this decline?
In 1989, prices for aluminium on the world market exploded. In Egypt, however, manufacturing enterprises would get highly subsidized aluminium at much reduced prices from the public sector. Many of the small entrepreneurs decided to sell the subsidized raw aluminium at a much higher market price instead of producing goods. This

development led to a drastic reduction of the labor force in this sector. In 1991, the aluminium price went back to a normal level. But by that time, the Structural Adjustment Program showed its effects in a high inflation and the subsequently reduced demand of aluminium goods. This was paralleled by the establishment of the micro-credit program of the Social Fund for Development. A number of workshops in the aluminium sector received loans on very favorable conditions for buying new machinery, and so production became more efficient. The Egyptian Social Fund for Development is regarded as one of the most successful programs of its kind worldwide because the number of new jobs created per loan is exceptionally high.

However, it was not taken into consideration that numerous workshops that did not get the loans had to close down because they couldn't compete with the ones who had received loans, and so were able to produce more aluminium goods at lower prices. In the end, it turned out that, on average, four jobs in traditional aluminium workshops were destroyed by creating one new job due to the small-credit program. I discussed this with experts from the European Union and USAID who were responsible for the financial support of credit programs, and this has in fact led to a more sophisticated approach.

Is there a typical form of entrepreneurship in the informal areas?
Since the 1970s, the term 'informal sector' has been used for the typical form of economic survival of the urban poor in developing countries. This is characterized by small, family-based enterprises with less than ten workers. They are highly specialized, have little capital and little know-how. The economic barriers for setting up such units are low, and they have to compete with a vast number of other small and micro-enterprises.

Could you elaborate on this a bit more? What does this mean in Manshiet Nasser, for example?
Traditionally, work intensive products such as handicraft articles for tourists were located in the old quarter of al-Gamaliya, near Khan al-Khalili, the largest tourist bazaar in Egypt. When the demand for those goods increased due to a massive rise in the number of tourists, more and more wage laborers left the old workshops in central Cairo and established their own small-scale manufacturing enterprises in the informal settlement of Manshiet Nasser. Most of them worked there as subcontractors, specializing in just one step of the manufacturing chain. An intarsia box, for example, often passes through several small workshops before it is finished. The first one saws the wooden plates, the next assembles it, another one carries out the intarsia work, one does the painting and polishing, and finally velvet is fixed inside the box. The different steps were monitored and coordinated by wholesale traders residing in the Khan al-Khalili area.

In the 1990s, more and more of the workshop owners in Manshiet Nasser started to organize the production process by themselves. Now, they are even transporting their products with rented pick-ups to the Red Sea coast or other major tourist destinations, and sell their handicraft articles directly to the retail shops. So they can increase their profit significantly.

Furniture is produced in a similar way. The carpenter will show his client some Polaroid photos of chairs and sofas and the customer will choose from this 'catalogue.' The client has to make a down payment so that the carpenter can buy the wood. As the carpenter usually doesn't own the necessary saws, he will go to a local woodworking center. Here, he can use the machines and pays for this service by the hour. After completing his part, the carpenter brings the piece to other workshops. One will do the staining and polishing, other workshops

Mosaic lamp workshop. Manshiet Nasser.

specialize in braiding, upholstering, or inlay work for decoration.

Again, the chain of production, which is otherwise carried out in one large factory, is here split into separate steps and distributed among many highly specialized small manufacturing units. This makes it possible for the individual workshops to work with very little capital and the know-how needed is easily to be acquired by training on the job.

We have been talking a lot about Manshiet Nasser. What about the other informal quarters—there are certainly differences?

The example of the chain of production in furniture making is typical for all informal areas. But you are right, there are significant differences in the general structure of manufacturing in the surveyed quarters. In Manshiet Nasser and in the old quarters of Bab al-Shariya and al-Gamaliya, there are many workshops producing handicraft articles, shoes, and metal goods. Enterprises in these areas employ a

relatively large number of workers. Here, the average number per workshop went down from 4.2 in 1986 to 2.5 today. In Manshiet Nasser, Bab al-Shariya, and al-Gamaliya they produce goods mainly for the national market. Only about 15% is for local consumption, whereas 50% of the workshops are subcontracting units, which produce intermediate goods for other small enterprises in the old quarters of the city.

In other informal settlements on the periphery of the metropolis, the scenario is different. The number of people working in the small manufacturing units is much lower than in the more centrally located quarters. Since 1986, the average figure of workers per micro-enterprise has declined from 2.5 to 1.5. Production is mostly for local consumption. Instead of relatively large metal workshops or artisans producing tourist articles, tailors and carpenters especially are to be found in the peripheral areas. Here, the demand for goods produced by the workshops is in many cases small and irregular.

Therefore, most owners of the manufacturing units work on their own without additional laborers. Often, the workshops only open after regular working hours, when the owners have finished working on their other jobs. Many hold positions in the public sector and upgrade the poor government salary through the irregular income from their workshop. If they get an order, they can rely on a network of workers and other workshops to comply with even big orders on short notice. This system is only sustainable because of additional sources of income and low rents. That's why these workshops are able to survive even though they might only work four or five days per month.

And how do the plans to change the informal areas affect the economy there?

There are plans to move people from the crowded and unsafe areas of the informal quarters to new formal settlements—far away in the desert on the outskirts of Greater Cairo. This means that most of them will lose their jobs in the small manufacturing units. In has also been planned to transfer the workshops to industrial zones outside the residential areas. This seems to make sense, especially when it comes to environmentally unfriendly enterprises like brass foundries. There are many such plants in Manshiet Nasser where they were among the first enterprises to be established in a former stone quarry during the 1970s. Later, people started to build their houses around it. The area is highly polluted and suffers from a very unhealthy environment. Nevertheless, transferring the foundries to other areas would mean that many of the other remaining metal processing workshops will be cut off from their supply of raw material. Okay, one might think: Why don't we take the whole cluster of foundries and metal workshops and sent them to industrial zones in the desert? But then, how do they get their workforce? If the workers have to commute in

order to go to work, they would have to spend more money on transportation than they earn. Remember, we are talking about people with few skills and low daily wages. Furthermore, the proximity to the traders of the old quarters is essential for many of the enterprises.

But it can't be an option to leave things as they are. Look at the pollution in some of these areas.

The problem could be solved by organizing these industries in production centers, for example along nearby Nasser Street. It would be possible to establish 60 to 70 of the small workshops in one five- or six-story building. They would have all the advantages of being easily accessible to traffic, close to their workers, and close to their clients in the city center. By concentrating the workshops in one building, the health risk for the residential population in the whole area would decrease.
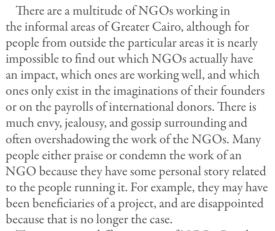
Doing such a long-term study must be quite an interesting experience.

Yes, that's true. I have been doing this study for about 23 years now. The people in the workshops know me and I love to come and see what has changed when I return every three years. People have gotten used to my visits. They say, "Look, the *agnabi* (foreigner) is back." And then they discuss when they last saw me. It's a unique study—the only long-term survey of this kind in developing countries.
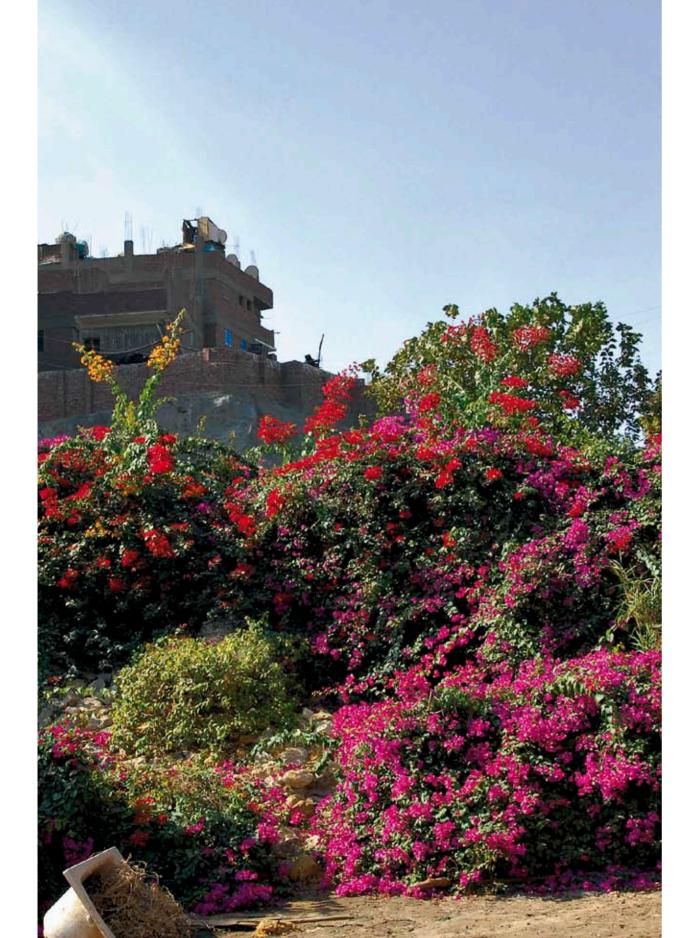
Protection of environment by an NGO. Manshiet Nasser.

How We Get Organized
The Work of NGOs

by JULIA GERLACH

There are a multitude of NGOs working in the informal areas of Greater Cairo, although for people from outside the particular areas it is nearly impossible to find out which NGOs actually have an impact, which ones are working well, and which ones only exist in the imaginations of their founders or on the payrolls of international donors. There is much envy, jealousy, and gossip surrounding and often overshadowing the work of the NGOs. Many people either praise or condemn the work of an NGO because they have some personal story related to the people running it. For example, they may have been beneficiaries of a project, and are disappointed because that is no longer the case.

There are many different types of NGOs. People may get organized because they want to support each other, for example. Many NGOs in informal areas start off as cooperatives. People save money together to help members cover the costs of a burial or a wedding. Eventually, their scope of activity broadens.

The **Mahras** NGO in Manshiet Nasser is one example. The organization was originally founded in 1973 by people living in Minia, and by people from Minia who had migrated to Cairo. The headquarters used to be in Boulaq Abul Ella. "In 2005, a new generation took over the organization. We kept the name, the license number, and the tradition, but we started to add other projects to the NGO, and we established a new administrative board here in Manshiet Nasser," explains Aziz Aboul Al Leil. Now in his late-30s, the lawyer was born and raised in Manshiet Nasser, where he still lives and runs a law office. "My family is from Minia, and most of the members of our organization have their roots there, but we are also open to others," he explains. The NGO is very successful in teaching the Qur'an to the children of the community. "Sure, these students could also go to the mosque to learn the Qur'an by heart, but some parents trust us more, and it's also a question of availability. There is simply too much

demand, that's why the children come to us." The organization supports charitable work for the poor. "We approach the poor families of our community and give them money, or help out if they can't pay the doctor when they are sick," he says. He stresses that it is important to help people to keep their dignity. "We don't want them to stand outside of our office and beg for money," he explains. The NGO also runs a small handicraft project, employing some 15 young people in a workshop producing *galabiyyas* and other embroidered products. This project was initiated to give the NGO a little income and to give jobs to young people in need. In fact, the return of the project is quite limited. "These days, people don't spend money on anything they don't absolutely need. And if they buy, they would prefer to buy a cheap product from China. We have difficulties competing with these products even though we try to keep the prices down." The people working in the workshop are both older, experienced craftsmen as well as young girls. In the future, the NGO wants to offer literacy classes and lectures on subjects of interest. The organization has approximately 250 members and is financed mostly by membership fees and the donations of rich members.

The **Sons of Barquq** NGO is designed to be a charitable organization. The association was founded in 1970 in the City of the Dead. The founder, an accountant named Ahmed Seif, lived nearby and wanted to offer services to the community of the Sultan Barquq area, where many of the inhabitants are very poor. "See, we have a file here for every person who is getting support from us," explains Usama Madbuli, who has been working in the NGO for many years. He is sitting behind a big desk with large piles of files beside him. "People come in and apply for help. Then we do research to find out about their situation. Afterwards, we help them according to their needs. Our donors like to know precisely what we are doing with their money. They choose one file and tell us to give the money only to this person. So we have a lot of responsibility to make sure that this person is really in need." The Sons of Barquq also runs a daycare for children in the area, and a small workshop. Usama Madbuli is especially proud of the NGO's cultural program. "We address different subjects that are of interest to our people. These might be health issues. We have been talking about female genital mutilation, or about religious subjects," he explains. Normally there are 30 to 40 people—most of them women—attending. "But I have to admit that people tend not to come by themselves. We usually invite them, and when they come the first time, we give them a goody bag and five pounds per person in order to motivate them. Generally, people come again, even though they are not getting any more presents."

The **Association for the Protection of the Environment** in the *zabaleen* area of Manshiet Nasser has a different story. The association was founded in 1984, but the initiative did not come from within the community as in the two other examples. In the 1980s, the Egyptian public, as well as international aid organizations, became aware of the living conditions in the garbage collector communities. International donors came in, and charitable and Christian organizations cared for the poorest of the poor. This was the time when some influential Egyptian philanthropists started the Association for the Protection of the Environment. "One big problem at the time was that the garbage collectors just didn't know where to put the organic waste, whether as food for the pigs and goats or as manure for agricultural land. So we started to build a big composting plant in this hole between the houses." Hoda Shukri is pointing to a green garden in a former stone quarry between the houses of the garbage collectors. The elegant woman in her sixties is wearing practical shoes and trousers. She seems at ease in this environment, but one can easily imagine meeting her at the opening of an art gallery or in a cultural salon somewhere in one of the more fashionable parts of town. Hoda Shukri is one of twelve volunteer helpers of the organization. She comes to Manshiet Nasser two or three times a week, and is responsible for the NGO's daycare unit. Four hundred children come there every day. Those under the age of four attend nursery classes and preschool in the morning. The majority of the older children come after they finish classes in the government school. Their parents cannot afford to pay for the extra lessons, so the NGO steps in and teaches the children at very modest prices. Shukri is called 'auntie' by the children and the employees. She is there to listen and to ensure that the school is working according to plan. The other eleven 'aunties' supporting the NGO as volunteers take care of other units such as the papermaking, rug weaving, or embroidery units. Here girls from the community get training in the production of handicrafts. "Most of them come here and get some hours of training on the job, and then they can become self-employed craftswomen. For example, they get a loom from us to work on at home, then they come here to buy the material—our rugs are made from recycled clothes—and after they have finished, they can sell the rug to the NGO." The job of the 'aunties' here is to develop new designs and to explore new markets. In this they are quite successful. The products of the girls' labor are to be found in many shops around the city. Apart from these extremely successful production units, the NGO also has literacy classes and a health center. "Here we prefer to work on medium term projects," Auntie Hoda says. "We address one problem. For example, we are doing a project for the prevention of the eye disease Trachoma, and we approach a donor and run the program for one or two years, and then we change donors and look for a different project. This gives us more flexibility and independence," she says. Some 400 people are working for the NGO, or are getting an income through the outreach production program and the composting plant. As the project has been active for decades, many thousand young girls have gone through the training and literacy programs, and the NGO is well connected in the area. "It really makes me happy to see these girls running the NGO now. They are all first generation rug weaving girls. They got their training and their education here, and see what they have achieved," says Shukri. She is a proud 'auntie', and her nieces seem to love her.

The **New Vision** NGO has a different founding story. The youth organization in Boulaq al-Dakrour got a good push from the local GTZ office. Young people from the community were invited to attend a workshop in Ismailiya in 2005. "It was so great. We learned how to get organized, how to motivate other young people, and many other soft skills," explains Mohammed Husny Abdel Karim, a 23-year-old student at Cairo University. Some of the young people attending the workshop had been working in a different NGO before. Others like Mohammed Husny were taking part in activities of the local youth clubs. The new organization wanted to serve the local youth, and it started a quite successful program for unemployed adolescents. They received training on how to present themselves as well as other skill enhancement, and the NGO organized contacts between business people and craftsmen looking for employees, and the young people trained by the NGO. "It was very successful. There were some 3 000 young people going through this program, and we got a lot of attention from the community," explains Husny. "We talked to the young people a lot about their attitude towards work. Unfortunately, many of them are only willing to take a job if they can be managers right from the beginning. They don't want to start from the bottom and learn something first," Ahmed Tawfiq, 22, explains. He has a job as an accountant in a large company and is member of the administrative board of the New Vision NGO. The employment project is presently on hiatus, according to the two activists. They are planning to restart it soon.

The other main objective of the NGO is to revive local youth clubs. "There are some clubs in the district, but they are in very bad shape. We try to make them more attractive and open to all young people by holding talks and lectures in them," Tawfiq says. This is the job of the cultural unit of the NGO. They decide on subjects and look for one of the young people to prepare a speech and a discussion on the subject. "It can be something about the job situation for young people. We also had a lecture on Mother's Day about how much we love our mothers. Many people attended. That was a good one. Another interesting discussion was about the question of whether a woman should become president or a judge," he explains. "In the end we agreed that they shouldn't. It was a very good and lively discussion." The NGO is also working on environmental projects in the district. "Look at these pictures. That was when we cleaned one of the streets of Boulaq al-Dakrour," Mohammed Husny says. "And these pictures show us in a workshop with some young

people from Germany. This was organized by the Goethe Institute and it was a great experience. We have many things in common with them, but there are also many differences. The German girls, for example, didn't understand why we have a problem shaking their hands," says Ahmed Tawfiq. The NGO New Vision has more than 20 active members. The lectures in the youth clubs are usually attended by 30 to 50 young men and women, and in the past the NGO was able to mobilize many more people for special events. After the initial support of GTZ, the NGO is now independent.

This presentation of different types of NGOs in informal areas in Greater Cairo is far from being complete. Every association has its own story, but in general most of them are former cooperatives, founded either by people from the area who wanted to help themselves, or by benevolent people from within or outside the community. At times, they have been founded with the help of an international donor. Because the new NGO law in Egypt makes it complicated to register an organization, people sometimes use an old name and an old license for a new project. That is one of the reasons why some NGOs have a strange variety of activities on their agenda. The original purposes for which they received the license from the Ministry of Social Solidarity are different from the new ones they want to be the focus of their actual work. As it is quite difficult to register a new association, especially if it is not concentrating strictly on charity work, many civil society activists prefer to work informally. Several informal associations were founded after the rocks fell in Manshiet Nasser, for example. People from within the community, and with help from opposition groups like Kifaya, joined together to organize events. The same phenomenon happened in response to the pressure of the police force on the island of al-Qorsaya: People got organized and organized events together without asking for formal credentials as an NGO.

Recycling school. Manshiet Nasser.

The Recycling School of Moqattam
A Win/Win Situation for Multinationals and the Zabaleen

by MARTIN FINK

The district of Manshiet Nasser is located in the eastern part of Greater Cairo, between the old, northern cemetery and Moqattam Mountain, approximately eight kilometers from downtown Cairo. The area is home to a community of garbage collectors, the largest of five such communities in the Egyptian capital.

Around 6 000 families in Manshiet Nasser survive on the income from the sorting and recycling of 4 000 tons of garbage collected daily, approximately one-third of Cairo's total amount of collected waste. Recovering and trading in source-segregated waste is a coping strategy of poor communities worldwide, which is also the case in Egypt. Communities in many places of the world have been searching for effective ways to alleviate poverty for the poorest of the poor among waste collectors, pickers, scavengers, and traders. One distinctive feature of the Cairo waste collectors is that they are comparatively well organized. In addition to this, they have been working at their trade for more than fifty years, serving the same households and developing client relationships with residents.

As a result, Egyptians have developed a tendency to recover, resell, re-use, and recycle man-made waste. The *zabaleen* do not cost the municipality anything, and thanks to their experience and expertise they are highly effective in dealing with waste: around 85% of the waste collected by traditional garbage collectors is recycled. This significantly reduces the need for landfills, which have been found to be both expensive and harmful to the environment. The extent of recycling practices in Cairo, which are rare by international comparison, is resource-effective, sustainable, and therefore environmentally friendly. It greatly reduces the need for landfills. By contrast, multinational companies have been contracted to collect around 50% of the city's garbage, 30% of which ends up in landfills that have been constructed around the city.
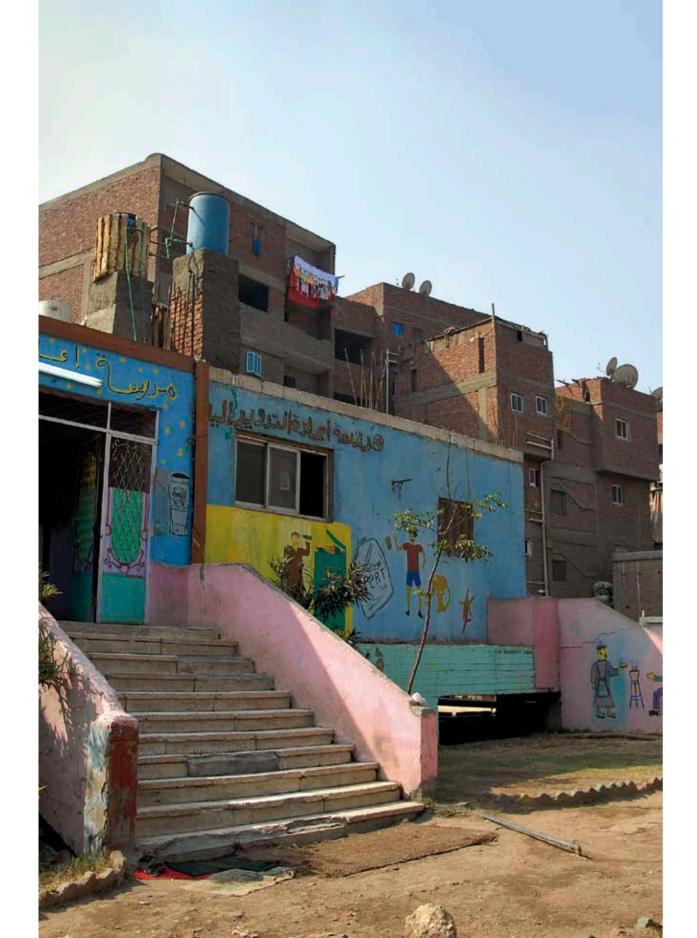
Waste collection and trading happens not only in Greater Cairo, but also throughout Egypt. According to studies undertaken by Community and Institutional Development Consulting (CID), a thriving informal sector of source-segregated waste buyers and collectors exists in every region of the country.

For reasons of survival and food security, the informal sector plays an active role in selective waste management. Small and medium enterprises that trade and manufacture non-organic waste provide the markets and clients for these operators, and recoup a sizeable portion of recoverable material from the waste stream. The strong driving force behind the recovery and re-use of waste is financial incentive.

From aluminum foil to animal bones, from rusty tins and cans to glass containers, from plastic toys or chairs to the interior components of computers, there is hardly any material that is not recycled and re-used in Egypt. Plastic is the most common item in household garbage—including mineral water bottles, food containers, and plastic bags—and plastic recycling is flourishing. Plastic is re-manufactured into many new items, such

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Girls in non-formal education. Manshiet Nasser.

as hangers, cups, spoons, and the soles of shoes. Discarded paper and cardboard are also re-used thanks to compactors, as well as various other recycling techniques. New products are made by hand using recycled paper, including invitation cards, notebooks, and cardboard boxes. Old unused cloth is turned into cotton matter or stuffing. In Egypt, a thriving business in rugs has been built on this kind of recycling. Re-use of materials is cost-effective and respects the scarcity of natural resources.

However, many injuries occur while dealing with garbage manually. The risk of infection from various diseases such as hepatitis, parasites, and skin and eyes diseases is high. The recyclers often spend more than 12 hours a day dealing with garbage. Especially affected are girls and women, who sort the garbage. The sorting, however, is the crux of the informal sector's efficiency in the recycling of solid waste.

Another critical aspect of informal sector activity, whether in waste or in other sectors, is that it is essentially run like a family business. Each member of the family is involved in this work, as either a truck driver, collector, sorter, trader, barterer, roamer, or in yet another role.

The Role of Non-Formal Education in Developing Countries

Many children in Egypt and other non-industrialized countries have missed out on the opportunity of a formal education. Non-formal education, therefore, is grounded in the popular economy. In large measure, it revolves around forms of self-employment such as street vending or craft making cooperatives, as well as barter, exchange, local production, and family-owned businesses. Many children in Manshiet Nasser work with their parents from a very young age, either sorting or collecting garbage. The young people of the district generally take on the work of their parents in dealing with garbage.

Until the late-1980s, no government schools existed in the area. One of the main reasons why people are excluded from formal schooling is the necessity of having to work, whether in the fields, or in workshops, or at home. The conception and design of non-formal learning experiences are based on the fact that working children need to be empowered by income generating skills and opportunities that do not threaten their lives or health, and which provide them with lifelong learning skills. Non-formal learning needs to be based on the realities of local communities. This type of learning integrates the natural learning processes of young people trying to survive in difficult circumstances.

The Recycling School: Shampoo Containers Against Illiteracy and Poverty

The concept of the recycling school coincided with a growing problem faced by shampoo corporations. A study of brand name fraud conducted by CID Consulting in 1998 ascertained that shampoo-producing companies were experiencing substantial losses from having their empty containers fraudulently refilled. The Moqattam neighborhood was identified as the primary dumping station for plastic bottles retrieved from affluent residents of Cairo. There, the bottles were recovered by the garbage collectors and traded with other merchants. These merchants connected to a complex web of trading networks in the city, which in turn resulted in the refilling of the bottles with counterfeit products and their eventual return to the market as brand name shampoos, creams, and other single-use products.

Youths at the school, equipped with masks and gloves, granulate the bottles, observing industrial safety. The school re-sells granulated plastic to small- and medium-sized recycling enterprises in the neighborhood. The income generated from the

sale of granulated plastic covers the salaries of the 16 teaching staff, and makes the project economically sustainable. The youths are reimbursed by the multinational shampoo company for every empty bottle they collect and granulate at a rate of around 35 piasters (5 US cents) per bottle. The income created by the 40 students by the granulation of approximately 500 000 bottles per year contributes to enhancing the livelihoods of the families of the garbage collectors.

Cooperate Social Responsibility is Not Charity, it's a Business Opportunity

The CID study on brand name fraud indicates that losses incurred by these multinationals could be defrayed if the learners in the new school could circumvent the fraudulent market for granulation. Furthermore, the Moqattam model creates a symbiotic relationship between the participants and the multinationals whose products are protected from the black market. In the recycling school, empty shampoo containers enable the students to acquire literacy and numeracy, as well as business and computer skills. The model attempts to protect the profits of shampoo multinationals, which in turn pay for the granulation as a way of protecting their profits and their brand. The income from the sale of the granulated plastic goes toward paying teachers' salaries and school operating costs. In this way, an educational enterprise by and for the poor becomes self-sustaining.

Project Strategy and Implementation Methodology

CID's methodology is a solution for working children and youths from the informal sector who have been deprived of a formal education and are working toward combating environmental degradation, creating for them a curriculum, a source of income, arts, music and the joy of learning. It is a complex construct, requiring the expertise of non-formal educators, solid waste specialists, experts in institution building, and grassroots development practice. Marginalized, out-of-school working children and youth, and street children are the main learners in these education projects. Students thus come from the informal sector with a rich reservoir of knowledge about labor markets, trading, credit, local technology, survival strategies, social capital, and community solidarity.

The main method is hands-on instruction in which recycling trainers work in direct contact with learners. Numeracy, literacy, and business and accounting skills are transmitted through structured, non-formal learning initiatives involving specific activities. Accounting skills are directed at diversifying learners' knowledge so that, rather than becoming merely specialists in a single skill, they can learn to calculate and manage a business whatever and wherever it might be.

The local environment is used to the greatest possible degree as a source of material and inspiration. In this way, waste, which is otherwise perceived as a 'nuisance,' becomes a valuable commodity and a focus of curriculum design.

The innovativeness of the recycling school lies in the combination of research and action, carried out by the learners themselves. Young people participate directly in the needs assessment and in the running of the projects. This approach is further reinforced by the fact that it is the students who may later, in turn, become the teachers of others.

Young men with their Tuk Tuk. Boulaq al-Dakrour.

How We Get Around:
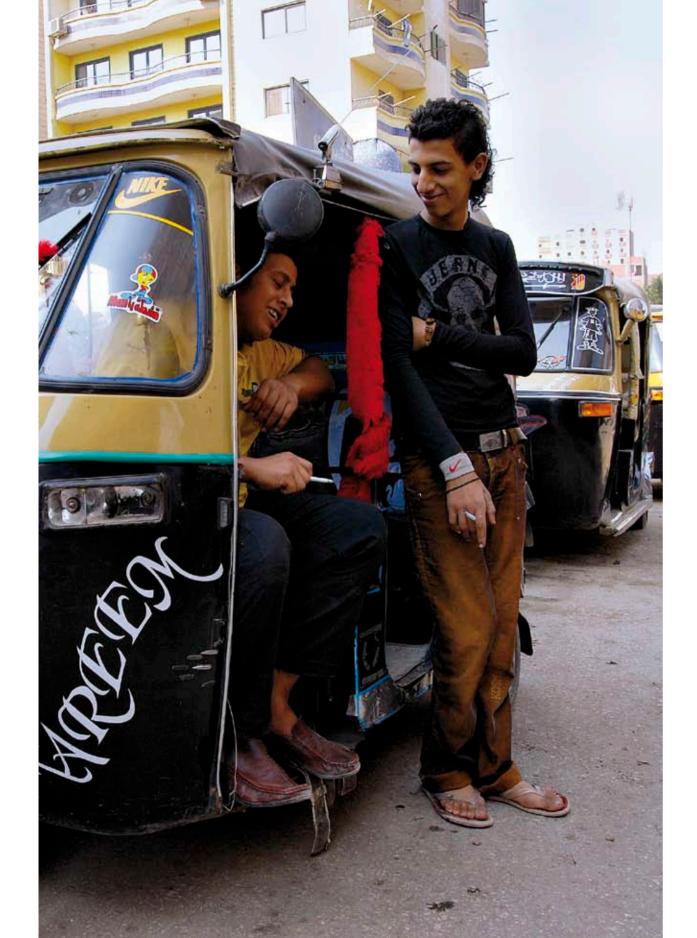# Tuk Tuks and Microbuses

by JULIA GERLACH

There are different ways to reach Boulaq al-Dakrour. Traveling to the informal area can be accomplished by various means of public transportation. One way is to catch a microbus from the Ring Road. After a quick slide down the steep talus of the highway, one lands in a dusty strip of land where goats look for food in piles of rubbish. Welcome to Boulaq al-Dakrour! The other way is more comfortable. Anyone who is not able to find a taxi driver willing to drive to Boulaq al-Dakrour will have to get off at the bus station on Sudan Street. From there, it is only a few steps to the rusty bridge that is one of the main arteries into the area. Arriving at the vegetable *souq* (market) at the beginning of Nachia Street, the easiest way is to take a tuk tuk (auto rickshaw). If it's a good day, Mohammed Ahmed Abdel Aziz will be standing there waiting for passengers. He is easily recognized by the Disney figures on the carpet under the driver's seat, and by his pleasant smile. For only 75 piasters, he will take a person to the other side of Boulaq al-Dakrour, where people slide down the bank of the highway to get in.

"This is a bus route, and as there are also microbuses running this route, we charge a flat rate which is very cheap," Mohammed explains. He is 18 years old and a freshman at the Al-Jazeera Academy in Moqattam, where he is preparing for a *diplom tigara* (degree in commerce). "My father got the idea to buy a tuk tuk when they were first introduced in Egypt some four or five years ago. He thought that it was so difficult to find a job for young people at that time, and a tuk tuk was an easy way to earn money," Mohammed recalls. The best time of the day is in the morning between 7 and 10 a.m., when everybody has to get to work and the other means of transportation are too crowded or not even running. "At night, after 11 p.m., it's also good business. That's after the microbuses have finished operating on most routes. In these peak hours I can make up to 10 or 15 pounds an hour," Mohammed says. His voice is a little shaky now. He

has left the main asphalt road and is being shaken as he steers the three-wheeled tuk tuk through the chuckholes. "Here a taxi would break down, but the tuk tuk can do it," he says, and turns into one very narrow street with shops and street vendors blocking the road. "Look here, this is where we really make sense. In these narrow streets. No car can get through here," he says.

But driving a tuk tuk is more than just taking clients from A to B, like the mother with her four-year-old who wants to go to the hospital, paying Mohammed two pounds for the trip. Driving a tuk tuk is a statement: "Sure, it's a good feeling. Nobody can stop me, nobody can identify me, and driving the tuk tuk gives me the feeling of being free and strong," Mohammed admits, having stopped at a kiosk where he invested 25 piasters to buy a single cigarette, which he smokes as he drives down an asphalt street.

"Before it was just about driving, but for about a year there have been many tuk tuks, and everybody wants to show that he is the strongest, the cleanest, and the fastest driver. That's why they put their names on them, and many kinds of pictures, things like the Mercedes insignia, pirate skulls, or a sura

Means of transport. Manshiet Nasser.

from the Qur'an. In fact, every tuk tuk needs a little Qur'an to protect the driver. Very ugly accidents are not uncommon. Some have the whole tuk tuk plastered with the Qur'an." Looking around at the parade of other tuk tuks and their drivers, however, a secular style seems to dominate. Young men in skintight jeans, wearing knit caps pulled down low and holding cigarettes—or is it something else?—in the corners of the mouths. Loud music blasts from their vehicles. "It's very fashionable to have pictures and flags of Bob Marley and Che Guevara. Many don't even know who Che Guevara is. They don't know that he used to fight for the Israelis. They just like his picture." Some girls, he says, will only get on these very tacky tuk tuks because they want to get to know the drivers. "Not all tuk tuks are means of transportation in the real sense of the word. It's a lot about getting to know each other. And I think that sexual harassment has become a lot worse since the tuk tuks have been around. You can just chase any girl with your tuk tuk and nobody can do anything against you because it has no license plate."

But it's not all fun being a tuk tuk driver. Suddenly, Mohammed's vehicle stops running. He gets out and tries to fix something in the motor as quickly as possible. He doesn't want to loose the client in the backseat. This particular passenger will not pay more than 75 piasters, and Mohammed needs this money. His tuk tuk is quite old and the carbuertor has seen better days, so that a good part of the money he makes goes to the mechanic. The mechanics are his enemies. "They are like the mafia," he says. "They come to the gas station when they know that a delivery of 80 octane gas is expected. Usually this is at 3 a.m.. And they buy up the whole delivery. So the tuk tuk drivers have to buy their gas from those mechanics for a higher price." The other risk for a driver—apart from getting injured in an accident, which is a common enough occurence—is being caught by the police. Tuk tuks are illegal, they

cannot be registered, and the drivers do not have driver's licenses or permits to transport people. "The police show up regularly, and if we don't manage to get out of the way quickly enough, they take the tuk tuk away. We have to pay 50 pounds to get it back. It's so obvious that this has nothing to do with the idea of making the streets safer. It's all about making money for the police."

The new traffic law that came into force in August of 2008 regulates the use of tuk tuks. Previously, the three-wheeled vehicle was legally non-existent because it did not fit into the definition of neither a car nor a motorcycle. Under the new law, tuk tuks have a grace period of three months to comply with safety regulations. Licenses are granted, but only to tuk tuks in rural areas. Therefore, Mohammed and his colleagues in urban Boulaq al-Dakrour will still be able to enjoy the feeling of being 'informal'.

The eyes of another young man, also a driver, are always moving, checking around. His name is Ayman and he is the driver of a microbus. He says his family name to introduce himself properly, but in a way that is deliberately hard to understand. He is just taking a break, having a *foul* sandwich (a typical bean dish served in a sandwich), sitting on the wall overlooking the entrance to the district of Manshiet Nasser. Where the main street passes the local administration building and police station, the Autostrade (motorway in the city of Cairo) is a little wider and goes uphill. This is the main transition point for people going to and coming from the informal area on the slope of the Moqattam Mountain. Crowds of people are waiting in the midday sun for one of the small buses hurrying past. Most of them are already full and people have to wait for another one to take them in the direction of Medinat Nasser, or Downtown, or to Ramses Station, or wherever else the microbuses go. Microbuses usually have two seats for passengers in the front and another 9 to 15 in the rear, depending

on the size of the passengers and the driver's adherence to the traffic laws. People going into Medinat Nasser can change here to a larger bus that runs along a main asphalt route, or to a jeep that serves the more remote areas uphill.

Both the driver of a microbus and the microbus itself need a license. Usually, the vehicles run the same routes all the time, but drivers like to swap routes if their route is too congested or if business is slow. "And it's also boring to go the same route every day. So I sometimes like to go somewhere else," says Ayman. This kind of adventurism is against the law, but Ayman tries to avoid contact with police officers. Little by little his story is revealed. He is not the owner of the microbus he is running. He is subleasing it from his uncle who has rented it "from another uncle," as Ayman says. He admits that he is usually working as the second man on the microbus—or, to put it more precisely, the second kid, because the person shouting out the direction of the bus and who collects the money is usually quite young. And that is precisely Ayman's problem and explains why he is only a substitute driver. He is obviously not 22 as he claims, and he doesn't have a license. The reason why he is resting on the wall next to the entrance to Manshiet Nasser is not because he has a friendly boss who lets him take time off for lunch, but because someone has tipped him off about a police control. That's the reason why his eyes are now darting around. Under the new traffic law, getting caught driving without a license means up to six months in prison.

"It wasn't really a problem before the new law. When the police caught me without a license, I just paid 20 pounds and it was fine," explains Ahmad Sabir Abdel Hafiz, who used to work as a taxi driver until the new traffic law came into force. He is 27 and so his age is not a problem; he simply thinks that he would be unable to pass the driving test to get his license. "It is very, very difficult and I just don't stand a chance," he explains. Now he has no more work and no more income, from time to time he helps out and drives a taxi for a friend. "There are quite a few people in my situation and there are good offers for people like us. People offer me 500 pounds for a single trip to Alexandria and back, just for picking up a package and delivering it to someone in Cairo. Guess what is in the parcel! It's very bad and I am not accepting dirty jobs like that," he says.

The public has been demanding for a new traffic law for a long time. Egypt has a very high number of road accident injuries and fatalities. The streets of Cairo are congested, and traffic often comes to a halt because a vehicle that should never have been on the road in the first place breaks down. To many, punishing people who operate non-licensed tuk tuks, or drivers of public transportation who operate without a license, seems to be a sensible idea. But there is another side to the story, as well: the informal side, as experienced by people such as Mohammed, Ayman, and Ahmed.

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PARTICIPATION IN PRACTICE

PDP's Methodology for Participatory Urban Upgrading

by KHALED MAHMOUD ABDEL HALIM

The participatory approach is certainly not a panacea, it needs to be complemented by extensive public sector reform, a serious reduction of bureaucracy, and further decentralization efforts in order to be at all effective.

When you hear the word participation, a number of questions naturally arise: participation in what, by whom, and how, or by which means? The answers to these questions in any field may seem straightforward. However, this is not what the PDP found out. This article will take you through our experience in trying to answer these questions.

The question of 'participation in what' points to a number of interrelated objectives of the PDP. Improving the living conditions of the urban poor population in Egypt can be achieved by improving the delivery mechanisms of services in the areas where these populations live, be they properly named under-served areas, marginalized areas, or informal areas. This, again, may be achieved by making decisions concerning urban development more participatory and better coordinated. So, when the residents of an area or district participate in deciding which roads have priority for pavement or lighting, which outpatient clinics should be added in the nearby hospital, or where the proposed microbus station should be placed, then they not only feel the impact of such improvements on their quality of life, but they also feel like full-fledged citizens.

The ideal answer to the question 'who should participate' is usually "the people concerned with urban development interventions or upgrading efforts." Those may be beneficiaries of a specific service or all the residents of an area. Managing participation through representation does not really work well in Egypt. Although the local administration system has an elected council (the Local Popular Council) with the mandate to propose and approve development plans, projects, and budgets, the members of such councils are the affluent in the local community who mainly serve their own agenda, and who usually do not get back to their electorate base for decisions. In other words, most Local Popular Council members are not really 'popular.'

Another formula for 'who participates' is the globally-accepted model of participation, which proposes that civil society organizations represent community interests within a triangle partnership that includes the governmental and private sectors, with the ultimate aim of all three sectors contributing to community empowerment. Although this model is accepted by the Egyptian government, and the political leadership is establishing the model of civil society organizations taking the lead in promoting participatory development in poor and informal areas, the reality of about 26 000 NGOs in Egypt shows that the majority of these organizations do not truly represent local communities, are not furthering a participatory or community-based model, and do not have a comprehensive agenda of development.

PDP has been promoting an inclusive model of participation on the local level, urging participation of *all* local stakeholders, including district administration, the Local Popular Council, NGOs, local businesses, and natural youth and women leaders. Channeling participatory decisions and demands from the local level to the regional and national level requires an active local administration,

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the strong support of elected representatives, and persistent follow up by all local stakeholders.

The answer to the question of 'how' to promote participation is what the PDP has been developing since 1998, and it is the core of technical support to its Egyptian partners. In order to test the best way to promote participation in urban development, particularly in the upgrading of informal areas, the PDP started at the local level. In two pilot areas in Greater Cairo, Manshiet Nasser and Boulaq al-Dakrour, three phases of the development and experimentation of participatory tools and methods took place. In the first phase (1998 to 2003), GTZ teams were exploring the local stakeholders' groups and their potential participation in development measures.

The second phase (2004 to 2007) of the program focused on how to improve urban management mechanisms through the development of tools and methods that can be introduced and built in the process of local development to ensure that it is participatory. These tools were mainly introduced to the local administration because it is this governmental sector that controls local development, and which should enable other stakeholders to participate in it. However, the tools were also practiced with all local stakeholders to show how things can work in reality.

A brief description of the participatory development tools on the local level is as follows:

1. Knowing Local Community: In order to know the local community, a Participatory Needs-Assessment (PNA) and an institutional capacity assessment of local stakeholders should be done. When involving local people in assessing their own needs and capacities, it becomes a self-discovery process, as well as a mobilization tool, fostering participation in other aspects of local development. It is done by recruiting a team of local people and accompanying them in conducting community

walks, talking to the people about problems and assets, organizing focus-group discussions of priority problems, and then presenting the outcome in a public meeting within the area. The institutional capacity assessment of local stakeholders uses a format that indicates the strengths and weaknesses of the district administration, NGOs, and other institutions within the community, hence pointing out who can do what in development interventions and what the capacity-building measures are that need to be implemented. The output of PNA and the capacity assessment of stakeholders form the basis for planning and budget allocation as well as the baseline for impact monitoring. PDP has produced a manual and is preparing training modules for both methods.

2. Support of Local Initiatives: One main impediment to participation in local development is the lack of trust between people and the government. It has been shown that if the local government supports the initiatives of local communities towards solving priority problems within their locality, the community starts to change its negative perception of being neglected and marginalized. The immediate action towards sewage flooding, or removing a pile of garbage obstructing access to the area, or funding a community project for equipping a health clinic, all promote cooperation and partnership between the governmental and community sectors. This process of trust building can also be emphasized by direct contact of key officials with the people of the area, such as a visit of the district chief or a meeting with the governor asking about priority needs and what can be done towards meeting them. PDP has been managing a Local Initiatives Fund, financed by the KfW (*Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau*) and the Egyptian Ministry of Economic Development, providing funding for NGOs to implement projects corresponding to priority community needs. This

can be a model for governorates and ministries to manage similar funds through their own resources or by attracting resources from national and international levels. PDP has produced a manual and is preparing on-the job training guidelines for managing a Local Initiatives Fund.

3. Information Sharing: Another obstacle to effective participation is the lack of access to accurate and reliable information about the profile of the community, the features of the locality, and the progress and impact of development interventions. The creation of an interactive information database is essential to support a participatory development process in terms of empowering local stakeholders and decision-makers to take informed decisions and monitor interventions. PDP has been promoting the use of Geographic Information System (GIS) technology by the local administration to create such databases, using satellite images and visualizing detailed information about elements such as boundaries of areas, roads, and services that used to be fragmented, unverified, or inaccessible. The unified GIS database makes it possible to share information about informal areas between the three levels: national, regional, and local. PDP instructs trainers at the governorate administration of the Greater Cairo Region so that they, in turn, can train the staff of district information centers on GIS, and link them all to relevant ministries to ensure effective information exchange. PDP has produced several manuals for this as well.

4. Participatory Planning and Budgeting: Informal areas have grown without planning. This is why they lack proper access, infrastructure, and services. In becoming subject to conventional planning, such areas may loose their dynamic responsiveness to the living patterns of the residents. Conventional plans in Egypt end up being no more than a blue print

mounted in planning departments. For planning to guide decisions and interventions in informal areas, it has to be based on negotiation and agreement between local government and other local stakeholders, and on feasible, tangible, and coordinated actions. That is participatory action planning.

When the PDP led participatory action planning in the neighborhoods of Manshiet Nasser and Boulaq al-Dakrour, it played a moderating role between local stakeholders towards sharing a common vision of problems, assets, and necessary interventions. Building on the results of the needs assessment and the feedback from local initiatives projects, as well as using the interactive GIS database, participatory planning can be done through planning workshops held in a publicly accessible place in the neighborhood, to which community representatives and active stakeholders are invited. Experts and relevant departments can be invited to workshops discussing technical solutions and cost, for projects such as sewage networks and road paving. The output of planning workshops takes the form of proposed projects and procedures such as investment and procedural interventions/improvements, based on which detailed physical plans and budget plans can be prepared. Participatory planning requires local coordination of various sectors towards integrated development, as well as continuous follow-up and communication with local stakeholders during all stages.

5. Impact Monitoring: Even when local stakeholders participate in decision making for local development interventions, these interventions may not be effective in fulfilling their purpose or may cause unintended negative impacts. For example, paving a road improves traffic, but it may as well lead to high rates of child accidents if a pedestrian crossing is not provided in front of a school. Impact monitoring needs to be conducted

by an independent evaluator to see if expected and long-term effects take place. The results of impact monitoring can bring up new priority needs and help formulate new action plans.

However constructive these participatory tools may sound for the development or upgrading of an area, in reality there is a limit to what can be achieved on the local level alone. PDP's experience in the pilot projects demonstrates that the governorate level is pivotal in empowering and supporting local participatory development processes. Governorates approve all plans, request and allocate budgets, give legitimacy to priority community needs, and communicate them to ministries' service directorates. Governors can order district administration to mobilize participatory processes and can issue decrees supporting localized participatory mechanisms.

This is why the PDP, with its objective of promoting participatory tools for local development and upgrading, decided in its last phase (2008 to 2011) to scale up its technical support to include the governorate level. There, however, the scope is not limited to managing participatory development within one area, but more importantly to result in an institutionalization of the participatory approach. This means that there is a need to develop an overview and a strategy for dealing with informal areas.

Redefining Informal Areas Based on Database: This involves reviewing the criteria for defining informal areas and the demarcation of such areas according to available, verified, and uncontested data.

Information Map and Official Register: Based on the updated redefinition of informal areas within the governorate, an official register should be issued to ensure that the national, regional, and local levels refer to the same thing when talking about or working within informal areas in a governorate. Accordingly, an information map can be built up

to indicate the basic information on each area, as well as the development agencies in each and their development efforts.

Classification and Intervention Strategy: The differentiation between the types of informal areas in terms of their features, and what needs to be done for each type, is essential for guiding resources and interventions. Apart from the two well-known types and strategies—slum redevelopment and upgrading of unplanned consolidated informal areas—the General Organization for Physical Planning is experimenting with other strategies for guiding peripheral urban growth and for using major development interventions to elicit upgrading efforts in the surrounding areas.

Setting Priorities for Upgrading of Informal Areas: Based on the above tools, each governorate can set priorities for the development of each type of informal area according to clear criteria. This is essential for planning resource allocation and coordinating development plans and efforts.

So, what is the way forward? PDP is working intensively with its partners at the governorate level. It is also working with partners on the ministerial level towards replication of participatory models on the national scale. The ultimate impact goes beyond the scope of PDP. It hinges on the real commitment of Egyptian partners towards decentralization, good cooperation between central and local governments, the institutionalization of participatory and effective urban management tools, and the capacity building of local administration staff.

In the 1980s, the shortcomings of externally imposed, donor-driven development strategies became evident. In an attempt to deal with the unsatisfactory results of top-down approaches, Robert Chambers, in his work on Participatory Rural Appraisal and Participatory Rural Development, suggested a shift towards a more participatory approach in development projects. The main idea of such an approach is that the beneficiaries of development initiatives should be put in the position to influence and share control over the processes, the strategic choices, and the allocation of resources involved in development projects and programs. Instead of being the silent and passive object of development interventions, the marginalized population would gradually be enabled to assume control over other, broader decisions directly affecting their lives. Once empowered as a consequence of this assumption of responsibility, stakeholders could initiate a process of political and social transformation, which would eventually integrate them in the social and political system, ensuring for them the enjoyment of full citizenship rights and enabling them to take part actively in national decision-making and in the allocation of governmental resources. The attractiveness of participatory approaches to development does not stem solely from their rhetorical appeal. From a practical point of view, participation is supposed to guarantee greater efficiency and effectiveness of investment, since participatory programs generally require contributions from participants in labor, cash, or kind, thereby reducing the initial sums necessary for the success of the project. In addition to this, the sense of ownership and responsibility, which participants supposedly develop over the course of the projects, would lead to reduced recurrent maintenance costs.

Participation is also assumed to contribute to the promotion of empowerment and democratization

Participation: Empowerment or Domestication?
Reflections on Potentials and Potential Shortcomings of Participatory Approaches to Development
by ELENA PIFFERO

by giving the population a voice in the decisions affecting them. Finally, the involvement of beneficiaries in the provision and management of resources, facilities, and services would increase the sustainability of the programs so that the process, once initiated, has more probability of continuing on once the development program has ended and/or the development agency has gone. Nevertheless, the experience of participatory development programs has shown that establishing participation at the center of a project entails a big challenge to the status quo. It means raising the standards for developmental success to an impossibly high level, especially if participation is considered in its empowering/transformative dimension (Williams 2004). In fact, despite more than twenty years of implementing participatory approaches, there is very scarce evidence from the field supporting the possibility of transforming exclusionary and disempowering dynamics in favour of the marginalized and excluded population.

1. Participation Under Critique
Initially welcomed by the World Bank and its followers as a panacea for the deepening poverty,

marginality, and social exclusion that have been generated by global economic dynamics and 'structural adjustments,' participatory development has since become more vulnerable to the critiques of academics and practitioners of very different fields, including political science, sociology, psychology, and even the management of human resources. Why does participation fail to fulfill its promise of achieving the liberating effects for which its proponents had hoped?

The key arguments put forward by the critics of participatory development revolve very broadly around some main clusters:

1.1 An 'Obsession' with the Local

Observers have noted that participatory programs' emphasis on the micro-level tends to ignore and sometimes even reinforce broader macro-level inequalities (Mohan and Stokke 2000). Apart from not managing the support of their beneficiaries through the initiation of a wider process of social and political integration, these programs often end up further limiting the potential for change, in some cases even nullifying it. As Williams puts it, the predilection for the local as the main site for action "draws a veil over repressive structures (of gender, class, caste and ethnicity) that operate at the micro-scale but are reproduced beyond it, and by emphasising 'the community' as the site where authentic development can occur, it turns attention away from wider power relationships that frame the construction of local development" (Williams 2004, p. 562).

1.2 Scarce Attention to How Power Operates and How Empowerment May Occur

The prevailing approaches to development are still mainly technical and practical, but are "commonly cloaked in the rhetoric of empowerment, which is implicitly assumed to have a greater moral value" (Cleaver 2001, p. 37). It is assumed that people are poor and marginalized because they are disempowered, and vice-versa (i.e. disempowerment keeps people poor and marginalized). Through empowerment, it is thought, people are supposed to be able to escape their poverty. However, what empowerment involves practically for the projects in terms of concrete actions, and in terms of promotion, remains unclear. As a result, the language of empowerment ends up masking a real concern for the managerial effectiveness of the programs undertaken on behalf of the 'powerless.'

1.3 A Romanticized Conception of the 'Community'

Communities do not have neat boundaries; they are not unproblematic, compact, and homogeneous monads, as participatory development practitioners tend to portray them. Rather, they contain multiple, overlapping, and conflicting entities just as does any other social group. In participatory development programs there is often very little consideration given to elements of conflict, which the internal distribution of and competition for power creates within the target community itself. If these internal dynamics and inequalities are not appropriately taken into account and dealt with, the research undertaken around the development measure for the consensus and the support of the community as a whole might, in reality, only obtain the consensus of the most influential people within that community, at the expense of the marginalized (Williams 2004, Mosse 2001). Target groups—the 'beneficiaries' or 'stakeholders'—are mainly involved in development programs with the implicit assumption that all actors have the same bargaining power. In fact, they do not. While overlooking and disregarding the heterogeneity of the 'communities,' and of the multiple interests interacting within its changeable and permeable boundaries, participatory development programs might only provide further

resources, material or otherwise, to elites, while others continue to be excluded and relegated to the margins (Hildyard et al. 2001).

In addition to this, development practitioners are often among the most enthusiastic supporters of 'local knowledge,' and of the virtually unlimited potential of local communities to solve their own problems, provided they have been supplied with an appropriate institutional framework and adequately mobilized (Cleaver 2001). The incorporation of 'local knowledge' in the planning of development programs and interventions is one of the main principles of participatory orthodoxy. Nevertheless, 'local knowledge' and 'local culture' reflect 'local power' and so can constitute a further cause of exclusion for the weakest groups. What about 'local, traditional, cultural' gender discrimination, for example? It has been observed that in some contexts where women are discriminated against in the distribution of responsibilities and resources, they tend to prefer interventions that appear to reinforce their subordination. What can participation do in such cases without entering in conflict with the 'local culture' (Cornwall 2003)?

1.4 Anti-Politics

The disregard by development practitioners of considerations of power is not an oversight, and does not originate from superficial planning. Generally speaking, in participatory development programs everything that has to do with politics—as power certainly does—is avoided as divisive and obstructive (Kothari 2001). Development agencies tend to prefer civil and social action as opposed to political action, offering, wherever possible, 'technical' solutions to problems that are intrinsically, deeply rooted in the political and economic realm. If the promotion of participation means fully integrating people in decision making, planning, and implementation, this is an undeniably political process. As it has been

observed, "power is conceptualized in relational and conflictual terms. Hence, empowerment of marginalized groups requires a structural transformation of economic and political relations towards a radically democratized society" (Mohan and Stokke 2000, p. 249).

Participation defined in terms of empowerment, and democracy/democratization, can in this respect be considered synonymous, even if just on a local scale. Nevertheless, concrete actions to 'radically democratize' society (apart from being pretty ambitious) are very sensitive tasks for development organizations, considering the fact that the counterparts of these programs are often represented by local governmental agencies whose members would likely perceive any effort to change the existing situation as a threat to their ruling position.

1.5 'Cosmetic' Participation

Participation is a buzzword attached to many different political agendas. Its polyvalent nature makes it flexible and often unclear. Because of its versatility and positive sense of optimism and purposefulness, in developing countries the term has become an integral part of mainstream governmental discourses. The fact that many of these authoritarian governments have been persuaded to claim that they care about people's voices can be considered a starting point (Brown 2003). However, the actual policies on the ground have been much less promising than such claims would suggest, and participation has been co-opted by the elites in power to maintain existing relations of rule (Cornwall and Brock 2005). It should not come as a surprise that powerful elites show little interest in changing a status quo from which they benefit.

As a consequence, the language of freedom and emancipation offered by participatory approaches has ended up facilitating the incorporation of marginalized groups into official, uncontroversial

liberal projects of modernization, while at the same time providing a palliative for neutralizing mounting grassroots discontent. On the other hand, thanks to the presence and involvement of the 'stakeholders' (although in limited forms), official discourses have been further legitimized by these local 'testimonies' (Hildyard et al. 2001), and they have secured a good degree of compliance with pre-shaped development agendas (White 1996).

Not only can "government agencies use 'participation' to reach expenditure targets through enrolling NGOs or community institutions in implementation," but "public works agencies view 'participation' as a means to reduce operation and maintenance costs; marketing agencies may see 'participation' as a means to enhance an organization's profile, or the 'seed' for future markets; while for NGOs participation might mean patronage and reputation building" (Mosse 2001, p. 29). The language of participation is, in fact, "co-opted from below as much as imposed from above" (Mosse 2001, p. 32).

1.6 Managerial Effectiveness

The transformation of society in favor of groups hitherto excluded and marginalized is a long and complex process, which cannot take place in the limited lifespan of a development program. The pressure for international development agencies to get things done and deliver visible impacts within short time frames, together with their reluctance in dealing with issues of power and politics, causes them to privilege the more practical dimensions of cost-effectiveness—e.g. contributions in labour, cash, and kind from the intended beneficiaries—rather than those aimed at empowering marginalized groups.

1.7 Fixed Sets of Interventions

In spite of the valorization of local knowledge, instead of diversified and locally-designed programs,

development organizations tend to re-propose in the most disparate contexts the same nucleus of standard measures, such as infrastructural upgrading (water, sanitation, waste collection, etc.), home improvements, removal of environmental hazards, rehabilitation of community facilities, and regularization of tenure. Where is the 'creativity of participatory problem solving?' It has been claimed that projects somehow manage to "ventriloquize" stakeholders' needs (Mosse 2001, p. 24). In such cases, it is logical to expect that the intended beneficiaries will ask for what they think they can get. It's also reasonable to suppose that, in the planning process, development organizations project their expectations onto the target community. In other words, the initial assumptions of development agencies about community needs are maintained throughout the process and are neither challenged nor debated. As a consequence, they end up shaping the whole project (ibidem).

1.8 Participation as a Self-Legitimizing Idea

Often, participatory programs offer an impressive record of documents—minutes of meetings with members of the local community, needs assessments, records of training—which purport to clearly demonstrate their participatory performance. All the results achieved, such as the infrastructural upgrading of a neighbourhood or the improvements of houses, are presented as the positive consequence of people's participation. As such, participation can become a "self-validating theory of the relationship between successful outputs (...) and people's involvement" (Mosse 2001, p. 30).

Demonstrating the strength and efficacy of participatory approach becomes the key, self-referential project 'purpose' and programs then develop dissemination strategies such as the production of manuals on participatory techniques, or the organization of international seminars and

workshops. Replication programs are aimed at demonstrating that the models developed and tested in pilot projects can then be applied elsewhere with the same 'efficacy'. No clear analysis is provided, however, of the relationship between participation and the impacts on livelihood. As a matter of fact, reports often criticize projects for being too concerned about participation in itself and for not managing to demonstrate its concrete role, provided that there is one, in improving the living conditions of the intended beneficiaries (ibidem).

2. Participation as Empowerment

From all these considerations, it is possible to deduce that one of the most crucial arguments about participatory development is the question of empowerment. If we assume that participation is considered a tool for empowering previously marginalized groups, then a series of questions naturally arises concerning whom exactly to empower, and how, and to what end?

2.1 Whom to Empower
2.1.1 NGOs and CBOs?

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Community Based Organizations (CBOs) have been, and still are, considered by a consistent share of theorists and practitioners to be the most spontaneous interlocutors and the most natural partner in participatory development projects. NGOs and CBOs are thought to be the voice of the community, and are appreciated for being expressions of the organizational capacity and of the activism of the population. Their role in the 'democratization' from below of (semi-)authoritarian regimes has been discussed and supported in numerous publications (see, for Egypt, Ben Nefissa 1991, 1995 and 2005; Sullivan 1994; Brumberg 1995; Abdelrahman 2004). Debate both among theorists and practitioners, however, has tended to

revolve around which type of local organization is most likely to become an element of change: supply organizations (those offering services to the population, such as charities) or demand organizations (those claiming for civil and political rights, such as advocacy organizations) (see, for instance, Fowler 2000).

In time, a growing discontent with the performance of NGOs and CBOs, both in terms of internal management and in evaluating their role as agents of change, has led to a less enthusiastic attitude towards local organizations, to the extent that poor communities' penetration by NGOs and CBOs is considered by many more recent observers to be one of the main impediments to community participation (Botes and Van Rensburg 2000).

First of all, in only a few cases are the leaders of local NGOs and CBOs democratically elected, which raises questions as to how legitimate, representative, and reliable the voices of these self-appointed leaders can be. In also raises concerns as to how much certainty development practitioners can have that the opinions and points of view expressed by these leaders reflect those of the broader

community. Furthermore, in certain contexts the positions of power in these organizations tend to be held indefinitely, and the primary concern of the leaders is not the needs of the community they claim to represent but their own personal interests and prestige. For these individuals, then, the leadership of an NGO can be a resource, the best platform from which to start a political career and to build a pool of potential supporters along patron-client lines (see, for instance, Van Der Linden 1997; Ben Nefissa 2000, 2002).

Finally, NGOs and CBOs are well aware of the limits imposed by governmental authorities on their initiatives and actions. While operating in authoritarian and semi-authoritarian contexts, they are usually subjected to all sorts of pressures not to become 'dangerous' for the 'social peace' (which is mostly a synonym for 'the status quo'). If they take a strong position in defending the interests of their constituencies and are perceived as a threat to the stability of the system, the laws generally offer to the administrative authorities a series of provisions which easily allow for the closing down of the offending associations.[1] To safeguard their survival, NGOs and CBOs are therefore encouraged to maintain good relationships with the administration, a practice that does not facilitate their role as agents of change or as promoters of the transformation of uneven power relationships—relationships in which they themselves take part, and from which they benefit.

2.1.2 *The 'Poor?' The Women? The Youth?*
As already underlined, it is not possible to empower a whole 'community,' because, since the community is not free from conflicts and disparities, empowering some members would mean relatively disempowering some others. The difficulty then arises with the identification of the less powerful groups within the community, and of devising the best strategy to reach them and bring them forward, considering the fact that they often do not have the skills or the will to participate spontaneously.

Identifying power relationships within a given target group is not an obvious or easy task. In particular, "public participatory research methods are unlikely to prove good instruments for the analysis of local power relations since they are shaped by the very relations which are being investigated" (Mosse 1995, p. 29). As anthropologists have shown, the most outstanding, outgoing, 'best known,' and most easily approachable members of a community tend to be the people that are more marginal and less integrated in their own societies, and in many cases there is no effort from the side of development agencies to identify these less obvious partners (Botes and Van Rensburg 2000). In these cases, participation is "selective" (Cornwall and White 2000), in that it does not concern the whole community but only some parts of it, usually those very outstanding members and groups who are keen to accept and support the development program for the simple reason that participatory arenas will allow them to gain control over additional resources such as prestige, patronage, and political and economic power. This selective participation is also furthered by the strategies of gate-keeping, which local elites often adopt in order to monopolize the new spaces opened by development programs, and to limit the possibilities of access by lower social strata, thereby deepening their exclusion (ibidem).

2.2 *How to Empower?*
2.2.1 *Participatory Rapid Appraisals*
Practically all participatory development programs involve in their first stages the drafting of development plans specific to the local resources and needs, and which usually happen through a process of Participatory Rapid Appraisal. Ideally, problems are identified and prioritized by the intended beneficiaries, workable solutions are found in a joint process with the technical help (if necessary) of the development agency, and implementation regimes and time frames are negotiated and agreed upon among "all stakeholders" (Mosse 1994). Nevertheless, the process is more problematic than it initially appears. Experience has shown that the priorities resulting from this process are influenced by a series of factors. First of all, there is the need to maintain a good relationship with local government. It is very unlikely that the stakeholders will identify as a primary need something that goes against, somehow hinders, or simply threatens the administrative and governmental authorities. Secondly, what is expressed as a 'local need' is sometimes shaped by local perceptions of what the agency in question is legitimately and realistically expected to deliver (Mosse 2001). Finally, as already mentioned, what participants say and do is often the result of processes of domination stemming from wider political, economic, social, cultural, and structural factors that individuals have interiorized.

2.2.2 *Social Psychological Limits to Participation*
One of the assumptions of participatory development practitioners is that solutions negotiated and discussed within the group of intended beneficiaries/stakeholders are better because they are shared by all participants and therefore more responsive to the real needs of the community. This assumption does not take into account that within groups 'things can go wrong.' A branch of social psychology has studied particular, so-called group dysfunctions, and Cooke has interestingly applied these findings to underline that the efficacy of participatory techniques is severely limited by social psychology (Cooke 2001)[2]. Four main dysfunctions have been identified which can negatively affect the collective decision making so celebrated by participatory approaches to development.

Risky Shift
Empirically, it has been observed that collective negotiations and discussions lead the members of a group to make riskier decisions than would be the case had the decisions been made by single individuals. The reasons for this social behavior are unclear. It might depend on the fact that the most influential individuals within a group tend to be more willing to take risks, or that responsibility is diffuse in groups so that individuals tend to feel more protected in that setting.

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[1] In the case of Egypt, this has been defined as the "politics of the freezer." See Valeriani, A. (2007), Giornalismo e Giornalisti come agenti di democratizzazione in Medio Oriente ? Il caso dell'Egitto, Working Paper of the Italian Society for the Study of Democracy, p. 4.

[2] The analysis that follows about group dysfunctions strongly relies upon Cooke's reflection.

[3] As suggested by Cooke (2001), the risks of groupthink can be counterbalanced, for example, by assigning to someone the role of the devil's advocate.

The Abilene Paradox:

This social dynamic takes its name from a famous parable written at the end of the 1970s (Harvey 1979). It tells the story of a family from the city of Coleman in Texas, who decided to take a trip to Abilene, a city in the same state. Everyone agreed to go, thinking that everybody else would be very happy and enthusiastic about it, but in fact nobody in the family really wanted to go. In organizational terms, this exemplifies a frequent, hidden mechanism of decision making: that in a group often people take decisions thinking that this is what everyone else wants, when in reality the opposite is the case.

Groupthink:

This dysfunction manifests itself when individuals are afraid that by expressing their personal point of view, they might be excluded and ostracized by the group itself, when that view is not the point of view of the majority of the group. When the socialization process requires a high degree of discipline and conformity, dissenting opinions are rarely expressed. This undermines the effectiveness of participation, both as a method to help unvoiced opinions find expression and as a way of making better decisions that have resulted from genuine debate.[3]

Coercive persuasion:

According to this socio-psychological phenomenon, a sort of manipulation can take place during participatory processes that can lead to changes in ideological beliefs and in consciousness. This process is based on the initial creation of anxiety about the present state of things, as well as by the provision of some sort of 'psychological safety', where survival is guaranteed if, and only if, people follow certain steps set by the project's framework. For example, by making the participants in a workshop feel that the current situation cannot go

on as it is, and by claiming that things must change or development will be impeded and that in order to get out of the present half-disaster it is necessary to follow procedures and prescriptions which have proven successful in other cases, it is possible to convince people of the unavoidability of certain processes, even though they would never have thought of embarking on such an adventure if they had not been 'persuaded' to do so.

2.2.3 *Committees*

The creation of committees, which in a formal institution organizes and structures the participation of both groups and single personalities identified as the main stakeholders in the development process, is among the most widespread techniques for involving local communities in decision making. These committees are supposed to help build trust among the various members by creating the premises for cooperative behavior, and by guiding participation along predictable and recognizable channels which discourage "free-riding" and cheating (Granovetter 1992). Nevertheless, this preference for institutionalized arrangements ignores the fundamental importance of informal relations, networks, and forms of associations and alliances for social life in many non-western contexts. Such informal interactions can be far more important than those taking place in public negotiations. Hence, formal institutions can actually be less relevant than their proponents may have thought (Cleaver 2001).

As already discussed above, reaching the most vulnerable groups within a community is not an easy task, and it is often only a selective participation that committees represent. Ideally, gathering 'all' stakeholders around a table to discuss local problems and envisage solutions is thought to be a good strategy to give everybody a voice. Yet even if the participation is truly far-reaching and not selective, there is a

remarkable difference between having a voice in meetings and having a real influence in the decision making processes. The rights of the vulnerable are not automatically guaranteed by their simply sitting on committees and speaking. In reality, their bargaining power is limited. If no device is adopted to dis-empower the most powerful, the external, structural inequalities are transferred without any modification inside the committees, and the exclusion and vulnerability of weaker groups is perpetrated.

In addition to this, institutionalized committees often end up mirroring the very same, existing bureaucratic structures whose shortcomings in the delivery of 'development for all' participation is aimed to address.

Finally, experience has shown that committees, like any other institutional device, can malfunction (Harrison 1997). For all these reasons, they are at high risk of becoming empty shells, without meaningful decision making power, because the important issues are discussed outside of the context of the committees, and the approval of the stakeholders merely serves to legitimize policies that have already been designed.

2.3 *Empowerment for What?*

What emerges from these debates is that participatory development processes have no pre-determined outcomes. They can lead to transformation and change in political and social patterns, but sometimes they do not really affect the way decisions are made and implemented, nor do they change the relations of power among the various stakeholders. In this sense, it is possible to differentiate between two main types of participation: 'participation as social inclusion' and 'participation as socio-political transformation.'

'Participation as social inclusion' refers to a dynamic by which those groups and individuals that were previously marginalized are involved in

the development process, but in ways that might reinforce the very same exclusionary mechanisms that caused their marginalization in the first place (Kothari 2001, pp. 143-145). In other words, this limited form of participation can achieve significant success at the micro-level, but the broader structures of distribution of power and of resource allocation remain the same.

'Participation as transformation', on the contrary, refers to a process that modifies and changes the "relations of power that objectify and subjugate people, (and which leave) them without a voice" (Cornwall 2000). In certain cases, even micro-level projects somehow succeed in triggering the broader political and social transformations that allow the marginalized population to claim and obtain their full integration in the social and political system.

Conclusions

Participation may at least create a sense of psychological ownership over ideas and over jointly-produced decisions, but sometimes it "stinks of rotten fish," as Anthony observed as early as 1977 in analyzing the perceptions of employee participation in business management (p. 256). Disillusionment with this device—which is given such widespread, enthusiastic support but which has met with so little success—is becoming more and more acute, so that even its supposed beneficiaries have become increasingly suspicious about it.

When a participatory development process is initiated, very rarely does its initiator know if the outcome will be inclusive, and therefore limited, or truly transformative. As a set of tools proposed by mainstream development agencies, participation assumes the characteristics of a technical method of project work; however, participation would best be considered as a highly political methodology of empowerment, which as such depends heavily on contextual power relations, both explicit and implicit.

International experience has shown that the few successes of participation as transformation/empowerment have depended on the presence of a counter-elite political party or social movement promoting a radical transformative political project, as in the cases of Brazil, West Bengala, and Kerala (Hickey and Mohan 2003).

However, if located within a political context characterized by wide discretionary powers in the application of the law and highly vulnerable to corruption, and where the "answers to the requests of the population" are negotiated along the same, pre-existing patron-client avenues, participation is domesticated and becomes quite a conservative device, non-threatening to the interests of the ruling elite, which "secures compliance to, and control by, existing power structures" (Taylor 2001, p. 137).

The political context in which participatory development programs operate is crucial.

Where inhabitants are considered not citizens endowed with rights but subjects dependent upon the good-will of political authorities, participatory approaches will scarcely have empowering effects, and "it should be the responsibility of agency staff to evaluate in advance whether or not a partner government is likely to support local participation, and not to become involved if this evaluation is negative" (Hildyard et al. 2001, p. 70).

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Between Crisis Management and Participatory Development:

The Balancing Act of the Participatory Development Program in Urban Areas

by GUNDULA LÖFFLER

Light falls dimly through the thick, dusty curtains and the air in the room has not moved in a couple of days. We are sitting in one of the numerous heavy sofas that are awkwardly arranged in the anteroom of the Governor's office. The office assistant is sitting on a stool next to the door. He has been staring at his toes for the last 20 minutes. The Governor's office manager, who had welcomed us and assured us that the Governor would be available any moment, seems to have vanished from the face of the earth.

All of a sudden there is movement. The door flings open and half a dozen men barge into the room. They are all very agitated, shouting orders and explanations as they go, but without addressing anyone in particular. They demand to see the Governor. The office assistant bravely throws himself in front of the door to deny them access. But he is soon pushed aside and the men flood into the Governor's office. From the chatter of these visitors, all we can gather is that a bridge has collapsed onto a busy street crossing and a market. There are reports of casualties, but no one knows how many or how seriously they are injured. In any case, it seems that the issues we intended to discuss with the Governor will have to wait another two weeks.

Although this particular incident is fictitious, it might happen in exactly this manner on any day in any government office in Egypt. Whether it is the Duweiqa tragedy or the bread crisis, the government is always running behind the events, barely managing to keep up with the daily challenges faced by its people. Despite recent efforts to delegate some responsibilities to lower administrative levels, Egypt's bureaucracy remains an extremely centralized system. All decision-making powers are highly personalized and under the tight control of a small number of very high-ranking officials. These few privileged (or cursed) people sometimes do not even know whether they are coming or going, and the overwhelming majority of the civil servants remain passive, seemingly unconcerned, subserviently waiting to execute orders from above—unless they find a discrete way to get around them.

This situation makes the government very cumbersome and inefficient. Its limited capacities and competencies render it incapable of proactively engaging in strategic planning, or in the implementation of interventions to prevent their constituencies from deteriorating, to say nothing of developing them. As a result, this huge, lethargic bureaucratic body is helpless in responding to the growing pressures of Cairo.

Given these precarious circumstances, how can the German Technical Cooperation (GTZ) address this problem and develop feasible approaches, capable of tackling the challenges its Egyptian partners face both today and in the future? It tries to inject a few drops of something into the present Egyptian system that represents the antithesis of the current guiding principles, and contrasts with the usual practices—something called participatory planning.

Participatory planning offers a structured approach to comprehensive urban development, which allows all concerned stakeholders to strategically plan for interventions leading to the improvement of urban livelihoods. These stakeholders—or development partners—intervene by promoting a constant dialogue on needs and priorities, and take joint responsibility for the planning, implementation, and monitoring, thereby establishing the process on a broad, bottom-up basis and conferring it greater legitimacy. Participatory planning is therefore a process that requires coordinated support from all relevant governmental institutions, private sector actors, and civil society organizations, and ultimately leads to efficient, effective, and demand-driven development.

Is a system with such hierarchical, paternalistic traditions willing—or able—to grasp, let alone absorb, the underlying principles of participatory planning and adopt its mechanisms and instruments accordingly? Some empirical evidence might suggest so. Four out of the five governorates in the Greater Cairo Region have established units for dealing with informal areas based on cooperation agreements with GTZ, clearly identifying advisory services on participatory urban upgrading processes as the major German contribution. One of these agreements was concluded only after continuous requests from the partner side. A number of central ministries and agencies, among them the Ministry of Social Solidarity, the Ministry of Local Development, the Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency, and the Information Decision Support Center, as well as large NGOs such as the Integrated Care Society, headed by the First Lady, have asked GTZ on numerous occasions for support regarding participatory planning mechanisms and instruments for the upgrading of informal areas. Additionally, beyond the attribution gap of GTZ's advisory activities, it seems that the participatory approach is starting to be considered a feasible alternative to common practice. Different large, politically influential civil society organizations, as well as affluent private sector companies eager for the benefits of corporate social responsibility, have engaged in participatory urban development activities, introducing one informal area after another to their new showcase for participatory upgrading success. Even the new building law 119/2008 calls for replacing traditional master planning with strategic and detailed action planning, following the participatory approach. In short, the new participatory paradigm is being ushered in, and a noticeable change of direction on the part of Egypt's movers and shakers is taking place.

However, it has been said that 'all that glitters is not gold,' and it is important to listen for the subtle nuances in participatory discourse, which may reveal tremendous differences in conception. This becomes apparent when studying in greater detail the different underlying motivations for the 'supply and demand' of participatory methodology.

One method for participatory urban upgrading is the Participatory Needs Assessment (PNA). This well-known method serves to identify the problems and needs of a community through the participation of that community, and to jointly prioritize its needs according to the perspective of the local stakeholders. Planning and implementing projects on the basis of a PNA ensures that the allocated resources are used in an efficient way, since they target the needs most urgent to the majority in the community. But what is it that each party really wants to achieve? International donors—GTZ among them—generally see this method as a means to provide a platform for civil society to voice their opinions and claim their rights to development. It is therefore a process that encourages democratic decision making processes on a local level and fosters genuine citizenship. Whether these same priorities are motivating Egyptian decision makers when they ask for support in the implementation of a PNA process is questionable. It has been suggested that in their eyes, a PNA mainly serves to mollify a resentful

public anger about the extent of its government's negligence. This resembles more surface expediency than sincere interest. That perception is reinforced by the tremendous speed with which the Egyptian partners would like to move ahead with assessments. No consideration is given to the actual process itself—the results are all that count—no matter how miserable their quality might be.

Another participatory approach is provided by the local initiatives fund. The fund gives financial support to small Community Development Associations (CDAs) to conceive, plan, and implement micro-scale community projects. The financial support enables communities to address their most urgent needs from within and to obtain quick and tangible results in a non-bureaucratic manner. The support they receive from local administrators and other government institutions during their planning and implementation phase is meant to build trust between the communities and the governmental bodies. Furthermore, the capacities of those civil society organizations are strengthened in the process and they are empowered to manage their affairs more independently. The Egyptian partners are quite enthusiastic about this instrument. Not only because there is a decent amount of donor money attached to it, but also because it enables civil society organizations to deliver to communities public services that the government has long failed to provide. The Egyptian government is not trying to be subtle about these intentions. The New Social Contract clearly states that in order to achieve national development, government, private sector, and civil society organizations alike are required to make their contribution to meet the challenges of the present generation. Fair enough, one might say, if these duties come along with the appropriate, corresponding privileges within civil society. Unfortunately, however, it seems that civil society participation, though being most welcome today, is still understood as participation in the form of in-kind contributions

rather than participation in policy and other decision-making processes. The empowerment of NGOs in a role where they serve as watchdogs, as a monitoring entity for local administration that can help achieve greater transparency and accountability of government activities, is not desired. This becomes clear from the tight control the state is exercising over NGO activities. Furthermore, the current NGO law is restrictive, ambiguous, and inconsistent enough to make it almost impossible for the NGOs to fully comply with it, thereby making them vulnerable in case of 'too much disagreement' with government policy.

Finally, the participatory instrument most requested by the partners is the Geographical Information System (GIS). The instrument is officially called "information sharing through GIS," but the information sharing part, in particular the output sharing, is often neglected. The process of information collection and management supported by GIS can help to generate precise and up-to-date information on the physical conditions of an area. Such information is highly valuable, but rarely found. It is highly valuable because such precise and up-to-date information allows for much greater accuracy and therefore a much better quality of analysis,

planning, and decision making. It is rarely found because most information available in governmental institutions is usually out-dated, incorrect, and often does not originate from empirical inquiry. It is therefore no wonder that not only governorates, but also many other governmental and even non-governmental entities on all levels, are extremely keen for GTZ to help them set up their own GIS system. There is, however, some concern as to whether the purpose is monopolizing, rather than disseminating, the information among all development partners once it is collected, compiled, processed, and visually presented. A definite answer to this question would be premature. What cannot be dismissed, however, is the fact that the culture of transparency advocated by the information sharing approach is contested by the dominant culture of control prevailing in the Egyptian bureaucracy. Who will get the upper hand in this culture clash still remains to be seen.

These examples illustrate how often a strong ambiguity in the articulated interest of our partners can be perceived. Our partners may (often) use the same language, the same words, and the same rhetoric as we do, but in fact mean considerably

different things. These differences go far beyond pure semantics. They reveal the fact that we are often following completely different agendas and pursuing different objectives. This is of course not unusual, nor particularly alarming. One just needs to be aware of it so as not to be misled and disappointed by having cherished wrong expectations.

What still needs to be verified is whether the participatory approach is in fact an appropriate method for tackling Egypt's governance issues. It is certainly not a panacea, and it needs to be complemented by extensive public sector reform, a serious reduction of bureaucracy, and further decentralization efforts in order to be at all effective. If one day the concept of participation were to seriously take root in the Egyptian system, it would change the nature and the essence of its regime in a fundamental way.

04   PARTNERS IN DEVELOPMENT

The Ministers of Economic Development and of Social Solidarity

Time to Adopt a Comprehensive Development Model

by MANAL EL-JESRI

Signing Cooperation Agreements
Above:
between the Minister of Local
Development, the Minister of Economic
Development and GTZ (from right to left).
Below:
between the Minister of Social Solidarity
and GTZ (from left to right).

Egypt's Ministry of Social Solidarity attempts to address the problems of Egypt's poor and underprivileged. Its goal is to improve living standards by ensuring that the country's social security network targets those in most need of support. It also oversees the working of NGOs and other civil society groups, and works closely with international donors. The Ministry of Economic Development is faced with the daunting task of formulating the country's long-term economic development strategy. It oversees the implementation of this strategy, and provides the data and information necessary for the implementation of a comprehensive economic program.

At the Ministry of Economic Development
"The main challenge is a challenge of development," begins the Minister of Economic Development, Dr. Osman Mohamed Osman. "The aim is to bring about a level of economic development that reaches all Egyptians. The problem of informal settlements is just a part of the challenge." These informal settlements are, however, a part of the challenge that has taken center-stage in the recent years.

To deal with these settlements, it was important to try to understand the make-up of informal settlements in Egypt, a process that began in the early 1990s with the help of a number of international partners, GTZ being most prominent among them. Today, the Ministry of Economic Development is the main national counterpart of GTZ's Participatory Development Program in Urban Areas (PDP).

"When we started in the 1990s, we were surprised at the huge number of informal settlements. Although the government tried to allocate funds to deal with these areas, new areas kept forming all the time. It was no longer a problem of Greater Cairo, but a problem of most cities in the Egyptian governorates," Osman continues. Informal

settlements have been encroaching upon agricultural land, eating away at the country's economic livelihood. It is time, Osman points out, to come up with new definitions in order to be able to address the issues at the heart of the problem.

"We used to perceive informal settlements as areas with unlicensed buildings, which consequently have no access to basic amenities like water, sewage, and electricity. I do not want to talk figures, but a lot of funding has gone into supplying many informal settlements with exactly such amenities, in addition to medical centers and schools and such," Osman says. As a result, he argues, the main characteristics of informal settlements no longer apply. Osman believes that well-built homes with access to basic services must not be considered part of informal settlements. There is a need, he counters, for fresh data and information. "The numbers governorates and governors give us, claiming that Cairo, for example, has over 80 informal settlements, are not to be taken for granted if we apply the new ideas," he says.

Osman believes the focus must be on the more dangerous informal settlements. "There are more pressing issues we must deal with other than the lack of basic services. Are the buildings environmentally

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CAIRO'S INFORMAL AREAS BETWEEN URBAN CHALLENGES AND HIDDEN POTENTIALS – FACTS, VOICES, VISIONS. **04**
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The Ministers of Economic Development and of Social Solidarity:
Time to Adopt a Comprehensive Development Model

04 CAIRO'S INFORMAL AREAS BETWEEN URBAN CHALLENGES AND HIDDEN POTENTIALS – FACTS, VOICES, VISIONS.
Partners in Development. National Partners
The Ministers of Economic Development and of Social Solidarity:
Time to Adopt a Comprehensive Development Model

safe, do we have problems of accumulating solid waste?" According to the Minister, if were to apply the new criteria, we would find that Cairo is home to no more than seven or eight informal settlements in need of immediate attention.

Decentralization, the minister explains, is the appropriate way to deal with the more pressing issues. "Through the GTZ project, we allow local initiatives to take center-stage." Within the framework of the new government approach, Osman explains that the government has set up a fund to address those informal settlement problems that are demanding immediate attention, with a preliminary budget of LE 500 million focusing on NGO initiatives.

He believes it is time to approach informal settlements from a socio-economic standpoint. "The point is not just to relocate, but to consider the new site for relocation, whether it is suitable for the specific needs of the residents of a particular area. We must deal with households. We must consider whether informal settlements are synonymous with poor areas. Are they? Well, not necessarily, or rather, not exactly," he says. The purpose is to create a social safety net to deal with the most pressing problems of the residents of informal settlements, such as those living in dangerous homes made up of tin or wood, for example, or those living in dangerous locations.

Osman believes the PDP has proved its success, and as such it is now time to take the program a step further. "We tried it in Manshiet Nasser, and we tried it in Boulaq al-Dakrour. We tried to answer the question 'What are informal settlements?', and it is now time to apply it widely. This reflects my confidence in the approach. We have taken it a bit further to include areas of Helwan and Ezbet al-Walda, for example, but it is no longer enough to deal with selective areas. The people working on the program are now experienced enough, be they planners or executors. We can take this further. We must define the informal settlements, and then meet with the residents. We must point out that their conditions need to be upgraded. We must tell them that we do not just want to relocate them until we build better homes for them. We must tell them that their lives need to be upgraded as well."

At the Ministry of Social Solidarity

The concept of upgrading the social conditions of the lives of the poor, and in particular those residing in informal settlements, is at the heart of the goals of the ministerial group for social development, which was recently formed by the Egyptian Cabinet. Leading this group is Dr. Ali Moselhi, the Minister of Social Solidarity. The ministry essentially deals with the poor and underprivileged strata of society. As a result, the issue of informal settlements is one of its main concerns. "We have worked in Duweiqa and Istabl Antar, and in various other areas. Our role is to conduct the detailed social research necessary to understand the characteristics of the families. The issue is no longer just relocation or upgrading. The issue is to cater to the specific make-up of the residents, and to coordinate with civil society and businessmen operating in their original areas or their areas of relocation," Moselhi says. Prior to the relocation of the first group of Islabl Antar residents, the ministry worked with the Egyptian Red Crescent, the Integrated Care Society (ICS) operating under the auspices of Mrs. Suzanne Mubarak, and the Sawiris Foundation, to effectively integrate the residents into their new homes.

Similar work took place in Manshiet Nasser's Duweiqa area. The PDP was a partner in this area of work. In some areas of Duweiqa, residents have been moved to the nearby Suzanne Mubarak housing units. Like Osman, Moselhi believes it is time to take a closer look at the structure of informal settlements, in order to be able to prioritize an action plan. "I speak here as a member of the National Democratic Party. The issue of informal settlements was one of the main topics on the agenda of the party's fifth national convention. We discussed the three main approaches to the issue. The first is to restrict the growth of further informal settlements. All areas that could become future locations for informal settlements must be planned, and any new unauthorized building on these areas must be torn down immediately.

The second approach is to study the informal settlements that are made up of good, but unplanned, buildings and to plan them. The best example is the area of Imbaba. At the present moment, this district is in the process of being re-planned, taking into consideration the services its residents need, such as schools and medical centers. This is the biggest project conducted in cooperation with the Giza Governorate and the Ministry of Housing. The Imbaba airport site, which used to be the location of an informal settlement, is going to be part of this plan. Over 750 000 residents live in the area, so the project is huge," Moselhi says.

The third area of government action focuses on informal settlements that are considered too dangerous, and whose residents need to be relocated immediately. "These areas have been counted all over the country, and the plan is to choose one dangerous area per governorate for the time being. We had a meeting with the Prime Minister last week, and the areas have been chosen. Efforts are underway at the moment to devise the appropriate action plans for dealing with these areas," the Minister explains.

The new unified building law, Moselhi points out, has taken into consideration all unplanned areas in both rural and urban Egypt. According to the Minister, when people are presented with the option of building on planned areas where the infrastructure is suitable for living, this would limit the encroachment upon unplanned areas and agricultural land. "Informal building is dangerous, because in emergency situations these unplanned streets make it impossible for ambulances or fire trucks to go through," he says.

The cooperation going on between different ministries and different groups, including the PDP, will ensure the efficient management of a complete network that has at its core the well-being of the residents of informal settlements, Moselhi explains. The Ministry of Social Solidarity was the first to set up its own unit of participatory development, building upon the experiences of the GTZ program. "GTZ had been working in different areas when we first approached them. They had the methodology, and they were working with the natural leaders of the areas. They worked with NGOs and local district boards to instill the idea of local management as a factor in the concept of development. It was not easy, and it took us some time to train a team of ministry employees, NGO personnel, and local administrators.

Thanks are due here to GTZ, which trained the ministry employees who now understand the meaning of participatory development and participatory planning."

The cooperation with the PDP has today grown outside the boundaries of the Ministry of Social Solidarity, according to Moselhi. "The GTZ's PDP was the inspiration behind the formation of the ministerial group for social development. The idea is to gather data at the lowest micro level, at the level of local units, and then to accumulate it at the governorate level. It ultimately reaches the ministerial level after all levels have participated." The idea, Moselhi believes, is to determine the specific needs of the residents of different districts and governorates. "Our experience with the GTZ has been very successful, and I have asked for it to be fully documented."

Cairo and Giza Governors
Ongoing Challenges

by MANAL EL-JESRI

A governorate is only one link in the chain that makes up the Egyptian government. Despite that, it is often to their governor that people turn when a solution for a problem is needed. Egypt is divided into 28 governorates, two of which are recent additions that have been carved out of Cairo and Giza (Helwan and 6th of October, respectively). Although governors report to the Minister of Municipal Development, each governor is the leader within his governorate and is responsible for everything that goes on inside it. Representatives of all of Egypt's ministries inside a governorate report to the governor, whose job is often as complex as life within the governorate itself.

In times of crisis, such as the rockslide that shook the district of Manshiet Nasser last September, people turn to their governor for quick answers. Dr. Abdel-Azim Wazir, the Governor of Cairo, has worked at the head of a team of experts to come up with a plan to deal with the issue of informal settlements. PDP's efforts in Manshiet Nasser falls under Wazir's area of influence. Wazir has worked closely with GTZ's Participatory Development Program in Urban Areas (PDP), and his governorate has taken a pioneering step in setting up the first unit for the development of informal settlements. The head of the unit is Engineer Khalil Shaat, who works with the PDP.

Although General Sayed Abdel-Aziz, the Governor of Giza, has been in office for less than a year, he too has cooperated closely with the PDP and has set up both a participatory development committee and a unit for the management and development of informal settlements in his equally vital governorate.

Dr. Wazir and Great Plans for the Nation's Capital

The issue of informal settlements in Egypt is a multi-faceted one. What one expert may see as an informal area, another may perceive as a lower-middle class district displaying the characteristics of poorer areas. This is why clear definitions at the outset are extremely important. Wazir describes informal settlements as follows:

"Legally and politically, informal settlements are transgressing areas in which homes are built without permit, or they are areas that thrive on an informal economic system. Socially, they are settlements existing outside the framework of the state and its institutions. Studies define informal settlements as areas deprived of services, or areas with inhomogeneous building patterns made up of unlicensed housing and deprived of public services and basic amenities."

Definitions are important, but having a well thought-out action plan to deal with the issue must follow closely upon a clear definition. According to Wazir, the governorate, aided by the Unit for the Development of Informal Settlements, has set up a multi-step strategy:

"The steps include bringing the database up to date, preparing an information blueprint for Cairo's informal settlements, educating and building upon the capacities of the employees of the local administration, launching local initiatives for development, and setting aside the budget to do so."

The governor believes that the pioneering unit, which draws upon the experiences of GTZ, will prove invaluable both immediately and in the distant future, and will also act as the cornerstone of the governorate's work in informal areas. "This unit has become the dynamo that gets plans moving," he says. "It is where we store, manage and process information and data about informal areas. It has been very successful. I hope to see this experiment repeated in all of the governorates that have informal settlements. But it is important to point out that it had to start in Cairo because of the scope of the problem of informal settlements in the capital," Wazir explains.

The scope is indeed huge. Before Helwan was carved out from Cairo as a new governorate, the Cairo Governorate had 81 informal areas. After the division, Cairo kept 62 informal areas. Nine of these have been dealt with, leaving 53 informal areas in the nation's capital. Only four of these areas pose a threat to the lives of the dwellers, and need immediate demolition. These areas to be partially pulled down are Duweiqa, Istabl Antar in Ezbet Khairallah, the area of upper Razzaz (Wadi Faroun), Shahba, and Ezbet al-Arab. There are four other areas in need of demolition, although the homes of the residents will be rebuilt on the same land. These areas are Abu Qarn, Ezbet Abu Hashish, Tall al-Aqareb, and Hekr Sakakini.

The latter four areas are included in the remaining 49 areas in need of varying degrees of attention and development. "We are working according to a program," the Governor says. "We have different levels of priorities. For the time being, we are giving top priority to areas that pose a threat to residents' lives. We will turn our attention to the rest of the informal areas if we can, and if the funds are sufficient. If time and funds permit, we will try to solve as many of the problems of informal settlements as we can."

Wazir is concerned at the pace at which the capital is growing in terms of population. He believes action must be taken to relieve the suffocation from which the city suffers. "We need to keep the population as it is now," he says. "There is no more room for growth. Better still, we need to decrease the population in the capital. This is the only way to turn Cairo into a capital worthy of Egypt's status."

Ideally, the governor would like to move some of the dwellers of informal settlements to the fringes of Cairo. Relocated residents would be given new homes, but the Governor says he would like these homes to be outside Cairo:

"If we have money to build new homes for residents, why do we need to build these homes inside Cairo? The ultimate goal is to provide residents with a good, decent life, with schools and healthcare, markets and entertainment facilities and sports venues. It makes no difference whether it is inside Cairo or outside Cairo. It does not mean that anyone outside the capital is an outcast. Are residents of Alexandria or Beni Souif outcasts, too? No, they are not."

The main challenge Cairo has to deal with is its attractiveness as the capital. Anyone in need of work or searching for new opportunities dreams of heading to Cairo. The influx of rural citizens never stops. "The challenge of dealing with informal settlements stems from the very reason these settlements appeared in the first place," he admits. "Cairo pulls people looking for work and a better life, and thus the mushrooming growth continued for a long time. The settlements were built without planning and under dire economic conditions, lacking many of the basic requirements for a healthy environment."

Wazir explains that in its effort to solve the problem of informal settlements, the government has taken into consideration the issue of human development. As he points out, it is well and good to think of what we would like the capital to be in the

Cairo Governor.

Giza Governor.

future, but the capital's poor, some of whom live in informal settlements, must be taken into account:

"It is all part of the comprehensive strategy the government has adopted in channeling attention towards informal settlements. It all ties in with the programs of comprehensive development, which extend to encompass the understanding of the roots of the problem, what led to it in the first place. In order to do that, the government has enlisted the positive contribution of the citizens. Bringing development to informal areas is a complex effort. It requires the cooperation of government executives, civil society, NGOs, youth, women, and technical support institutions. Urban development is the duty of all these entities, and it is the right of all citizens."

In fact, the experience of the Cairo Governorate in dealing with informal settlements has been a successful one through the cooperation of some of Egypt's most respected NGOs, such as the Red Crescent, the Integrated Care Society, and the Heliopolis Society, all of which are chaired by Her Excellency Mrs. Suzanne Mubarak.

Giza Governorate

Major-General Sayed Abdel-Aziz, the Giza Governor, has been in office for less than a year. Despite that, he has quickly taken to heart the plans to develop Giza's informal settlements, and has set up a committee for participatory development and a unit for the development of informal settlements. Both the committee and the unit were set up with the close cooperation of GTZ:

"The idea is to tie in the development efforts in the governorate with the attempt to develop informal settlements. The function of the unit is to coordinate the work of the different players for the benefit of the residents of informal settlements. The very highly trained personnel working in the unit are collecting and updating a complete database of informal areas in the governorate. The unit helps in setting and implementing strategies for intervention in Giza's informal areas."

Based on the work of both the committee and the unit, the governorate has identified the informal areas in Giza, dividing them into three groups:

informal, decaying, and unplanned. The Governor clarifies further:

"We defined the criteria for determining which group an area belongs to. We have started and we are not finished yet, but we will be in the next five or four months. Once we have concluded this phase, we will be ready to formulate a comprehensive plan, which enables us to deal with each area accordingly. We have some very good examples to follow, one of which is the PDP work in Boulaq al-Dakrour, which is an example of how to deal with an unplanned area successfully, and through social participation and NGO initiatives."

In Giza, the Governor and his supporting staff believe each of the groups making up areas in need of attention warrants a unique definition. "This way we can deal with each group according to its unique requirements," Abdel-Aziz points out. For example, informal areas were defined as areas which were built informally and which threaten the lives of their residents and the residents of surrounding areas, because they exist in dangerous zones, whether near railways, at the foot of mountains, beneath

high-voltage lines, or where they are susceptible to flooding. He explains further:

"Such areas exhibit multiple issues of safety in addition to their many social and environmental problems. In case of emergency, it is impossible to reach the homes in these areas to deliver rescue. The homes are mostly built of temporary or dangerous materials. We have five such areas in Giza. They are: the railway huts in Dokki, Sinn al-Agouz in Haram district, the *zabaleen* at the intersection of the Ring Road and the 26th of July axis, Rab'aa district in Saqiet Mikki in South Giza, and finally there is al-Agayez al-Thalatha in Old Agouza."

According to the governor, these five areas in need of urgent attention will be handled through the fund for informal settlements. In terms of methodology, the Governor outlines his plan as follows:

"There are two methods for dealing with these areas. The more suitable and easier method is by replacement. If a piece of land in the same area is available, we can build one or two buildings. We can then move the residents to these buildings and tear down the

The Planning Authority in the Ministry of Housing
GOPP

by JÜRGEN STRYJAK

unsanitary homes, so we can build more buildings. We can then allocate new streets, and find spots to build a school and a medical center or a nursery and a youth center. Working slowly over three or four years, we can change an area into a civilized area with streets and services, at the same time keeping the residents in place. This is the ideal way of dealing with residents. It is what the future association did in al-Agayez district. We can do this for the railway huts in Dokki. The land is available, and I will try to get funds to start working on this area. Sinn al-Agouz, on the other hand, is at the foot of a mountain and its residents will have to be relocated. The railway huts in Dokki and Sinn al-Agouz are my top priority because of the threat that living there poses for residents. In Dokki, the area is surrounded by better, more civilized districts and residents feel underprivileged. The social dimension is very important and I have the chance to do something positive there."

The Governor goes on to point out the plans for the remaining districts. He believes the *zabaleen* area may require a complete relocation, unless the pigsties are moved, in which case replacement may be an option. "But when thinking of relocating people, it is very important to find decent spots that suit people's lifestyles," Abdel-Aziz says, "where people can survive and become productive once again. We need to keep people satisfied for the projects to be successful." He believes it is possible to find areas for replacement buildings in Saqqiet Mikki, but thinks a problem may arise in cases where land is owned by individuals and not by the government:

"In these cases, we can release urban plans and give residents the permission to tear down and rebuild according to the new criteria. This is where participatory development becomes crucial. It is imperative to win people over, and to build bridges of trust. People must trust that everything we do is for them. Residents of informal areas live in fear of being sent away, they fear injustice. This is precisely what I abhor, the mere idea of injustice."

The Giza Governorate has also worked on mapping the decaying areas, which the Governor describes as areas where the buildings are in a dilapidated state, and where services and living conditions are generally bad. Although the governorate has located these areas, the final figures are not ready yet. Five such areas were found in Giza:

"Some of the homes are falling apart. These are either government projects that were built over 50 years ago, or private homes in poor popular areas. If the buildings happen to be on government land, then when it is time to turn the attention to these districts we will be able to deal with them easily. Buildings on private land are a different story, and again we will plan the areas, and give owners the permission to start tearing down and rebuilding. Our only condition is that landlords must provide their old residents with new apartments in the new buildings or elsewhere."

The Governor's third area of concern is that of unplanned housing:

"We have located the areas, which include some parts of Haram, Boulaq al-Dakrour, East Monira, Aziz Ezzat, Mit Oqba, and al-Kom al-Akhdar. The buildings in these areas are constructed without following any plans, and consequently the streets are narrow. Services and infrastructure also pose problems for this third group. But this group requires no urgent attention. We have set our priorities, and must begin with dangerous areas falling in the first group. I believe by the end of 2009 we will have finished with the mapping and the database, and will begin our action plan."

According to Abdel-Aziz, trust continues to be the main challenge. "Gaining people's trust, their belief that we are on their side, is the main tool in our strategy," he says. "Another challenge of course is to find spots to build and replace people's homes in the dangerous areas. After the new governorate divisions, there is not much space left in Giza."

In November 2008, the popular independent Egyptian newspaper *Al-Masri Al-Youm* published a damaging commentary on Egypt's capital. Under the alarming headline "Before Cairo is Announced Dead," author Magdy al-Gallad described a picture of a city that has become almost uninhabitable. "Cairo," he wrote, "has entered the phase of a slow death. It has been living for decades on intensive care, but now it has reached the stage of clinical death." Al-Gallad asks the readers to stay calm as he lists his statistics. The percentage of lead in the air, for example, is almost four times higher than in London or Berlin, and 40% of Cairo's area is composed of informal settlements. In his opinion, the capital breaks all world records in chaos, corruption, bad planning, and a unique government silence.

While most of Cairo's approximately 18 million residents would probably agree with the author's feelings of despair about the city he loves, there is one inaccuracy. According to Mostafa Madbouly, Chairman of the General Organization for Physical Planning (GOPP), more than 50% of Cairo's area is comprised of informal settlements, not 40%, as al-Gallad had written. Madbouly is one of the government officials who fight day in, day out, against extremely bleak prospects. During the last several years, he has worked on urban master plans for 2020 and 2050. Madbouly estimates that by 2020, Cairo will have a population of 24 million people and will reach perhaps 32 or 34 million by 2050.

Asked about his future vision on Cairo, he turns immediately to the most pressing problem: "My dream—and it is exactly what we are working on currently—is to turn Cairo, by 2020, into a metropolitan area without slums." In his definition, there is an important difference between slums and informal neighborhoods. Slums are those deteriorated areas where the lives of its residents are acutely jeopardized, where the people face rockslides like the Moqattam disaster of September

2008, or where they live under power lines, or are endangered by floods. In Greater Cairo, the GOPP has identified 15 such areas, with around 100 000 families living there. "Luckily," says Madbouly, "the number is small, but it will take years to relocate this half a million people, although they account for less than 5% percent of Cairo's population."

There is a limited number of other slums, says Madbouly, like the one behind the Maspero television building, or like a part of Mit 'Oqba in Mohandessin. The lives of those residents are not in serious danger, but they might face resettlement, too, because these areas constitute an enormously attractive location for inner-city building. Endangered slum quarters are, nevertheless, the authority's top priority.

Another huge challenge is to improve the depressing living conditions in informal settlements. Compared to the relocation of slum areas, it may be even the bigger task, since a majority of Cairenes live there. Some of the informal areas are home for up to one million people. His organization hopes, states Madbouly, to be able to upgrade three or four of them by 2020.

In the district of Imbaba, the authorities are working on a model project for upgrading informal

settlements that is intended to be adopted by other districts. The area is adjoining the former Imbaba airport, including the airport site itself. Among NGOs and in the local media, the project is already a fiercely debated topic. Due to bad experiences, the people are usually sceptical of such plans. They believe the authorities work mainly for their own benefit and for those of the country's business elite. In the Imbaba case, local residents fear the expropriation of houses and land for sale to investors.

Mostafa Madbouly does not deny the possibility of upcoming acts of dispossession, but the affected people will be compensated. "We have a big and ambitious program to develop the Imbaba neighborhood. The area is one of the most densely populated in Egypt. We speak of a million people who live there. We have already allocated the resources, and our commitment in the ministry is to improve it until 2012." According to him, one of the basic ideas is to open a certain number of arteries throughout the targeted quarters, and to widen streets or alleys by demolishing existing buildings. This will not only help to increase accessibility, but could revive complete settlements by inspiring new small and medium sized businesses to invest on the edge of these new arteries.

Head of GOPP at an international conference in Cairo (left side).

"Of course," Madbouly explains, "opening the access means that you're going to demolish buildings. Its residents will be relocated to vacant land strips, for example to the area that used to be the Imbaba airport." To an area, that is, near to the peoples' old neighborhoods, which means that relocated inhabitants can stay within their familiar social fabric. One of the lessons of the past is that infrastructure plans do not work if people are uprooted and lose their source of income. At the same time, another lesson shows that a mainly free housing market can ensure necessary investments in deteriorated areas.

The current policy is, as Madbouly puts it, to avoid massive relocation. No more than two to three percent of the neighborhood's population will have to move. "We implement our plans now in a participatory manner. We go to the people and listen to them. The required investments amount to billions of Egyptian pounds, money that the government does not have. We need the business community to take part. By selling certain plots of land, for example parts of the Imbaba airport area, we receive money that offsets the cost."

While the government has slowly started to implement informal area revitalization plans, to Madbouly it seems impossible to stop the growth of such settlements:

"The expansion has slowed down, but in my opinion it will never stop. As long as the state's policy is to privilege the main urban centers, like Greater Cairo or Alexandria, it will simply attract people to go there. We are now looking to informal settlements on the periphery of Greater Cairo. We develop plans for each area around them. We don't stop their expansion. We allow them to grow, but in a structured, formal manner."

Growing informal settlements, however, even if they expand in a planned way, will not be able to accommodate Cairo's 24 million inhabitants by 2020. In recent years, the city has witnessed expansion both in the west and the east, in suburban districts like 6th of October, Sheikh Zayed, or New Cairo. Middle and upper class residents are able to afford an apartment or a house there, surrounded by gardens, shopping malls, and private schools or universities. According to Mostafa Madbouly, these new districts will be home to more than 12 million people in the future.

In the meantime, the center of the city has started slowly but surely to become depopulated. Residents, if wealthy enough, prefer to escape from the overcrowded quarters with their ever-increasing pollution and infernal noise. Districts like Mohandessin, Dokki, and al-Manial have already begun to deteriorate partially. Madbouly does not know a nostrum to fight this deterioration. "It is a cycle that happens all over the world," he admits. To him, this process has an advantage, too, since these areas have already become overly congested. The authorities even plan to accelerate this development, for example, by removing all government offices, ministries, and the parliament from the city center. "We will relocate them to a new area that we call the government district," he explains. "It will be located on the eastern edge of New Cairo."

This last plan especially is one that inspires him to a bold dream. Madbouly, who has studied architecture and urban planning in Cairo, as well as in the Dutch city of Rotterdam and in Karlsruhe in Germany, would like to see the capital's downtown return to its former beauty. Once famous for its art déco and fin-de-siècle buildings, it has now become an overcrowded, noisy, and often shabby place. Its current condition makes it difficult to believe that people once referred to Cairo as the 'Paris along the Nile.' After having evacuated all administration offices from there, Madbouly hopes it will again become an attractive place with pedestrian zones, restaurants, cafés, and elegant shopping arcades.

Integrated Care Society:
Development Partners Must Be Coordinated

by AMIRA HOWEIDY

Although it goes back to 1977 and has been active since the early 1980s in the upgrading of informal settlements, the Integrated Care Society (ICS) NGO is better known for its chair, Egypt's First Lady Suzanne Mubarak. It is difficult to determine if her chairmanship overshadows the work of ICS, or if the NGO has indeed benefited from her presence. In 2007, ICS generated more than 70 million Egyptian pounds in donations from public and private institutions to fund its upgrading projects in Greater Cairo.

It is currently working in parts of eastern Cairo's squatter area of Manshiet Nasser, and according to its Secretary General, Farida al-Wakeel, ICS is "phasing out" of Ezbet and Arab al-Walda in the industrial governorate of Helwan, south of Cairo, where the NGO has almost completed its first "holistic" upgrading of an informal area "with a participatory approach." Although ICS has been in Helwan since the 1980s, it considers its work in the squatter area of Ezbet and Arab al-Walda, which started in 2005 in cooperation with GTZ, its most noteworthy accomplishment. It still works in Helwan's many informal settlements.

ICS has also worked in areas that are not entirely informal, but are in dire need of upgrading, such as East Ein Shams and parts of Manshiet Nasser. The latter has been on ICS's mandate since the 1980s, and has primarily received health services. Al-Wakeel says that ICS has a medical center in cooperation with the Health Ministry, which it has used as a platform for many social services in the al-Zarayeb area of Manshiet Nasser. Then, in the early 2000s, ICS began work in al-Duweiqa, another squatter area in Manshiet Nasser.

These, as well as future projects on the table, are miniscule in size compared to the vast and complicated issue of Egypt's informal settlements, says al-Wakeel. She openly admits—even though the First Lady's NGO is theoretically well-informed—that "we don't have proper data on the size and composition of Egypt's informal areas. What do we have inside those areas? And how should we deal with them?"

In short, she adds, "I don't think we have a general plan of action and I don't think we have a vision of how to solve it. It keeps expanding, and I don't think we have the right approach till now." However, she believes there is "a lot of awareness of the problem amongst the government and NGOs," yet there is "a need to channel all this awareness and goodwill so that the pieces of this mosaic will fit better." Which is why, she argues, it's necessary to have "a vision that enables people to see the picture in its entirety."

The picture is a complicated one. Not all informal settlements are the same. Some are slum pockets that exist in dreary conditions; others are squatter areas that are not necessarily as deprived. There are also informal areas that are high in population density which suffer from various social, health, economic, and environmental issues. Similarly, argues al-Wakeel, not all NGOs, or even donors more generally, have the same financial means or areas of specialization to address these challenges. "Many factors come into play in deciding which informal areas we should go to. We simply do not have a map, although there are beginnings of one," she adds.

Al-Wakeel alludes to a new line of thinking within the government that is inclined to give priority to more physically endangered areas like al-Duweiqa in Manshiet Nasser (where a rockslide killed hundreds of residents in September 2008). This government vision surfaced following a presidential decree on 16 September, 2008, which formed a national fund dedicated entirely to the development of informal areas. The fund's mandate will focus on and address the problem of "unsafe" areas specifically, which is a new government policy.

Despite the lack of clarity that al-Wakeel describes in Egypt's handling of informal areas, she finds it safe to say that ICS ("which," she adds, "is just an NGO and we know our limits") at least has its own vision of upgrading informal areas.

"We find new approaches and we implement them and set a model. Then we test that model and see if it's replicable and help others replicate it because we can't do everything on our own." In a way, she sees ICS working as an "umbrella NGO to bring in other NGOs to work with us and replicate the successful model elsewhere."

More important, she adds, is to help make these projects "sustainable in the long-term by empowering local people because they are the stakeholders," so that projects do not collapse when they leave the area in a month or year.

When ICS went to Ezbet and Arab al-Walda and al-Ma'asara in Helwan, both squatter areas, it conducted a needs assessment and gauged the residents' views on how to improve their lives. This was a sort of revelation for ICS; or, in al-Wakeel's words, "a very important exercise, as we got to discover by practice that people are much less demanding than we think. They have very simple demands, really. They want to live at an acceptable human level including having a health unit, not a state-of-the-art hospital, a school and teachers, reasonable and clean classrooms where their children can learn. And they want job opportunities for their children."

Strangely enough, ICS discovered, one of the top priorities of the Ezbet and Arab al-Walda residents was an open area where their youth can practice sports activities. "It was priority number one," says al-Wakeel, "we were stunned." But after talking with the residents it wasn't so shocking. "They wanted a football field because they are suffocating in their tiny apartments. Without a public playground, the youth will linger at the 'ahwa (traditional coffee shop) in their free time. They have a very big youth population. Many of the youth are still in schools, or have finished schooling but are unemployed, so when they play sports, they release energy and are less hostile. The perception is that this makes them less prone to smoking or taking drugs and therefore provides safety and health for the community." Similarly, in Manshiet Nasser, when ICS asked residents if they want a big hospital, the answer was "no, when there's a serious case we go to the (public) Hussein University Hospital. We want an emergency unit for everyday emergencies."

This is ICS's interpretation of what it considers a successful participatory approach for upgrading informal areas. Al-Wakeel points out that "participatory" work should not just stop at hearing people out to form a plan for a given informal area. "It is important to keep the residents interested and participating throughout the process."

ICS identifies several methods for doing that. It spots local NGOs, "most of which are weak," and helps them build capacity to increase people's participation and also to raise funds. Al-Wakeel notes that most of the NGOs in informal settlements are in fact primarily interested in charity work for orphans or the *hajj* (the Muslim annual pilgrimage to Mecca) and for burying the dead.

"What we try to do is put inside this structure NGOs that are interested in development as a whole," she explains. "We (try to) introduce the concept of development to the people and we want NGOs that train people on certain professions, after identifying the needs of the people in the area."

There are problems with this approach, exemplified in Helwan's al-Ma'asra area by a posh and unmistakably slick youth center. The center was part of ICS's upgrading project in this informal settlement. ICS's brochures feature this

Secretary General of the Integrated Care Society at an international conference in Cairo.

famous building with photos of its computer club, displaying rows of men and women sitting opposite flat computer screens. The plastic covers wrapping the speakers are clearly visible in the photo. A similar photo displays the center's spotless gym. Or at least it was spotlessly clean back then. After it was left to the stakeholders, they did not have a budget to maintain it and keep it clean. This example is often the subject of criticism by development workers.

Al-Wakeel is not shy to admit where it went wrong. "We weren't involved in the design process because (as a social NGO) we don't have the technical know-how to interfere in the specs." That was the task of the National Youth Council. She says ICS's role was to provide the land allocated for the center and then the other designated bodies took off from there. "We realized it was a mistake. Neither the National Youth Council nor ICS had a budget to maintain the building. It should have been simpler and more practical." ICS's evaluation assessments include such issues, she says, but the evaluation process is also used to "solve problems" after the NGO leaves.

"Upgrading" in Helwan included other areas as well. ICS also modified the Eroding Illiteracy and Adult Education system (*mahow al-omeya*). "We identify the (educational) needs of the people then formulate extra sections to cater to the various levels." Some women and men just want to learn how to read a bill or calculate a figure so that nobody fools them. In other more sophisticated cases, ICS worked with Microsoft for training in information and communication technologies in Helwan. "We don't really have a prototype that we want to implement everywhere. When we see something that fits into this mosaic, we do it. We're willing to adjust and adapt and I think this is a very important measure of success."

ICS works with "any local NGO" in the area where it is active. It has also partnered with NGOs that do not originate from the local area, such as the *Awladna Mosta'balana* ('Our children are our

future') NGO, the Evangelical NGO, and the *al-Game'ya al-Shar'eya* NGO, among others. Their work with donors includes both local and foreign organizations.

But is coordination with so many parties sufficient? Al-Wakeel does not take issue with that. It is true, she admits, that lack of donor coordination could mean that several parties end up doing the same thing. It is bound to happen, she argues, because of the lack of a general plan that allows every party to know where It is going. But, she adds, "it does not constitute a problem." As long as the "work is done well, it's an added value. Don't expect each donor to be doing something entirely different from the rest, simply because we don't have the picture in its entirety."

She says that in every visit to Manshiet Nasser, she discovers more NGOs and donors operating there, even though "there is no overall plan or conflict in roles." The volume of the work in Egypt's informal settlements, says al-Wakeel, is much less than is needed "which is why there is need for everybody's work and contribution." If there is coordination, the impact will indeed be far better, "but we need so much to resolve informal areas, and solutions are necessary not only for existing informal areas, but to prevent their expansion, to turn off this tap."

How to turn off this tap then? "Everybody," she says, "believes in the idea of restricting the growth (*tahzeem*) of informal areas, but it's not yet clear how this will be done." There has to be a government plan to address "the root of the problem," which she believes stems from the "constant flow of rural migration to Cairo." But in order to do that, "you also have to offer people an alternative."

I Believe in Community Development
Interview with Dr. Laila Iskander

by REGINA KIPPER

Dr. Laila Iskander is an education and development specialist who offers in-depth local knowledge and hands-on expertise, in addition to wide-ranging international reputation as a consultant to UNESCO, USAID, UNDP, and many other institutions. Dr. Iskander's background includes studies in economics, political science, and business in Cairo, as well as Near Eastern studies and international education development at the University of California, Berkeley and Columbia University. Committed to an integrated, grassroots approach to development, Dr. Iskander has helped devise innovative and highly successful programs addressing a range of community concerns.

Dr. Laila, we would like to know how you became involved in your work in Manshiet Nasser in the field of community development and waste management.

I became involved 26 years ago, in October 1982. I was at church and there were people recruiting volunteers to teach Arabic reading and writing literacy to the children of garbage collectors. My daughter had just begun nursery school, so I had four available hours a day and thought, 'Why not do a year of volunteering?' So I started going out to teach children how to read and write. It didn't take a year to realize that I had to train teachers and to develop curriculum. The church allowed me to use a room. The priest was very worried about what we intended to teach and how. He tested us, three volunteers, for a year. We raised money from other sources, so we didn't cost him anything. We begged for paper from our friends to write the curriculum on, and printing material, and buses for field trips, and food. People were so very poor back then, and the situation was terrible: tin shacks, cardboards, pigs, garbage, burning piles of garbage everywhere, dead donkeys, dead pigs, dead camels—it was a horror!

However, I will never forget the first day I went there. I fell in love with the place. I thought I must be crazy, and I had to go back three times to make sure that I was not mistaken. How could I love this? Three times, and then I was sure.

It was a very good educational experience because it forced me to review what existed on the market in terms of curriculum for teaching children how to read and write. And what was on the market was all bad—no books for the kids to color, no useful material on health for children, for people living in this situation, nothing at all. So I started writing to other people abroad.

A major event was when, in 1986, donors began to alert the UN family to the need to engage civil society in UN conferences. They held what they called "Prep Cons" (Preparation Conferences) in New York: a Prep Con on women before Beijing Conference, a Prep Con on population before Cairo's, and a Prep Con on the environment before Rio's. At the Prep Cons, we became known all of a sudden. They would say to the local UNDP, CIDA (Canadian International Development Agency), DANIDA (Danish International Development Agency), and others: "propose NGOs or propose activists." And they would indicate my name. I then began traveling and meeting other people, who would ask me if I had a good curriculum on primary healthcare, what did I do and where did I work. This information exchange was invaluable.

In the meantime, the neighborhood was changing. In 1983 a major event was the introduction of recycling machines through Oxfam and EQI (Environmental Quality International). That was a major landmark event because electricity had to be brought in, in order to operate the machines. Having electricity meant that you became a client of the state, and so you had security against eviction. If the state accepted your payment of a bill, it had to recognize that you resided at that particular address.

I then began to understand the dynamics of informal living. This was not really my major interest, it was just happening in parallel. However, what really has made me understand this reality (and if I speak confidently, it's because I have shared their lives) is the fact that I have been observing these people for twenty years, as well as the enterprises engaged in garbage collecting and recycling.

What is your major interest?

For me, the main focus is on the informal enterprises as an aspect of informal living. They are a powerful economic force—this I will go to my grave

Chairperson of CID Consulting at an international conference in Cairo.

singing. I am not so sure about the housing aspects, because of course we live on a dangerous hill, and of course I have seen the sewage go in, and of course I know it is limestone rock. I am worried! So I'm not saying that eviction is bad. If it is a dangerous hill, we must move! But where to and how is quite another discussion.

In time I saw the informal enterprises of garbage collecting and recycling turning from donkey carts to trucks, from mere sorting to processing, from processing to manufacturing, to exporting, to expanding, to competing in the true world of private enterprise. So in our firm, in CID, when we were on the brink of losing the battle to multinationals, we realized that we had been very naive.

We went and got some money from the Ford Foundation to carry out an economic study to substantiate the economic value of the enterprise sector. That's when we began surveying its growth rate. And I have data that shows that every year this sector is growing at a 40% rate. The Egyptian economy doesn't grow this fast! And the informal enterprises are totally uncounted in the 7% growth rate of Egypt's GDP. Can you imagine what would happen if the government started counting them? They need to realize that it's to their benefit to count them. But instead of counting them, they let the municipalities loose on them to close down shops, fine them for violations, and thus make money off them.

Now, the enterprises are tired of all this. I have seen their evolution, and they are ready to formalize. They sat down and figured this out on their own and, with the help of intermediaries, they were able to understand that the new SME law helps them pay a fixed amount of taxes. And now they have tools to distinguish legitimate tax from extortion. The cost of remaining 'informal' is much higher. How to do this is quite another story, but they are willing to formalize.

As we kept surveying their activity and asserting their claims, totally unexpected external events transpired. And that's what you always have to count on: things happen. One major event was the rise of oil prices. How could we have known? But they did go up, and that meant that the plastics industry of the formal sector came searching for the informal enterprises of garbage collectors. They wanted the plastic.

Now, how do you play this game? The informal settlements livelihood is a very risky game, and that is why I think it is dangerous to say: "I represent the informal enterprises and the people living there." Even today I cannot claim that I truly understand every little meaning of every action. It is complicated.

One day, some businessmen from the plastic industry called me. Someone had told them that 'this woman knew all the guys'. And someone had also told them—because we keep delivering presentations and showing maps in conferences, but we have never given out data—that 'this woman had data', that she knew the names of all the people who collect garbage, who process, rate, granulate, and wash the material. So these businessmen invited me for that sole reason. I didn't stay long and I brought along two guys from Ezbet al-Nakhl, another two from Manshiet Nasser, and one from Alexandria. And there I said, "I don't represent anyone, look, here they are." Now the danger is that the very strong ones, who may not always have the public good in mind, are going to speak on behalf of themselves. So the way you pick people is another tricky issue. The two men from Ezbet al-Nakhl held this concept of public good a little stronger than the others, but they weren't as intelligent or creative or sharp as the boys from Manshiet Nasser. The guy from Alexandria was the true winner.

Now, whenever you have the opportunity to do something that broadens these people's horizons,

that brings a new direction, you must do it. Six months earlier, I had taken these three people from Ezbet al-Nakhl and Alexandria with me to Bogotá, Colombia. Again we had gotten money from the Ford Foundation and went to attend the Third World Conference of Recyclers. Once there, it became clear that we were the only Arabic-speaking participants, so I was translating for them. That's what I did for three days.

They saw that what they had never dreamed of really existed: recyclers, like them, challenging municipalities, taking their issues to the constitutional court, getting organized, training on policy, getting up, dancing, doing everything—and this was an eye-opener. They came back with this new experience, even though they weren't still as smart as the boys from Moqattam (Manshiet Nasser).

In 2002, I brought along the same two boys, the smartest boys of Moqattam, for a conference in Johannesburg. There they spoke about how the multinationals were coming in. "We are not against them, we just want our livelihood. We work with them, but we need to access the resources, we need to do so and so." They had a perfect advocate, who spoke English and French. They had the businessmen on their side.

So where are we today? We have reached the point where I have no fear for the *zabaleen*. They are unbeatable. In 2000, when the multinationals were coming in, I used to worry, I couldn't even sleep. But now—try it, you can't beat them. You just can't! They will do anything to access the resources. For example, the youngest boy in the neighborhood, when he is out on the street, will walk home with cardboard and cans worth 80 pounds per day! I am certain because I survey the field every year. So I am not worried.

But is this the way to survive, to live, to organize a city, a public municipality? I mean, what is this? At least I don't have to worry anymore about them, but

there are some serious things that must happen in order to make their enterprise grow, so that they are included in the national economy, in the accounting of it, and they should be rewarded for crying out loud, for improving their living conditions and keeping the city clean. The city is disgusting. You can't leave it like this.

And what can be done to keep the city clean?
We do have issues with the public. We have been implementing pilot programs every three years since 1996. We have carried out countless pilot programs for source segregation of waste into wet and dry waste. Every time we have tried it, it has worked. We have raised the issue with the Minister of the Environment and he loved it! But you see, to convert these programs into a waste system for a whole city is very difficult. And 'Laila can talk until she is blue in the face' about how she is certain because of the pilot programs, and concept papers, and so forth. But why should a minister be eager to change? If change is what you are looking for, do not expect a politician, whether good or bad, to do it. You need someone else, since a politician is not there to innovate, he is not there to be dynamic, he is there to keep trouble out of his ministry, the bureaucracy, and the government. That is the essence of his job description. I am not referring to corruption in any way. 'Keep everything quiet and happy, and don't rock your boat'—that's the attitude.

What is the role of civil society?
I think that it will require some small community groups coming together. Almost every week some group that I have never heard of sends me an email saying: "We want to do something about the trash in our neighborhood. What can we do?" I have everything ready, all of the files—our brochure for public awareness, the steps for implementation, the

The Information and Decision Support Center:
Supporting PDP's Idea of Building Trust Through Information

by MANAL EL-JESRI

concept paper. Is a proposal needed? Then I send a proposal. It's all ready. I am hoping that somehow, all these little grumblings will do something, and source segregation will happen, and we will resolve this issue of where to put organic material, and the *zabaleen* will stop breeding pigs and get some carbon credits for the organic material, and the processing workshops will be upgraded. Maybe we will even move our workshops to a new industrial park, because now we have the industry boys on our side.

What has been done for the enterprises?
One of the major interventions of GTZ's SME project was trying, number one, to formalize them, to have them registered and, number two, to provide good working conditions for engineering. They got people from Germany and hired an engineer from Cairo who went around to selected plastics workshops and gave advice in terms of safety issues at their work place, but nobody implemented anything, not without compliments and incentives. For the registration, though, 29 workshops put together files with all documents required for the registration process. They were ready to register. We took their files and brought them to the head of the municipality. He said, "Ok, I will see what I can do." Then he put them in a drawer and we didn't even get a receipt. From that day on , the head of the municipality began sending his people specifically to these 29 workshops, and only then to everybody else, to fine them for not being registered, although he has their files requesting registration.

So what are the consequences of this for a program like GTZ as well as for me? This destroys us. We walk them right into the track and that's why it is so dangerous to intervene in these informal sector stories if you don't have the politicians or a strong person with you on board. And we didn't. And the Social Fund was not able

to do anything. We had a direct line to them. But the people in the municipality office did not know a thing about how to register businesses, although the Social Fund has a special license for informal enterprises until they register. It's like a national ID, or a small enterprise ID, and it protects you. But they did not know what form we had to fill out or where to submit it. They were just people hired from the street, placed in an office with a desk at the Social Fund. What's that?

So anyway, when the private sector people came on board and requested my maps, I said, "No, I don't give out any maps. I will only give them out when the people of the informal enterprises tell me to do so. These maps are not mine, they belong to them. And they will not give them out. They are afraid because of what happened in the past. So, I am sorry, it's not my data." One of their representatives got rather mad at me and wanted to know what I was after. "What do you want?" he asked. So I said, "I don't want anything." And our guys from Ezbet al-Nakhl said, "We want to register. Help us formalize." The businessman wanted to know whether there was any problem with the registry. Only then did they begin to talk to us and became aware of our problems. And the man was able to get us a decree that now allows us to formalize. It took him four months. That's it! We got the decree just last week.

Now that we will be able to formalize, we can start doing business together and that's how they too can make a profit. Nevertheless, we became ambitious. When again asked about what we wanted, we requested not only the formalization of the enterprises in Ezbet al-Nakhl, but also of the whole chain. That almost seemed too much to ask. We'd got greedy. But they did formalize us! What we have been working for is finally happening and they are starting to buy from us. But there is still a lot to be done in the future.

The Information and Decision Support Center (IDSC) is one of the tools linking the Egyptian government and people to the information superhighway. "It is very important to provide the public with information through the Internet, thus fulfilling the promise of transparency. Our approach is to provide information to society at large," says Dr. Magued Osman, the Chairman of the IDSC.

The center focuses on different areas of study, and carries out in-depth research on various topics of national importance. Their latest project, which ended recently, was a comprehensive study of informal settlements in Egypt's governorates.

Chairperson of the IDSC.

Dr. Laila Nawar, a consultant and researcher, worked on this project. Nawar remembers that when the project first kicked-off, it was important to find out who the main actors in this field were. "We wanted to know who the donors were, and also who were the most active players. Very early in the project we found out that GTZ (and its PDP) is one of the most important actors in the area, and we met with them."

The study is made up of two components. The first was the office component, whereby the IDSC asked governorates to submit unified data on the criteria used to deal with informal settlements, leading to a decision to either upgrade, or tear down and rebuild, a given area.

The second component of the research was based on qualitative field work. Working with selective groups from different informal settlements, the study tried to discover the problems, ambitions, and aspirations of the residents of informal settlements. "We selected areas according to specific criteria. Areas had to have undergone upgrading, or otherwise been a site of PDP intervention. Other areas were chosen because of their unique nature, like the Awlad Allam area in Giza, which is a pocket in the middle of planned areas," Nawar says.

Although the plan was to go to all of Egypt's governorates, the early findings of the study coming from different areas revealed that all informal settlements in various parts of Egypt rendered almost exactly the same results. "It was surprising. We wrote in our conclusion that informal settlements are similar, even if the region and the location are different," she says.

Residents represented in the study, who were either household heads or single men and women falling in the 18 to 29 age bracket, spoke out about political and social involvement. Most of them declared that political involvement did not interest them, but that they were willing to do work of a social nature. They only needed to be shown what to do. Some of the residents were aware of the upgrading going on in their areas, while others were not.

"In my recommendations at the end of the study, I advised that residents needed to be informed of the ongoing work to upgrade their areas," Nawar recounts. One surprising finding was that some of the residents were not happy with the upgrading efforts, pointing out that funds going to the improvement of roads and sidewalks would be better used for the creation of jobs, because that is what

they really needed. According to Nawar, some of the findings revealed some issues that can be found in all poor areas, be they informal or not.

Osman believes that in-depth projects, which study different topics, are of extreme importance to the development of the country. According to Osman, for reform efforts to bear fruit, the public must be made aware of all the facts. "Information allows society to understand the decisions of the government. By providing information, the public will become educated, understanding the dimensions of each problem," he says.

Regarding informal settlements, Osman believes it is very important to create a debate, because residents often believe that the government is "coming to take over their homes and evict them or relocate them to distant areas."

The target is to reach the NGOs working in informal settlements. "They work with the residents on a daily basis, and they understand their mentalities, their thoughts, and their problems. It is very difficult for a government administrator to go to informal areas on his or her own and convince people of anything," says Osman. He believes that when it comes to the sensitive issue of informal

settlements, the government needs the support of the civil society.

"It is important that this topic is handled with a high degree of fairness and justice," Osman points out. The PDP is a pioneer in working with civil society in informal settlements. The IDSC and the PDP have exchanged information on informal settlements, according to Nawar. Osman believes that GTZ has ingrained the concept of participatory development in informal settlements, and points out that it is an approach that can be adapted to fit various areas of concern.

"I think that within the government, there is an adoption of the program, because the government has come to realize that without popular cooperation, not much can be achieved. I have talked about this with several ministers, and they are convinced that although the government can execute or fund, the people must be aware of the efforts taking place. There must be trust between the government and the people. Without trust, how can you tell someone to leave their home? In the absence of trust, much of the positive effort to upgrade informal settlements will be lost."

The District Chief of Boulaq al-Dakrour:
Lifting the Fog of Misunderstanding

by MANAL EL-JESRI

"The people of Boulaq al-Dakrour have come to understand that participatory development positively influences the area and its citizens," begins Emad Adam, the District Chief of Boulaq al-Dakrour. "But participatory development is a long-term process. It takes a long time for the people of the area to understand it. If you are able to generate credibility in 10 to 15% of the residents, then that is very good," he adds.

Adam was appointed to Boulaq al-Dakrour in 2007, moving from the relatively quiet rural area of al-Ayyat, where the natural leaders of the rural center are those to whom residents turn when anything goes wrong. To him, Boulaq al-Dakrour, with its official population of 250 000 in addition to its 900 000 informal settlement dwellers, constituted a bit of a shock. "People here are suffocating, and behave in accordance with the moral codes of crowds. Here people do not know one another. Any little problem can turn into a fight," Adam explains.

In crowded areas people can disappear, Adam continues. "It is dangerous to ignore informal and overly populated areas. Some of the residents may turn to crime, safe in the knowledge that no police officer can reach them. They have no addresses; you cannot even send them a letter," he says. Being invisible, the residents act outside the accepted norms of society, the District Chief believes. "It becomes a stigma to be called a son of *ashwa'iyyat* (informal settlements)," Adam explains.

As a district chief, Adam is responsible for everything that goes on inside his district, in this case Boulaq al-Dakrour. "I am responsible for the streets and everything in them including lighting, cleanliness, pavements and sidewalks, sewage, water, etc. I also have to answer to the representatives of a number of ministries, such as education, supplies, health, water resources, and irrigation," Adam says. The challenges he and his staff face daily are daunting, as he is in charge of an area of 17 square

kilometers that is packed with residents. Boulaq al-Dakrour has more informal settlements than any other district in Greater Cairo.

Residents moving to Giza from Upper Egypt started settling on the periphery of Boulaq al-Dakrour in the late 1970s, trespassing on agricultural land:

"They do not seek a building license because they know the district will never give them one. They build little huts, homes of wood or tin, and use the land around them for their waste. Given a chance, they turn these homes into brick and cement homes, and then seek ways to procure basic services like electricity, sewage, or water."

Adam is quick to add that not all of Boulaq al-Dakrour is made up of informal settlements:

"All of our informal settlements are on the periphery of the district, because the heart is all planned. We have some old planned areas like Bein al-Sarayat, for example. Although its streets are small, it is not considered an informal settlement area. Feisal Street is another more recently planned area. Although some of its buildings may violate building codes, it is not considered an informal district."

The problem of informal settlements can no longer be ignored, Adam believes. "It has become

a reality, and we have to deal with it." According to Adam, the government allocates an annual sum of 1 million Egyptian pounds for the maintanance of informal settlements, which is used to supply the areas with some basic services such as electricity and drinking water. "It got to a point where most informal settlements are as well off as any other area. Despite that, we still have areas in need of immediate attention."

This is where the role of the PDP acquires special importance. The project took off in Boulaq al-Dakrour in 2004, before Adam had moved to the district as its chief. Since his appointment, he has worked closely with the staff of the PDP and local NGOs on upgrading the informal settlements of the area, and believes such efforts have helped officials like him build positive rapport with the citizens in the district:

"The Germans have covered parts of al-Zomor canal, which is a 100% environmentally sound move. The job was done so well that the area is to be used as parking lot for service cars in the near future. In addition, they have replaced the water and sewage pipes in some areas, and lit up areas that were completely deprived of electricity. They built a medical unit, upgraded emergency units, and built

a school and a social services center. They have also upgraded six youth centers. These were badly needed services. Add to this the awareness that has been engendered in the citizens through NGOs and Local Popular Councils. As the district helped facilitate the agenda of the PDP, this has made the residents of Boulaq al-Dakrour realize that the district has their own interests at heart."

Despite the obvious importance of the tangible contributions of the PDP, Adam believes that the intangible contributions to the district are even more important:

"It is very important to lift the fog of misunderstanding and the miscon,ceptions between the government and the people, which is what the PDP essentially does.

The dwellers of informal settlements live in fear that the government will come after them with eviction notices any day. When they see the positive action taking place to develop their dwellings and their streets, it reassures them."

The Chief of the Local Popular Council:

A View on Manshiet Nasser

by MANAL EL-JESRI

When a Moqattam rockslide buried hundreds of residents of the al-Duweiqa district of Manshiet Nasser last September, the PDP became the only source for data on the number of homes and residents estimated to be trapped under the rubble. "I should mention that, as we removed the bodies of the victims of the rockslide, we discovered we had no data. We went to the German program, and they were the ones who supplied us with the maps complete with the street names, how many buildings are estimated to be under the rock, and so on," says Abdullah Abdel-Ghani, the Local Popular Council (LPC) Chief of Manshiet Nasser.

The planning and mapping of Manshiet Nasser is only one of the important steps taken by the PDP to bring some semblance of order to the informal area. Manshiet Nasser is one of the first pilot areas of the PDP. "When the Germans first came to Manshiet Nasser (in 1998), they worked directly with the public," Abdel-Ghani says, adding that although admirable, this work gained efficiency as the LPC became involved. "There had to be a link between the Germans and the people. The Local Popular Council is elected by the people. I am a public man, not an executive. I was born in Manshiet Nasser and I have sat on LPC posts since 1983," he says.

Abdel-Ghani remembers the slight tension between the PDP and the LPC at the very beginning. "The picture soon looked brighter as they realized they had to go through us as representatives of the people for any development and upgrading work to be approved," Abdel-Ghani recalls. This new phase, as the chief calls it, began in 2000.

The popular dimension, he insists, continued to be the most important aspect of the PDP efforts. "We held workshops in which the residents of Manshiet Nasser participated and voiced their concerns and problems. In the end, the LPC, GTZ, and the district chief all sat together to determine the best course of action. Today, we can say that the German

project has succeeded in Ezbet Bekhit (the chosen pilot area of Manshiet Nasser)."

The upgrading of Ezbet Bekhit included all of the infrastructure: sewage, water, electricity, and roads, Abdel-Ghani explains. "They show us the maps and plans here at the LPC, and after we approve of them they are taken to the governorate for the final approval. It is a successful system," he says. Abdel-Ghani is quick to point out that the work in Ezbet Bekhit is not done yet. Roads have to be paved. "If we push for this phase to be done, Ezbet Bekhit will become a model of success to be followed in the rest of Manshiet Nasser."

The success of the PDP in Ezbet Bekhit has opened the door for similar projects. According to the LPC Chief, Manshiet Nasser was divided into eight districts, half of which are to be upgraded by the PDP, the other half by the governorate's urban planning unit. "The Germans are working much faster than the urban planning unit. I work directly with the people, and I have seen how the PDP staff has started working with the people, and the fruits of their planning are starting to show in all of the districts they are working on," Abdel-Ghani says. Technical staff members have been seen asking the

residents for their opinion regarding the upgrading of their streets and districts. They are also making maps of the current situation of the streets.

The maps will be the basis for a number of upgrading projects, including a tenure project that the PDP and the governorate have been working on. The idea is for the people to buy their homes, which will help breed a sense of belonging and ownership. The mapping also serves another purpose, as Abdel-Ghani points out:

"It is very important to plan all the areas of Manshiet Nasser because of the uniqueness of the area. Every day, people find new land to build their informal housing upon. We had a 200 square meters piece of land allocated for the religious al-Azhar Institute, but recently I was told people have taken over and are building upon it. We have to have some mechanism to interfere quickly and tear down such buildings. But if we wait until people move in, have children, and start their lives in their new homes, I as a popular man will prohibit the demolishing of these homes. Informal settlements can grow really fast, faster than the capacity of the district and the governorate."

Manshiet Nasser is a sprawling area made up almost entirely of informal settlements, excluding

the historical areas of Qaitbay and Barquq to the west. Because its population is over one million, the resources in the area are not sufficient. "We have very few schools. We need a school complex, we need a general hospital. Our residents have to go to al-Hussein Hospital in case of emergency," Abdel-Ghani says.

It is the lack of such basic services that shakes people's trust in the government, Abdel-Ghani believes. "It was not easy to get people to trust us. It took us years to convince the people that their homes will not be demolished, but only upgraded. When projects are slow, people start to question and wonder. After the rockslide, people thought their homes were going to be demolished, but we reassured them."

"Thank God," he continues, "Manshiet Nasser has been declared an informal area suitable for upgrading. The governorate has started the legalization of tenure, but I have to say that it was a faulty process. The prices are exorbitant. If people cannot afford to pay, they will continue to build informally, and will continue to live outside the system. It is time for the residents of Manshiet Nasser to become part of the system."

Cities Alliance:
Highlighting Challenges for Decision-Makers

by WILLIAM COBBETT

The Director of the Cities Alliance at an international conference in Cairo.

Speech held by William Cobbett from the Cities Alliance at the International Symposium on Exchanging Global and Egyptian Experiences in Dealing with Informal Areas within the Wider Urban Management Context in Cairo, October 2008.

I am not going to be talking specifically about Cairo, nor about Egypt, although sometimes you will think maybe I am because the challenges that have been debated this morning are certainly not unique to Egypt. There are similar debates happening in Latin America, in Sub-Saharan Africa and all through Asia. This conference is looking at local responses to a global phenomenon, which raises the possibility of Cairo and Egypt learning and sharing their experience with other countries and cities elsewhere in the world.

Next month the World Bank will release its World Development Report. It's its flagship annual assessment of a key theme in the world, and this year's report will focus on reshaping economic geography. The Report argues that cities, migration, and trade have been the main causes of progress in the last 200 years, in developed countries in particular. The World Bank argues that this is now being repeated in the developing world.

The Report highlights three global trends that will increase economic success. The first is higher densities—not only in cities but in countries overall. And the world, as we know, is urbanizing. This is an historic process that we can analyse, and debate but which we can't change. Far from being viewed as a problem, urbanisation should be considered a positive force that has the potential to change societies and economies for the better.

The second trend is improved connectivity that arises from these greater densities. This raises the question about how cities are designed, the efficiency of their design and the removal of obstacles to trade, the movement of people and capital.

Let us address this in the context of Cairo, where we have been debating informal areas. I also want to examine the use of language.

We have, as our slogan for the Cities Alliance, the words 'cities without slums'. It is for some people a controversial thing to argue, but everyone understands what we mean. So, while we can argue about what a slum is, everyone understands what a city without slums could look like.

What is causing the growth of informal areas in the world today and in Egypt now? Of course, rapid urbanization, as the world changes fundamentally from rural to urban societies. This is already complete in Europe and North America, but also Latin America, which is 75% urban. It is now happening in the Middle East and North Africa, in Sub-Saharan Africa and throughout Asia. At this point, Africa and Asia are less than half way through their transition. However the trends deviate, the world will become far more urban in the next 30 to 40 years than it is now. However, this urban growth is only partially explained by rural-urban migration, but increasingly by natural urban population growth.

Most of this urban growth is occurring in poorer countries, and cities, where very real limits to public resources are a contributing factor to the growth of informal areas. Indeed, there is an affordability challenge for the individual, and the public authority, alike.

Besides these major, demographic factors contributing to the growth of informal areas, I would also like to identify the role of public policies, or to be less polite—bad policy, inappropriate policy, and inappropriate planning frameworks.

Let us look at the issue of planning. In many cities the public authority, represented by the mayor, is a stranger in large parts of the city. The public authority doesn't know how many people live there, has no idea where they came from, has no knowledge of their needs. This raises a very serious and fundamental question, for that Mayor, Commissioner, or Governor: namely, how do you plan without knowing the size of the problem? And yet, many cities try this all of the time. How can you plan for half of the city?

In many of the countries that are rapidly urbanising, there is often a fundamental belief that urbanization is a problem. To put a contrary view, I want you to think of urbanisation as possibly the best hope for the future of your economy. Indeed, most of the world's most successful economies are already urbanized or are rapidly urbanizing. This is may not be better demonstrated anywhere else than in China, where it is the cities in China, that are driving this remarkable economic growth and massive urbanization.

However, most of the world is not Cairo, or Lagos, or São Paolo. Most urbanisation is taking place in small- and medium-sized cities, not in the mega-cities of 10 million or more. And that becomes even more of a challenge, because local government resources and capacity are even more constrained.

In this discussion about informal areas in and around Cairo, a distinction is sometimes made between safe and informal, or unsafe and informal areas. This is an interesting distinction.

In almost every major city in Asia, there are slum dwellers, informal settlements, informal areas next to the road, next to the railway, next to the airport, next to the canal, next to the river, on the pavement in every city, in many cities. Children get killed by trains. Entire communities can get destroyed by floods, and by the impacts of climate change. In those situations where there is clearly a threat from either man-made disaster or natural disaster, a different solution is necessary.

Our focus in this conference is on the informal. How does informal settlement happen?

I've described the big picture of urbanization and finite resources, but now wish to focus more on the local level, and the growth of informal areas and slums. What tends to happen is that a land developer, someone in the broader private sector, grabs public land. Maybe outside of the boundary of the city, beyond the jurisdiction of the public authority, land is grabbed or maybe unofficially allocated via a corrupt politician, also a very popular way of handing out favours and resources. And a key feature throughout and looking at informal areas is how they encourage corruption and are rewarded by corruption. The land is then subdivided into plots, maybe even along proper planning standards, knowing that in the future the city will catch up and then the land is sold for cash and a handsome profit. The people then settle, maybe the politician's voters settle on that land or it is just sold on the market. If you've got the cash, you pay, you get on. People start building and then slowly, painfully services come to that area, informally, illegally and incrementally slowly.

What I've just described happens all over the world. You can look at it as corruption; some people look at it as private sector entrepreneurial behaviour. These are facts. These are how settlements develop. I repeat, very often outside of the administrative boundary. So the local authority might not view these informal developments as their problem. This

is a big mistake, it is their future problem. The local authority cannot hide from this contingent liability. It will become a public authority responsibility sooner or later.

But even the getting of services, the allocation of water or access to garbage, or access to electricity often requires the payment of bribes, the payment of something, a little something to the police officer, or a little something to the local government. I repeat: informal processes create the conditions for corruption, and for extortion.

So in summary—in most developing countries in the world, and in most poor cities in the world, informal housing delivery is, in many ways, the most effective and efficient way of housing delivery because the public authority doesn't have the capacity or the desire to deliver.

And in summary, informal delivery is quicker. In Pakistan, in Karachi, the public authority develops land to very high standards, which the poor can't afford. The process is very bureaucratic and it can take land many years to come onto the market. Paying cash under the table to get onto the land illegally is a lot quicker than waiting years for a formal process. And if you are the parent of children, you will understand that people will take that opportunity. With lower entry costs it is cheaper to go the informal route. But most important of all, and here is the key point about informal settlement, people have no alternative because of the failure— and the attitude—of the public authority.

To debate the merits of these facts is to miss the point: the fact that people have no choice. It is not as if they'd chosen the informal instead of the formal, because the formal is not on offer. And people have to respond to getting on with their lives, getting on with their economic prospects, looking after their children.

Informal settlements outside the boundary are often not recognized by the local government and often provide inferior services. So it's not sustainable:

it's a short-term solution, but very seldom is any provision made for health, for education or for recreation. And the danger becomes, of course, that the informal settlement of today becomes the ghetto of tomorrow.

So if you are the local authority and you are faced with informal areas, debating whether they are a good thing or a bad thing is a fairly useless debate. The key to the future of that informal area is, what is the response of the local government?

When the public authority is confronted with the reality of an informal area, I would argue that it has two big choices. The first choice, is that the informal area will be accepted, upgraded, eventually becoming a suburb and a long-term part of the city. That implies certain decisions that have to be taken by the public authority.

The second choice for the public authority is to ignore the informal settlement, fight it, and let it become a slum. The responsibility for taking that decision lies with the public authority, and not with individual households who would obviously prefer to be recognized and brought into the city.

So, the key challenge is the response of the public authority to informal areas, when they are already facts on the ground.

The other part of the equation is the response of the public authority to future urban growth. What planning is there for the next generation of people who need settlement? The current widespread belief—that not planning will somehow discourage future growth—is the wrong logic, because it has been disproven time and time again. And intelligent local authorities will be thinking about the future rather than arguing about what the past looked like.

Now, when we come to the language of the 'informal'—yesterday, when we were touring, we were told that we were looking at 'informal areas'. They did not look like 'informal areas' to me—they looked like Cairo. They are clearly part of the great

city of Cairo—neither formal nor informal, just Cairo. The public authorities should not plan for only part of the city—they need to plan for the whole city. To label an area as 'informal', and then not to plan for it, or not to treat its residents as citizens, will undermine the city as a whole.

Let us look at one of the outcomes of separating the formal from the informal. This is a study from Karachi in Pakistan, comparing a formal low-income settlement to an informal/illegal informal settlement. In the formal, in terms of crime 98% of the people in this study had not been victims of crime. And in the informal/illegal, 70% had been victims of crime.

In relationship to the police, the formal had no problems, while in the informal/illegal settlement 100% of the people said that they had problems with the police. Harassment, extortion, bribery, because the people were not recognised: they had to pay not to be harassed; they had to pay to get services that other residents received as a matter of course. In other words, the poor were being penalized for the failure of the public authority to recognize and to service them properly. This is no way to run any city.

The term 'informal', often describes the relationship to planning. Something is called informal because it doesn't fit in with the plan. There are very few cities in the world where what exists on the ground and what is in the plan are the same thing. This is the real world. A lot of planning that is used today is badly out of date—rigid, and inflexible. This is not an argument against planning, but against bad planning.

These planning frameworks that don't recognize the informal, and don't recognize the poor, effectively put the responsibility of city building onto the poor, because the public authority takes no responsibility. The net result will be informal areas, the net result will be slums, long-term. Inappropriate planning standards, unrealistically high standards

also contribute to the growth of settlements on dangerous, unwanted land, or outside of the city because the poor are trying to escape planning laws that don't help them.

Planning laws are meant to help the city, not the bureaucracy. Too many planning regimes deprive the poor of access to planning resources and exclude them from the planning process. Indeed, many planning regimes explicitly serve the elite and the wealthy, a minority of the population of that city. And because they create informality, and because they create illegality, they create a basis for corruption and extortion.

The real result of inappropriate planning frameworks, and planning for the elite, is fragmented, inefficient cities. And that's what we see throughout Sub-Saharan Africa, through South Asia and Southeast Asia: cities that are becoming more and more inefficient rather than more efficient.

Drawing on the work of Vanessa Watson in Cape Town, I want to highlight three ways in which the planning regimes have an impact.

First on governance, a negative impact: top-down, technocratic approaches, protecting the elite, excluding the poor creates a very poor framework for governance in a city. Secondly, it has an impact on poverty, because when the planning framework promotes informality, it has a large impact on people's ability to enter into the main economy. The third impact is environmental, by creating unsustainable cities. Inappropriate planning frameworks can have a negative impact on the environment.

Without planning, those with the resources will determine the future of the city, because they can buy access and they can get their own resources for planning. In fact, with the demographic changes that we are talking about, with the economic crisis that we are facing, and also with climate change, good planning of a particular type is more important than ever. That means promoting density, focusing

on public and not private transport, making the city work for all, and ensuring that public spending promotes private investment.

In summary, there is an urgent need to move away from top-down, technocratic blueprints focused on controlling rather than enabling. Control is a very poor instrument of planning. A shift to strategic participatory forms of planning with a flexible use of spatial instruments, is something that we advocate and support in the Cities Alliance.

But we also have to look beyond the planning tool—cities like Cairo, cities like Lagos, cities like Nairobi also need a new breed of flexible mayors and city managers: strategic, responsive, and accountable, that treat the city not like something that has to fit into 'the plan', but rather as a living organism, constantly changing and developing.

Indeed, the city and the public authority need to become a development agency rather than a mere regulatory authority, run by and for bureaucrats. It's a very different concept of how to run a city, and needs to focus on the entire city. You cannot divide a city like Lagos or Manila into ten, twelve, thirty of forty blocks and plan them separately, because the city doesn't work like that. People move. Money moves. Transport moves. You can't plan in blocks, you can't plan in projects. No city is ever finished. Cities change forever, hopefully for the better, sometimes for the worse. And change also keeps cities alive. So let me highlight for you with some examples some ways forward.

Some suggestions as how to bring all of this to some sort of conclusion. Again, I don't pretend that this is easy, but it is possible, and managing the city, the size of São Paolo, the size of Cairo or even small cities can be turned around, and can be turned around fundamentally.

Here are the challenges that I put to you.

Number one, know your city—know the facts, know the population, who is there, where did they

come from, where do they live, what do they live in, what do they earn. If you don't know that, how can you plan for your city? So, challenge number one: know your city.

Challenge number two is to make the housing market work for the poor. If 60% of your city is informal, then that is your city. That's the challenge, it's how to make the whole city allow the poor to contribute to that city, work for their own good and for the city's good.

In Karachi, which I have mentioned, 70% of the housing is produced informally or illegally, by the urban poor. If that's true, why try and stop this energy, instead of harnessing it? Why not find out how to provide support to the urban poor which, for most cities, would be a completely different approach. But if the public authority is constantly trying to stop people, instead of helping them to help themselves, it will undermine the future of the city and those people. If the informal low-income housing market is the market that works, surely the local authority should try to use it instead of trying to stop it! That requires a new partnership, between the urban poor, and the local authority.

The third challenge is to introduce in any city a long-term planning framework. Long-term doesn't mean until the mayor's next election—it means 20 years from now. It means 25 years from now. No city is going to turn itself around in four years. So it's nice if the mayor is elected or not re-elected, but the city is bigger than the mayor. And cities that have transformed themselves, like Bogotá, have done it with consistent policies, followed by mayor after mayor.

Fourth challenge: It has to be city-wide. It has to be systemic. No city is going to change by a project here and a project there and another project over there. Most cities in trouble are not short of projects—they are short of policies and systems that work, for everyone.

And only a city-wide approach which means looking at the functional city can make sense.

It also means, don't stop at the existing boundary, but redefine the boundaries to allow for future growth. Plan the boundary on what the city will look like 25 years from now, not what it looks like today.

The fifth challenge is to be absolutely clear about the institutional arrangements. Who is running the city? Who is responsible for that service or for this service? In many cities you have either competing jurisdictions, no one decides, because no one knows who is in charge. No city will be transformed without clarity as to who has the authority, has control of the budget, the authority to take decisions, raise resources, capture revenue and make investment decisions.

And my final challenge is that all of this assumes that the Mayor and the city government is going to promote—**as a matter of policy**—the systematic integration of the urban poor into the city, as citizens. In other words, yesterday's slum dweller is today's citizen and may be tomorrow's mayor. And cities that fight with their population, hassle their population, chase them away, stop them building, stop them trading, are those cities that are going to make little or no progress. If you want to come and see them, we can take you around the world and you can visit cities that fight with their own population. None of them are doing well.

When the Mayor, or Governor, or Commissioner starts looking at slums as future suburbs, and slumdwellers as citizens, then a city's chances of fundamental reform and growth becomes real.

I thank you for your attention.

International Expert David Sims:
Rethinking Housing Policy

by AMIRA HOWEIDY

It is a crisp November morning in 2008 when development consultant David Sims, 62, reveals fresh statistics on Egypt's much-discussed—and controversial—informal areas. Sims has just finished a study, the first of its kind, for the Ministry of Housing and Ministry of Investment on "Housing, Housing conditions, and Housing Markets." The results are impressive as they give, according to Sims, a "pretty good picture" of housing and what people can afford.

The study includes a representative household survey, based on Central Agency for Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS) statistics, which addresses informal areas. The survey asked every household whether they considered themselves to be living in a *mante'a al-'ashwa'iyya* (informal area). For Egypt as a whole, 41% replied "yes," with 44% in Greater Cairo and 52% in Upper Egypt also responding in the affirmative.

Sims, who has been an advisor for governments, donors, and public agencies on community development and housing (among other things) for more than 30 years, says this is the "best" kind of statistic "because it's self-defined."

"It's probably an under-estimate, because a lot of people will probably prefer to say 'no, I don't live in an informal area,' so the figure is probably higher than that."

But then, he says, there are all these "definitional problems" that affect statistics, and consequently policies, that attempt to address informal areas.

Recently, 'informality' acquired a more nuanced definition after a presidential decree was issued on 16 September, 2008, to create a fund for the development of informal areas. Upon adopting the decree, the cabinet specified that the fund would work on "unsafe" informal areas specifically. This definition substantially reduces the number of informal areas, because unsafe areas constitute a small percentage of the total.

Sims is not so sure this is a step forward. All this is happening, he says, "because a rock fell," a reference to the 6 September, 2008, rockslide in eastern Cairo's squatter area of Manshiet Nasser that killed hundreds. "It's a clever way (of approaching informal areas)," he adds. "My cynical point of view is that this will die down until the next crisis."

Foreign donors might not be so cynical. By adopting the 'international' definition of slums via the presidential decree, Egypt has aligned itself with an international approach towards slums. It is a language both donors and the government are satisfied with. Sims, however, remains unconvinced.

He recounts that in 1982, USAID financed a study of Greater Cairo done by ABT Associates (US-market research and consulting firm) on informal housing in Egypt, which found that 80% of housing construction in Greater Cairo was informal. "That sort of made a certain impact," he recalls, "mostly with donors."

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Third World housing and Third World poverty were key priorities and donors supported several urban development programs in Egypt, he explains. The most visible was USAID, which cost US$ 150 million. The World

Bank led the second urban project in Egypt, which supposedly, according to Sims, tried to upgrade Manshiet Nasser and a town in Assuit. "Both went nowhere," he says. Meanwhile, the UN and then the UNDP, followed by the British official development aid, went to the Suez governorate of Ismailia.

Throughout his 30 years of consulting in Egypt, Sims singles out the upgrading of the *hayy* (district) al-Salaam settlement in Ismailia as a success story. Sims was the urban and management advisor for this project, which ran from the mid-1970s until 1983. Plots of land were prepared and serviced, and people were allowed to build their houses. Most of the land was subdivided into small plots of 100 square meters, which were then sold for very low prices to the people of Ismailia. Then, 10% of the land on the best streets was kept off the market and eventually sold by auction. That 10% brought in money to finance the project.

The project was a well-known success by 1983, but it has never had an impact on government policy and it has never been replicated, says Sims. "And you can say it has to do with the inability of the local governorate to have its own funds. You need state land which is really developable, not something in the middle of the desert—which is the problem of the New Towns."

As a result, the donors "just went off." By the end of the 1980s, "housing was no longer a pending issue with donors." It was in the mid-1990s, he says, that the word 'participation' came up in Cairo. "Except for GTZ, no one else is in the game. UN HABITAT isn't doing anything other than upgrading. UNDP financed a study of a little area in Minia for last year. So besides them, the World Bank won't touch it, USAID won't get anywhere near the housing sector. Donors have zero influence," he argues. They're very marginal and "nobody puts a lot of money into the informal areas."

Just how complex and difficult is informality in Egypt? "Everybody talks about informality and there's not an Egyptian who doesn't know what informal areas are, although perceptions vary," he says. Sims knows "very high up people in the Ministry of Housing" who think that informal areas are areas that do not have electricity and water, "whereas 99% have electricity and 99% have water."

Informality, he insists, "is not a very difficult issue. These places are suffering mainly due to sheer government negligence. You will never see the government paving a street in these areas—less than 50% of the streets in urban Egypt are paved because

International Actors:
Coordination Is Needed

by AMIRA HOWEIDY

most of them are informal. You will never see traffic police in informal areas."

"It's so simple. If the government will put one tenth of the money it puts into New Towns into these areas, it wouldn't be so bad." The message should be a very political one: "start putting the budget where the people are."

He offers an example. There are six government-sponsored food stores (*gami'ya eshelakia*) in the upper-class Zamalek district which are full of fruit, vegetables, meat, fish, and regular goods for Zamalek's population of 16 000 people. "Manshiet Nasser, with half a million people, has exactly one government sponsored food store that doesn't have anything but sardine cans and some Rabso detergent."

So instead of spending money on informal areas like Manshiet Nasser and Mataria, "where populations grow three times as fast" as in other parts of the city, and where "most people of limited income live and will continue to live," the government is putting money into New Towns like New Cairo and 6th of October.

So what is the root of the problem? Is it rural migration? Sims offers a counter-question. "What do you think the New Towns have been for since 1976? Sixth of October has a humongous industrial area. It was designed in 1981 for a million people, and the idea was the workers would live out there in government-built housing and go to the factories. It never worked." This thinking has "been on the table for 30 years. Maybe it's about time to think otherwise."

He explains that as early as the 1986 census, it became apparent that Greater Cairo was no longer growing due to rural urban migration. "It's growing on its own weight. Its expanding into rural areas, but rural-urban migration no longer contributes to even 5% of its growth."

"The problem is that the government doesn't want to look at these areas because they're in the valley,"

Sims concludes. "If the government has a plan, it is to get people into the desert. This has been the national plan, announced in 1997 by President Hosni Mubarak."

So, one might ask, is participatory development mere lip service? "Yes," Sims replies. "Is there any participation in the Egyptian government at any level? This has always puzzled me with donors more than anything. Do you think the great cities in Europe were built, designed, and developed on participatory principles? Then why now? Why do these poor people have to not only improve themselves, but have to do it in an idealistic way that has rarely existed anywhere?"

"But if you're talking about *real* participation, start talking about another way, which is empowerment. No one is talking about it. Why don't you have a local project? And why don't you let people decide how to spend that budget? But you know how it is here, a part of the government is considered a position for revenue, personal revenue. That's why we have the ministers we have today, they're already rich."

Ever since Third World housing became a point of interest for the international community in the late 1970s, foreign donors have been present in Egypt to address informal housing and urban upgrading. Accordingly, there is a legacy of three decades that defines the relationship of donors with the Egyptian government and their informal housing upgrading experience. A general assessment of this experience is largely tainted by reservations. Despite the billions invested by international donors in urban upgrading, and related studies and assessments, there has been very little progress on the ground and in government policy. The institutionalized centralization of the Egyptian government, the entrenched bureaucracy, and the lack of a political will are viewed by donors as factors that have contributed to this situation. It is no wonder that the biggest donor, USAID, withdrew completely from any housing projects in the early 1990s.

Today, the active international development donors in the informal housing scene are GTZ, UN HABITAT, and the World Bank. Despite USAID's absence, it is active in pilot decentralization pilot efforts that include housing among its three priority sectors.

In fact, decentralization is now quite popular with international development donors, and organizations have prescribed it as an integrated component of Egypt's economic reform. Since Egypt is a signatory to a number of development agreements with international donors, including the EU, which emphasize the necessity of decentralization, the concept is slowly making its way, sporadically perhaps, into the official discourse. That is where it remains at the moment.

While donors have different readings and interpretations of Egypt's informal housing, and different solutions for the problem, there is consensus that without achieving decentralization, the growing problem of informal areas will remain uncontained and uncontrollable. This is because "there is not a single authority or ministry in Egypt

responsible for upgrading informal areas," says Khalid Amin of the USAID-funded Egyptian Decentralization Initiative (EDI). If the Governor of Cairo wants to make a decision regarding the upgrading of an informal settlement for example, "he is not empowered enough to implement it," Amin says, "because he has to get a series of approvals from different government entities." And of course, not all these entities work with the same understanding and priorities, and as a result progress is stymied.

Decentralization, says Amin, is more than empowerment. It relates to redistributing expenditure assignments among the central and local governments, revenue assignment (allocating a budget for local administration instead of the existing centralized money flow that goes to the public treasury in the Ministry of Finance), and creating an inter-governmental money transfer system to bridge the gap between local revenues and local expenditures. "Egypt is the only country of this size in terms of population that does not adopt decentralization schemes of progress," he adds.

There are some signs of possible progress. A presidential decree issued in September 2008 to establish a fund for the development of informal

areas is the first of its kind, and attempts to address informal areas at a high level within the government. Amin sees it as a "partial solution" for the budgeting and planning issues of informal areas, which are crucial. "Upgrading of informal areas requires financial resources, which is a major issue," he says. If there's a special fund that gets its money directly from the Ministry of Finance to serve this objective then "we can realize some progress." But there are many unanswered questions concerning who will manage, what the priority areas will be, what type of upgrading will be done, and how development donors will contribute to the fund.

"I don't like ad-hoc solutions," Amin says, "because they complicate the situation. It's a temporary thing and not a real reform, but it's better than nothing."

There are aspects of the fund's mandate that appeal to UN HABITAT, the United Nations Human Settlements Program. It's Senior Human Settlements Officer in the Regional Office for African and Arab States, Ali Faramawy, says the fund gives priority to unsafe areas. This is very different from the concept of informality, he argues, because if Egypt's informal areas constitute 60% of its urban stock, the concept of unsafe areas reduces the focus from 60% to only 5%.

According to the Egyptian government's definition, unsafe areas are locations where loss of life can occur because residents live in rocky areas or flood plains, with unsafe buildings made of ad-hoc materials, where buildings are unprotected, and where there is lack of potable water and high-level congestion. According to Faramawy, this definition "is perfectly aligned with the international definition of slums," and as such, aligns with the United Nation's Millennium Development Goals.

Others are wondering just how helpful this perception is to the upgrading of informal areas. "If you look at Egypt, this is not the main issue," says World Bank Senior Urban Management Specialist Ahmed Eiweida. "How many areas are in dangerous locations?

We're talking about what, fifteen areas?" This focus on "dangerous" zones or even *tahzeem* (restricting the expansion of informal settlements)—another new vision that is increasingly common in official discourse—is, in Eiweida's words, a "sporadic" approach to the problem that does not go beyond an occasional pilot case.

The World Bank, together with the Ministry of Housing and the General Organization for Physical Planning, has just completed a vision called "Towards an Urban Sector Strategy for Egypt." The strategy identifies the key challenges Egypt faces in urban upgrading, and after analyzing the location of the various informal areas and taking into consideration the accumulated experience of the past, came up with specific policy recommendations. "All the government needs to do now is to take this further and put it into a national policy, adopted by the highest level possible, by the Cabinet. Otherwise," Eiweida argues, "it will remain yet another expensive foreign donor project stacked away in an office or two."

The World Bank, in collaboration with the Cities Alliance Program (a global coalition of cities and their development partners), was involved in urban upgrading until 2007. It piloted in the Mediterranean city of Alexandria with the idea of forming a citywide strategy that the government of Egypt could implement. The World Bank surveyed all squatter settlements in Alexandria, mapped them and built a database and statistics about them. They reviewed the characteristics of each area and, according to Eiweida, found out that many areas have either merged together, changed, or been upgraded. As a result they built a new database, which reclassified and reduced the number of slums in Alexandria from 45 to 33. Alexandria was mapped, and using a methodology called Participatory Rapid Appraisal, they went to each area for quick interviews with the community to gauge their needs and priorities, compared them to the government plan, and then came up with an

action plan for each area. Alexandria was classified into A, B, and C categories, based on the level and urgency required for upgrading in every group.

"This is the first example of a citywide upgrading strategy in Egypt," he says. "Land tenure can be provided over a long period." But meanwhile, a land sales program, where each house can have a land title, can begin. Without it, Eiweida argues, "the Egyptian government is missing an opportunity:

People are ready to pay money for the land they are occupying illegally. Why shouldn't the government take this opportunity and increase revenues by having a land sales program and tendering a price for land there that matches the budgets of the residents? Imagine the revenues that could be generated for the government as a result."

He also believes that once people purchase their land, they are put in the formal housing market, which means they'll start paying property tax. This too, could be "another missed opportunity for the Ministry of Finance."

This is the kind of approach the World Bank is eager to see the government adopt. But it's not happening, says Eiweida. "We can't impose anything on the government. All donors can do is to provide advice and sometimes, investment. And we think the government is starting to take our advice seriously."

Twenty years ago, few foreign donors would have attested to that. In the 1980s, USAID was involved in an urban upgrading project called "Sites and Services," in the industrial city of Helwan. One of it's major policy objectives was to demonstrate the feasibility of providing serviced plots on which individuals would build their own houses, rather than construct more expensive public housing units. According to USAID, the main problem affecting the "Sites and Services" component was poor site selection provided by the Egyptian government. Due to poor soil conditions, very heavy and costly foundations were needed. This made it extremely costly and unfeasible to build

individual houses on some areas of the site. In order to make economic use of the site, the government had to build four and five story public apartment buildings, thereby defeating the original policy objectives of the component. After an USAID audit, USAID management decided to withdraw completely from any further housing initiatives. (USAID economic assistance to Egypt has been decreasing for the last six years. From US$ 800 million in 2000, it has dropped drastically to US$ 200 million.)

But this chapter in the history of foreign donors attempting to upgrade informal areas is part of three phases that started in the 1980s, says Eiweida. Phase one was before the launch of the National Program of Urban Upgrading by the Ministry of Local Development and nine governorates. "Before this period," he says, "the government policy can be described as *laissez-faire*, do nothing." It did not go beyond pilot projects with foreign donors for decades. They were mainly in the Suez city of Ismailia (British Aid), and in Helwan (USAID) and Aswan (GTZ). These projects provided, in the words of Eiweida "excellent experience" for participatory urban upgrading in Egypt. "Unfortunately, when the national program started in 1992, all lessons learned from these pilot projects with donor agencies weren't taken into consideration," he says. Amongst the national program's mistakes, according to Eiweida, was its focus on the "physical side" of urban upgrading, and neglecting community participation consultation.

Phase two was the start of the national program. Phase three is presently underway. "We are entering another new phase, where more attention is given to community participation and the government is moving towards a national strategy of what we (at the World Bank) call city wide urban upgrading strategy." That might be the case. Until that attempted strategy makes it into the government's priorities, the expansion of Egypt's informal areas will continue as "a natural phenomenon," says Faramawy.

05   EXPECTATIONS AND VISIONS

Hoping for a Better Future

by JULIA GERLACH

While we can argue about what a slum is, everyone understands what a city without slums could look like.

The man lets his body drop into the plastic chair. He has dark rings under his eyes and his skin is gray. He is so tired. He introduces himself as "an ordinary man." His life is such a balancing act that he does not want to have his name mentioned anywhere, just in case, so that nobody can take offense or turn against him. "There are more and more men here who decide not to get married and not to have a family because they don't want to take all this responsibility," he says. "I always wanted to have a family and now I have four children. It was by choice. They shall have a better future and so I have to work hard." The ordinary man works from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. as a mechanic in the maintenance department of the Ministry of Agriculture, which earns him 350 Egyptian pounds per month. "Do you know how much it costs to have children in school? All the private lessons we have to pay? My elder son is joining the army now, and even there I will have to give him money because his salary is not enough for food and public transportation." So the ordinary man is not going home after work. He goes to a shoemaker's workshop where he is paid by the piece. There he works until midnight, or even longer. "Yesterday, I was home at 4 a.m.," he says. No wonder his skin is gray.

His daughter started to work in a shop after she finished her *diplom tigara*. "But she had to get up at 5 a.m. to take public transportation and she didn't come home before 7 or 8 p.m., so I told her to give up the job. This is too hard for my daughter. She will have a better life. I can always work a little more so I can support her. I am not educated. For me it doesn't matter," he explains.
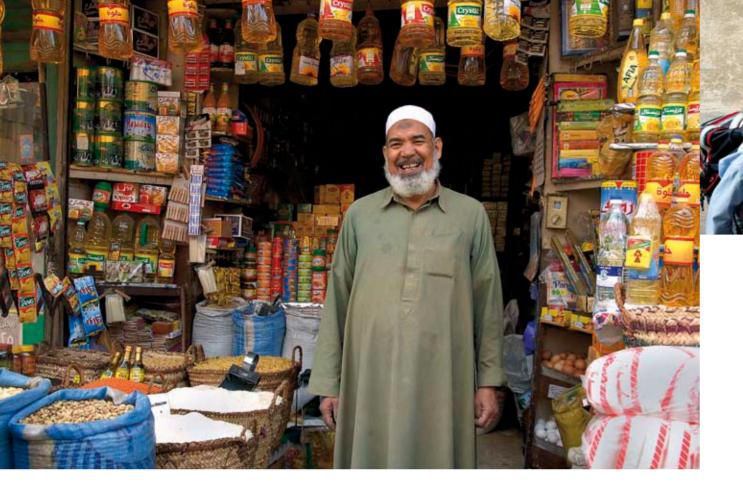
The ordinary man expresses what many others interviewed for this book have mentioned as well: They are not willing to give up their dream. They want their children to have a better life. Even though everybody says that times are getting tougher, and that it will become more and more difficult for young people to find a good job (or any job at all), they still seem dedicated to working hard and sacrificing for their children's future.

One of Umm Amr's main worries concerning her poor housing conditions in Manshiet Nasser is that her son Amr will feel ashamed inviting his friends from school home. "Look how small it is here," she explains. "We can't even invite someone for tea. I can feel that this is hard for him, but he is a good boy and he doesn't say anything." She wants him to study and become an engineer. Quite a few people interviewed mentioned that they feel ashamed in front of their children because they are not able to offer them a better life. This is especially the case when the parents are illiterate and the children have a minimum of education.

This is also the case in Mariam's family. The 18-year-old garbage collector has just finished a three year literacy class and now she cannot wait to continue her education. "I want to go to the school of tourism and hotel management, and then I want to become a flight attendant. I want to go to university and get a degree like every educated girl," she says. Her mother sends her to the kitchen to prepare tea for her and the guest. "You know, I can't read or write. What can I possibly say to her?" she asks.

Quite a few people see education as the main road to a better future, but as mentioned before, there are some doubts as to whether this strategy really

Kids on their way to school. Manshiet Nasser.

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Sheikh Abdel Hamid in his shop. Boulaq al-Dakrour.

works out. Many parents see the difficulties that young people have in finding a job after finishing their education, but they want to see their children as exceptions. They think their own child will be able to make it if they just try hard enough. Others are looking for alternative ways, like Mohammed Abdel Aziz's father, who decided to buy a tuk tuk (auto rickshaw) to provide him and his son with an income. He is doing so even though Mohammed visits the Al-Jazeera Academy and seems to be a successful student.

Most young people, when asked about their dreams for their future, said that they would like to open "some project" by themselves, or to do something with computers, or produce fashionable clothes. The older generation often expressed the hope that the government would one day step in, and that things would be a little more like they were in the old days of Gamal Abdel Nasser, when the state took care of his citizens. They would like the government to play a stronger role when it comes to education and employment, but also concerning infrastructure and planning in the area.

For Mohammed Shaban, a part-time carpenter in Sabir Nofal Street in Boulaq al-Dakrour, this means that he has a second job after hours, when he opens his workshop, and dreams of a more cooperative economic system. "These small workshops like mine don't have a chance to compete with big factories. We need the government to help us to survive by organizing us in bigger entities. We could all move together and share the machines and it would also be more effective if some experienced person would take over the management of the business," he says. He wouldn't mind giving up his freedom as owner and boss of the workshop in exchange for greater security.

With regard to the problems of their area, inhabitants again pointed to more government intervention. "This area is just full of garbage. People bring their garbage and dump it here in the street," explains Mohammed Abdel Aziz, the tuk tuk driver. "When it is getting too much, they burn it without thinking of the smoke. Once they lit a garbage field right next to our school and we all got sick and had

to go home. The only way to stop this is more control, more police," he says.

Another problem are the crowded and dangerous streets, and many people find the public transportation system frustrating. "I think we need wider streets and we need a better system for the microbuses," says Ahmed Abdel Hafiz, an unemployed taxi driver. "Now, it's very unorganized and chaotic. The drivers are very poor and they earn little, so they have to use every trick to get into a better position in order to make a little money. I would find a system that gives the drivers better chances and that is less chaotic." He believes that the state should consider the needs of the people living and working in the area and find the best solution for them.

Many believe that intervention from above is possible and that it can fundamentally change an area. In Boulaq al-Dakrour, several people mentioned the example of Shubra. "That's the constituency of Youssef Boutros Ghaly, and he decided to do something for his voters. Look at Shubra today: it's clean and nice. That means if they want, they can change it for the better," Abdel Aziz says.

Hagg Abdel Radi, an experienced stone quarry worker and natural leader from Manshiet Nasser, is not asking for more government intervention, but rather for a changed attitude on the part of the local administration. "Why don't they let us buy the land under our houses? Our sons inherit houses, but they don't own the land. Where is the logic? If we want to give them the money, even at a good price, why don't they take the money and do something for the poor people in the area, or put it into their own pocket, or

whatever. I think it is because they don't want to give us this feeling of security that we are really at home in our houses," he says.

Most people interviewed said that they would like to live in a different area, and would be willing to move into another apartment immediately if only it were a little better than the one where they currently resided. In some cases, people stated the reasons why finding a better place might be quite difficult, a fact which seems to indicate that they are probably quite happy in the apartment they are presently in, and have roots in the area. On the other hand, the ones that were eager to move may have thought that they were expected to be looking for a better place, or just did not want to miss an opportunity to improve their situation. The only exceptions to this were the women on al-Qorsaya island. They said that they were not willing to give up their houses for any other place in the world. Only one of them said that she might like to live in one of the modern apartment blocks in 6th of October City or Sheikh Zayed. The others gave her harsh looks for this remark.

How do people imagine their own housing conditions? Traveling on the Ring Road, the 6th of October Bridge, and other large traffic arteries in Greater Cairo, one is constantly confronted with housing dreams. "Medinati," "Le Reve," "Festival City," and "Uptown Cairo" are the names of some of the construction projects advertized on large billboards along these roads. The advertising often obstructs the view of the informal areas along the way. In fact, on the Ring Road, construction workers even used the pillar of one on these billboards as main support for their shack. The advertisements show green lawns, villas, and happy families with blond children playing in the grass. Some of these compounds already exist; others are under construction or still in planning.

"Nowadays, young people are much more frequently confronted with the lifestyles and dreams of other parts of the society and other parts of the world. They

see the advertising and they look on the Internet, and they see goods and ways of life that they want but they will never get. That causes a psychological disorder," explains Abu Haitham, owner of a stationary shop on Sabir Nofal Street in Boulaq al-Dakrour. Actually, none of the people interviewed admitted to have dreamt of living in such a place. When asked about it, they declared that they would not mind moving there, but they did not bring up the subject of other lifestyle expectations themselves. Their dreams were more realistic.

"I would like to live in a nice flat here in the area," responded Umm Amr. "It doesn't need to be too big. Just one of these flats for 50, 100, or even 150 pounds a month. And I want an open contract, so that the rent is not going up every year." She believes that in the future everybody in Cairo should live in such a modern flat or an upgraded old house. The government should evacuate the people from the dangerous areas first, demolish the houses there, and take good care that nobody comes at night to build new houses. "They should make gardens and playgrounds and clubs in these evacuated areas," she says.

Her neighbor—a soda, chips, and cigarettes vendor on the street—wouldn not say no to one of the new flats. "But I think such an independent, smaller house for only one extended family also has many positive sides. You can have some chickens, for example, and it's also cooler in summer, I would say."

Said Ramadan, however, a disappointed inhabitant of one of the new flats in Manshiet Nasser, does not believe in the future of the new blocks at all. "I think in the future we will all be living in self-made houses, just like before. Eventually in a different area, but everything else will be much like before," he says. The reason for this view is that he thinks that people will not be able to live together in the apartment blocks in the long run, especially after experiencing the methods some of the inhabitants have used to get their flats.

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Cauliflower seller. Manshiet Nasser.

Residents Voices:
What if...?

by JULIA GERLACH

"What would you do if you where king, queen, or president for one day?" Many people interviewed for this book started to laugh when they first heard the question. Some knew immediately what to answer; others had to think for a while before describing what they would concentrate on in their imaginary reign. Some even felt insulted. The answers and reactions to this part of the interview reveal a lot about the attitude that people have towards their government, and it gives insights about what they perceive as their biggest problems. A great number of interviewees quoted old tales and legendary examples from history about kings, caliphs, and presidents walking the streets and listening to the poor in order to find out about their needs. Some said that the problem with the Egyptian government and the informal areas was that the decision makers did not know enough about these areas. Others disagreed, and reckoned that the government knew enough but that it was not determined enough to put an end to corruption or other mechanisms preventing necessary change.

In many cases, people would answer the question in a very general way. They wanted to solve the problem of unemployment, raise awareness among people, or change world economics. In order to seek more tangible and applicable answers, people were then asked what they would do if they were governor or head of the local administration for one day, or what they would do if they all of a sudden found 10 or 20 000 pounds in their pocket. Here is a summary of some of the answers:

Fakiha, aged 55, is a housewife, mother of five and grandmother of five. Her husband, Hagg Hamdy, is a self-employed tile mason. The two live in a very run-down apartment in Boulaq al-Dakrour.
"What do you say, only one day? No, this wouldn't be enough. I have many things that I want to do. First thing: I would solve the problem of bread distribution. I would stop this system where people running the distribution kiosks sell a good part of the bread under the table to people who resell it at higher prices elsewhere. Second thing: I would tackle the problem of unemployment. There is so much to do. Why don't we send the unemployed to work as gardeners or in cafés? They could even open new cafés, create jobs, and do something for all of us. They should work so they feel satisfied and tired at night and take better care of themselves. I would stop this *urfi* marriage custom (marriage without official contract). This kind of irresponsible relationship destroys our society. What keeps us going, especially in the informal quarters, is the respect for tradition and custom. And looking at my environment, I would get the people to clean the streets. It's disgusting and uncivilized to walk through these dirty streets all the time. If I had 10 000 pounds, I would like to open a small shop. I could raise and sell chickens, or sell vegetables, or even fish. I would like to have a nice little project for myself, and I would employ one or two young people to give them a chance. Because I can't read and write, I would need someone to take care of the accounting. You see, for all that, it wouldn't be enough to have only one day."

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Gamal Abu Heiram, aka Abu Adham, is a taxi driver and father of five. He is originally from Sudan but has held Egyptian citizenship for more than two decades. He lives in Boulaq al-Dakrour.

"What do you want? We have a great President. I would follow his example and do everything exactly like Hosni Mubarak. I wouldn't change anything."

Abu Haitham is a retired employee of the Ministry of Education, the owner of a stationary shop, and a natural leader in Boulaq al-Dakrour.

"There are so many problems: the crowdedness, the noise, the pollution of the water, and the problem of the trash lying around everywhere. I think if I had only one day, I would try to get the support of the people. Then we could start working together the following day. I think it's mostly about people's awareness. They need to wake up and tackle their own problems. The informality of life here, and the fact that the officials have failed to address the problems of the majority, leads to a widespread attitude of indifference. Hardly anyone is willing to work for the community, and most are often just looking after their own interests. If I had power, I would also try to change the attitude of the people working in the administration. They are people like you and me and they have their constraints. But something is going fundamentally wrong. For example, the Department of Streets decides to bring asphalt to one of the roads. You can be sure that the Department of Electricity will decide to bring new cables just after the new asphalt is ready. And just after the workers of the Department of Electricity have closed the street again, the Department of Water decides that its time for new pipes. After just a few weeks the street is full of chuckholes just as before. I ask myself why this happens here, but it doesn't happen in formal areas. Shouldn't the services be better in the poorer areas than in the rich places since people there need them more?"

Ahmed Abdel Hafiz, 27, is an unemployed taxi driver. He has given up hope of getting married because he knows that he will never have enough money to pay the morning gift. He lives with his family in Boulaq al-Dakrour.

"I would introduce the Islamic law in Egypt and especially in Boulaq al-Dakrour. This would make people think twice before they do something wrong. Nobody will steal anymore because they will know that we would chop off their hand if they get caught. Nobody would dare to take drugs. That's what we need."

Daulat Guindy, 46, is a housewife and active member of the Christian community in Boulaq al-Dakrour.

"I would try to raise people's awareness so that they can tackle their own problems and I would give money and help to orphans and poor women. If I had 10 000 pounds, I would give half of it to the church. With the rest I would improve my apartment. It could use redecoration. But I am not alone in this world, so I would share the money with my family and I would have to give a little to everyone."

A man in his late-40s introduces himself as a "normal citizen of Cairo." He works in the maintenance department in the Ministry of Agriculture, but as he cannot survive on the 350 pound salary alone, he works as a shoemaker in a small workshop afterwards. He has four children and wants to offer them a better future. As his life is a daily balancing act he does not want to take any risks, which is why he does not want to have his name mentioned.

"I would bring those people to justice who have done something wrong for their own personal advantage. I wouldn't throw them in prison but I would make them realize and understand their wrongdoing. If I were the Governor of Giza, I wouldn't sit in my chair and trust my employees to report the problems to me and to find solutions. I would tackle the problems myself, and the first thing I would stop is the criminal practice of how the bread is distributed."

Shireen, 15, lives in a very run down shack in the zabaleen area. She is depressed because she wants to marry and her parents want her to leave the house to make space for the other family members, but her fiancé cannot afford the morning gift. Shirin recently visited a literacy class and loves reading. Her favorite story is Robin Hood.

"I would take care of the poor and especially of the poor young people who can't marry. I would give money to everyone. That's better than changing the politics, because then everyone can decide for himself what is important."

Eiman Girgis, 12, is a student at the school run by the Spirit of the Youth NGO in the zabaleen area.

"You mean, I would be Hosni Mubarak? I would put the criminals in prison and I would take those people who haven't done anything wrong out of prison. I would tell the police to stop treating people badly and beating them—yesterday they came to Manshiet Nasser and chased people through the street, people who have done nothing wrong."

Mohammed al-Abd, owner of an aluminum workshop in the zabaleen area, is one of the very few Muslims in the mostly Christian neighborhood of Manshiet Nasser.

"I would open some good schools for the young people here. That's what they need. A school where they learn a lot and where the teachers don't beat them too much."

Sheikh Abdel Hamid Mohammed is a shop-owner in Boulaq al-Dakrour and a former activist in the Islamist movement.
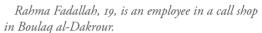
"I would make people pray to God and bend their knees in front of the Almighty. This is the only way to address the multitude of problems we are facing."

Soheir Hamid Mohammed, 50, is a housewife in Boulaq al-Dakrour.

"Me, a queen or president? Why do you have such a bad opinion of me? I haven't done anything wrong in my life so don't compare me to these people!"

Rahma Fadallah, 19, is an employee in a call shop in Boulaq al-Dakrour.
"I would clean up and help the poor, and I would try to find jobs for those guys out there in the street."

Umm Mustapha runs a small shop on al-Qorsaya-island.
"I would help the poor. These rich and fat people don't know anything about how life is for the poor. I would sort out the question of landownership, too. I don't want anything from the officials. I only want to have my rights, and I ask myself how they can talk about confronting Israel when in the end they are taking our land."

Umm Khalid is a resident of the City of the Dead.
"I am happy with my life and it would be exaggerated to ask for natural gas or more services in the area. No, we don't ask for anything. If I had some money, I would give it to my children so they can work on their future."

Abdel Basset Abdel Massoud Yunis is a retired engineer in the Ministry of Agriculture, and owner of a house and a call shop in Boulaq al-Dakrour.
"If I were king, I would start it all over again. I would rebuild the whole country in an organized way. I would care about what people think about me and I would try to make them happy."

Nawal Tawfiq is the wife of Abdel Basset Abdel Massoud Yunis.
"I would stop the selling off of the riches of our country. Which other country sells its electricity company, its water plants, and all the important factories to foreigners? I would try to find out the reasons why people become criminals and I would listen to the problems of my fellow citizens. I would take care of the trees in the streets. As most people are not used to care for their environment, I think the government has to jump in."

One of Cairo's hard working citizens.
Boulaq al-Dakrour.

Egyptian Partners' Expectations:
Visions for the Future

by MANAL EL-JESRI

The dilemma of envisioning the future of informal settlements in Egypt is much like that of the man who asked six blind people to describe an elephant. Each focused on one part of the animal, and not a single person was able to give an accurate description of the whole. However, if you put together all these visions, the full picture emerges. This is what we will try to do here, because when people work on one single area of expertise, they get drawn in by details, often forgetting to take a step back and see a broader perspective. We will bring together the visions and the expectations of the local development partners, working in different levels of responsibility, in the hope that in the end our readers will be able to see a fuller picture.

The Ministers

Asked how he saw the future of informal settlements in Egypt, Dr. Osman Mohamed Osman, the Minister of Economic Development, says that although he is hopeful, he fears that the issue is still being perceived from an administrative and financial perspective:
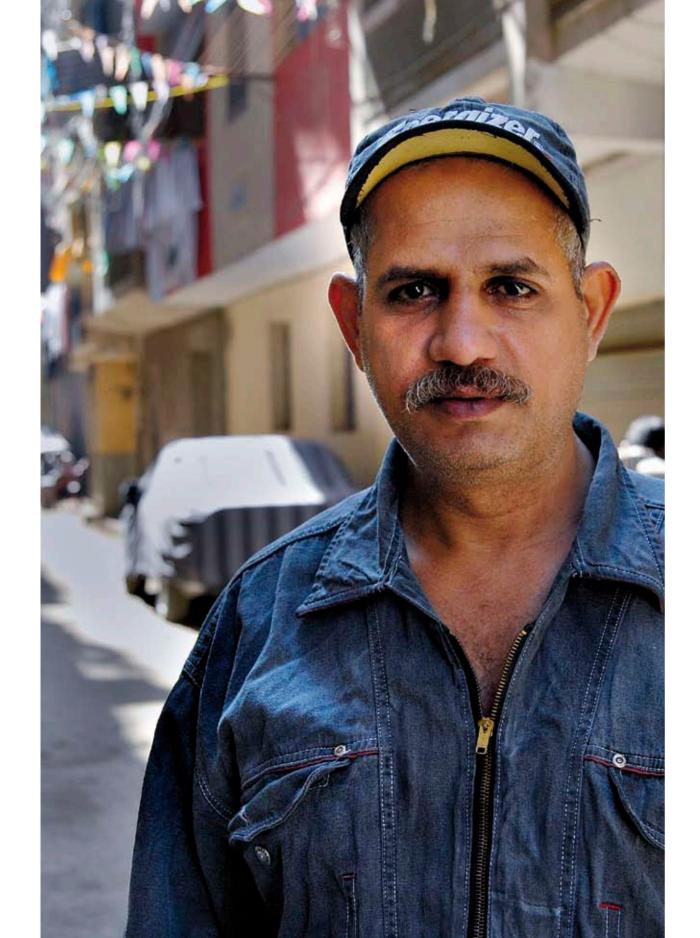
"The developmental perspective is needed. Most of the informal areas, if we use a loose definition, do not need basic services. So the issue is not getting the Ministry of Housing to introduce new water pipes to an area, or for the districts to put in place a system for the removal of solid waste. Solid waste is a problem that even residents of Heliopolis and Maadi suffer from."

What is needed, he believes, is for everyone involved to reflect on the living conditions of the informal settlement residents, especially with regard to those living in areas where urgent attention is called for because their homes or geographical locations pose an immediate threat to their lives:

"What we need to do is to redefine and re-categorize informal settlements and to focus on dealing with them within the framework of a comprehensive program. We must think of the residents. We must ask the question: 'If we move them, where will we relocate them?' And when we think of an answer to this question, we must think of a new question: 'What will they do, where will they work?' We must deal with the resulting issues before they are posed as questions."

Osman explains that residents, when faced with relocation, often complain, object, and are filled with fear. But relocation, he argues, is not always bad, because good planning brings about good results. "When the government moved the vegetable market from Rhoda al-Farag, merchants demonstrated and were very loudly against it. Look at them now. They are flourishing in Souq al-Obour. People must be won over, so they can see that the government may have something better in store for their futures," he says.

The Minister of Economic Development believes that an equally important issue, which should go hand in hand with the development of informal settlements, is putting a stop to the growth of new settlements. The only way to achieve this, he believes, is by planning all the areas that could be potential sites for new informal settlements.

Dr. Ali Moselhi, the Minister of Social Solidarity, is another firm believer in the importance of urban planning as a tool to deter the development of new informal settlements, and also as a tool for improving the quality of life for the residents:

"I believe that in the very near future, by the year 2011, most of the dangerous informal settlements will have been dealt with. As for unplanned areas like Imbaba, we are going to see much positive work going on there. We will also see the enactment of the unified building code. Many of Egypt's villages, at least 90% of them, will have been planned. As a result, people will be allowed to build according to these plans. When we take an aerial shot of the country in 2011, things are going to look much better. In the absence of planning for new land and existing informal areas, people are at a loss what to do. Faced with the option of abiding by the law, people are smart and prefer to do the right thing. But faced with two wrongs, they choose the easier wrong, the one that is more convenient to them."

Moselhi cites the example of Imbaba many times during our interview, because the Minister believes this area is going to be a very good example of an unplanned area that will be turned into a model of a middle-class district complete with schools, medical centers, and vital services:

"Imbaba is the biggest project taking place in cooperation with the Giza Governorate. New, wider streets will be paved between buildings to open up the area, and people whose homes fall in the way of the new streets are going to be relocated to new buildings right inside their own district, on the land that used to be called the Imbaba airport."

And although the Manshiet Nasser incident was a tragedy, Moselhi points out that it did have one positive outcome:

"Positive things can come out of disasters. What happened pushed the issue of informal settlements to the top of the list of priorities on the government agenda. We now have a system in place to deal with them. In the past, we would have held a very successful meeting regarding the issue, but everyone would forget about it once it was over because of the lack of a system. Today, the Ministerial Group for Social Development is in existence, based on a presidential decree, and will follow up and make sure that plans are put into action."

The Governors

For Cairo Governor Dr. Abdel Azim Wazir, the question of the future of Cairo and the informal settlements in the city is one that is never far from his mind. He hesitates, however, to talk about his own vision. "What I think is not the issue," he says. Wazir is a believer in the importance of the capital of Egypt, pointing out that it must transcend any official who may or may not be in office in a couple of years:

"Any vision about the future of the capital must come from the people. We are working on a strategic visionary plan for the capital. We have chosen a number of individuals who represent the different groups of Egyptian society. We are going to sit with them to find out what their vision for the future of their city is. We want to come to an agreement of what we want Cairo to become, and then adhere to this agreement. When you go to Paris or Rome, you will find that great cities do not change with the passing of the years."

For the time being, there are some major guidelines that the Committee of Concerned Cairenes has agreed upon: preserving Cairo's heritage, preserving Cairo's distinctive character, and preserving the Nile.

As for the informal settlements in the city, Wazir "would like them to disappear overnight." The idea, of course, is not that he would like to dispose of the city's poor, but rather to offer them a better life in well-planned homes. "It is impossible to wake up one day and find all the informal settlements gone," he explains:

"Time is an issue, funds are an issue, and so are priorities. We must find alternative locations where we can build decent homes for these people. I dream of seeing all of Cairo's residents living the life they deserve, as citizens of the ancient Egyptian nation. I dream of seeing all Egyptians living a decent life where all human rights are respected: the right to housing, the right to healthcare, the right to education and knowledge. This cannot happen too quickly. But we have to hold on to our realistic agenda. The most important thing is to have plans, and to have the will to turn these plans into reality."

After the Governorate of Giza was divided into two governorates, resulting in the new Sixth of October Governorate, Giza lost a major source of revenue. Sixth of October is home to a number of flourishing businesses, shopping centers, and factories. Giza Governor Sayyed Abel-Aziz sees this as a development challenge that he believes Giza is worthy of. "I believe we have a lot to look forward to. Our development is going to be vertical from now in, in many senses of the word. Vertical because we do not have any more land to develop horizontally, and vertical because the challenge is going to be to improve on what we already have," Abdel-Aziz says.

One very positive aspect of the division, according to the Governor, is the lack of land that can potentially become a site for future informal settlements.

"Existing informal settlements must be turned into civilized districts. The residents of Giza must know that the division has their own welfare in mind. Now that the borders of the governorate have been resized, we cannot have people coming from Upper Egypt or the Delta in search for work living here. There is no more space left for new residents. As for our residents, in ten years they will find that they belong to a beautiful spot with decent services and a lot of potential."

His belief is based on a master plan for five or six upcoming projects that are going to generate needed revenue. One of the most important projects is the North of Giza Project (better known as the Imbaba Airport Project). "It is an example of an unplanned residential area that we will turn into a planned project, which will hopefully do the residents a lot of good," Abdel-Aziz says. Many of these projects are based upon the active participation of the

civil society, the governor explains. "We have over 1 200 NGOs in Giza, and we are currently working with many of them, through the participatory development committee, in order to activate their role in society. The future of Giza depends on the involvement of all concerned groups," he says. The future is bright, Abdel-Aziz believes. "The issue of informal settlements is going to be resolved. It may take time but one day, I am certain, we will find that all the areas in Giza are well-planned and complete with all the services residents need and deserve."

Boulaq al-Dakrour District Chief

Boulaq al-Dakrour, a Giza district, is where one of the PDP's most successful projects has taken place. Through the collaboration of the district administration and the active members of the area's civil society, many improvements have been introduced to the lives of the over-populated district's residents through the proper allocation of a GTZ grant. Emad Adam, Boulaq al-Dakrour's District Chief, is hopeful that the future holds even more positive changes for the residents. "Boulaq al-Dakrour is going to be a different place in two years," he believes.

The administrator has based his future vision on upgrading efforts that are presently underway. "The Zomor canal is going to be covered in its entirety. The Ministry of Irrigation is completing what GTZ started. Parts of the covered canal are going to be turned into parks. Once the building of the Mehwar is finished, we are going to use the areas under the bridges for car parks and open sports courts. Soon after, we will start to pave the roads, and the crowdedness will be relieved after the closed streets are opened. In just a couple of years, when all these improvements are in place, Boulaq al-Dakrour is not going to be a district of informal areas, but rather a district of well-organized, formerly informal areas," Adam says.

Adam believes none of the district's areas will have any unsuitable housing units, as plans are underway to upgrade all of the areas in Boulaq al-Dakrour. He is of the opinion that when residents find that they live in well-ventilated homes, in decent streets with available services and amenities, that their quality of life will improve so much that the security situation in the district will change for the better. As the district chief, Adam works closely with the Ministry of the Interior. He thinks that the crime rate is directly related to the environment individuals come from:

"I do not think people living in plain sight, in homes with numbers and proper addresses, will want to commit crimes. Criminals know how to hide in informal areas, where it is sometimes impossible to find anyone in the densely populated streets. If we needed a resident in the past, it would have been impossible to send him or her a letter in the mail. How do you reach someone without an address?"

The challenge, he believes, is to put a stop to the growth of new settlements in the future. Adam is quick to add, however, that this is not much of a challenge, because the district is out of agricultural land due to the residents' encroachment. "Things can only get better from now on. Since there is no more new land, we are giving residents permits to tear down and rebuild their homes according to the new building regulations. Why should anyone want to build informally in the future?" he asks.

Manshiet Nasser's Local Popular Council Chief

Abdallah Abdel-Ghani, Chief of Manshiet Nasser's Local Popular Council, is confident that the future of his district is a positive one, thanks to the government decision that declared Manshiet Nasser's informal areas upgradeable. "Only areas where the residents are in danger, like the area of al-Duweiqa, will be torn down, and the residents will be relocated," he says. And one of the most

positive moves, Abdel-Ghani believes, is the decision to grant residents the right to own their homes. "It is all thanks to the guidance of His Excellency the President, of course. But I must say there are still some problems there," the chief says.

According to Abdel-Ghani, the only way to ensure a better, more stable future for the district is through ownership:

"But the prices the officials have set are too exorbitant. We have written to them, we have spoken with them, we have held meetings, to let the voice of the people be heard. How can an individual suffering from very difficult economic circumstances be asked to pay 1 200 Egyptian pounds per square meter for a home that he built years ago? Where will people get the money? The residents will not buy. Why should they want to pay so much for a house or apartment they already live in?"

Abdel-Ghani points out that many different strata of society live in Manshiet Nasser, "from judges to teachers, officers, workers and skilled laborers to those who try to win their daily bread through any kind of job they can get. But it is a developing district and people's circumstances are tough. You cannot ask a resident of Ezbet Bekhit to pay 150 000 pounds for his home."

Abdel-Ghani is himself a resident of Manshiet Nasser, and he declares that he would not be willing to pay so much for his home. "And if I do not pay they can do nothing about it. Nobody can decide to tear down our homes. I just want to say to those who exaggerate the price of the land that they are depriving the government's treasury of lots of revenue. In the past, when the prices were 50 or 70 or even 120 pounds, many residents rushed and paid in full," he says. For any upgrading or improvement to take place, Abdel-Ghani believes, "those officials sitting at their desks must try to empathize with the difficult lives and the suffering of the people in Manshiet Nasser. How can land in New Cairo,

Shorouk, and 10th of Ramadan be cheaper than the land here?"

Empathy, he continues, means understanding how the residents built their homes. "We built our homes through chipping away at rock. Our women carried water tanks on their heads and climbed the mountain to help build their homes. We carried water on the backs of animals, to be used for building and drinking. And now they tell me 1 200 pounds per square meter. This tone must change for the upgrading of Manshiet Nasser to bear fruit."

Cairo: A capital in constant movement.

IDSC's Vision for the Egyptian Capital:
"Cairo 2050"[1]

by NAHLA EL-SEBAI

The Center for Future Studies (CFS) at the Cabinet's Information and Decision Support Center (IDSC) is developing several scenarios concerning the future of Egypt. Among these is a collaboration with the General Organization for Physical Planning (GOPP), "Cairo 2050." This project on the vision for Cairo tries to produce guidelines for Egypt's capital city 50 years from the present by asking a number of questions: Is it enough to increase efforts in developing Cairo and solving some of its problems? Is it desirable that today's Cairo will still be Egypt's capital city in the year 2050, or would it be better to build a new capital? Would it even be possible to do so? What are the criteria of choosing a new capital's location?

The study began by considering the significant increase in population. It became clear that it would be necessary to extend the inhabited area of Egypt, as since the country's population is expected to more than double by the year 2050, if no strong and effective policies are implemented in the future. Therefore, the study concludes that 'another Egypt' has to be created within approximately 40 years to absorb this population increase, and which contains the same population density as the present city, around 1 600 person per km². The inhabited area of Egypt must be increased by three or four times to improve this high population density, which is also the source of many other problems such as pollution, high rates of crime, and chaotic traffic. This plan should be started as soon as possible.

According to the study, increasing the inhabited area of Egypt would require an expansion of economic and developmental activities along four main areal axes:

• An expansion along the sides of the Nile Valley and in the Delta, to absorb some of the population in these areas into new villages and cities.

• Expansion along the Red Sea coast and Sinai, where tourism could lead economic development and population resettlement, followed by an expansion and deepening of other activities such as mining, industry, and information and trade services.

• Expansion into the Western Desert, which could be divided into three main areas, each specializing in certain activities.

• Expansion of the coastal area in the north, which enjoys a good weather and still has a high potential for activities such as tourism, shipping, and the development of duty-free zones.

The second part of the study, "Cairo 2050", discusses the option of creating a new capital city for Egypt. Several aspects are mentioned.

Urban Aspects: Cairo today has poor basic living conditions, making it unsuitable for being a capital city. Among its problems are the very high population density, very difficult transportation and traffic, the deterioration of public services, and the growth of informal areas.

[1] This paper is based on a study at CFS conducted by Dr. Zaafarany.

Security Aspects: It is difficult to ensure the security of politicians, political and economic institutions, and ordinary people in a densely crowded city like Cairo. It is also difficult to manage disasters like fires, earthquakes, or emergency medical services in a timely manner because of heavy traffic.

Military Aspects: Cairo could be an attractive target for military attacks, as it has the highest concentration of population, infrastructure, and economic activities in Egypt. Due to the traffic, the evacuation of the population would be a major problem.

Socio-political Aspects: A new capital for Egypt could play the role of a large national project that unifies all Egyptians, as did the Aswan High Dam. It could also help decrease the dissatisfaction Cairo's residents feel because of their current problems. It could help de-concentrate investments, work opportunities, and highly qualified workforce from Cairo and help prevent the deterioration of living standards elsewhere in the country.

Economic Aspects: Time, effort, and money are wasted due to the shortage of services in Cairo and could be transformed into more productive opportunities. Tourism in Cairo is threatened by the current environmental and traffic conditions. Building a new capital city for Egypt could help in attracting funds now exhausted in suboptimal real estate investments.

The third part of the study deals with the question of how to choose the location of the new capital. Many different factors have to be considered, some of which are political, others of which concern planning. However, the final decision needs more detailed qualitative and quantitative research, comparing between different possible locations. According to the study, the main criteria would be:

Distance from Cairo: The first factor is moving the new location at least 300 kilometers away from Cairo, in order not to be transformed into another of its suburbs, as has been the case with a number of the current new cities like 6th of October, Shourouk, and Obour. At the same time, because Greater Cairo is the demographic center of Egypt, and because of its centrality to transport and travel, any new capital must not be too far from the current demographic center.

Relation with the Coasts and the Boundaries: The capital city should be not too far away from the sea, in order to facilitate communication with the outside world. At the same time, it needs to keep a certain distance from the coast for two reasons: to be at a distance from any possible invasion, and to avoid effects of rising sea levels due to climate change. Accordingly, the study recommends that the new capital city not be in any of the areas of Sinai or the Suez Canal cities.

Relation with Current Cities: After about 30 years of the Egyptian experience in building new cities, it appears that the new capital should be far enough from large and fast growing cities like Cairo and Alexandria. It is better to be close to small and medium size cities for mutual development to be possible.

Relation with the Nile River: The two major options are the western desert and the desert fringe of the Nile Valley. Although it is advisable to keep the new capital far from the Nile Valley for developmental reasons, the groundwater resources in the Western Desert make it important to stay relatively close to the Nile.

Building the New Capital on Flat Areas or on the High Plateau: Although Egyptians are used to life in the valley, the new capital should be built on the high plateau to leave the flat low areas available for agriculture and other development projects.

Aesthetic Features: The location on a plateau will give the new city an aesthetic appeal. The new capital must be designed in a beautiful and effective manner, in order to attract Cairo's residents to it, and to establish a psychological connection among them.

A mother and her child looking forward to
a better future. Boulaq al-Dakrour.

PDP's Future Goals and Visions

by JÜRGEN STRYJAK

According to the latest statistics issued by the Ministry of Economic Development, Egypt has succeeded in reducing poverty by 2% since 2005. In 2008 alone, more than 8 million Egyptian citizens have reportedly been lifted from poverty. For professionals working in the field of informal settlements this is good news, since poverty is one of the main reasons for the existence of informal neighborhoods.

At the same time, continuing population growth makes it difficult to be excessively optimistic. While rural migration to Cairo slowed down during the past decades, high birth rates, especially among impoverished people, keep the demand for cheap housing alive. The Egyptian government, unable to provide a sufficient amount of affordable housing, will not be seeing the informal settlements disappear anytime soon. For Marion Fischer, this reflects a global trend. "Informal settlements are a worldwide phenomenon," says the team leader of GTZ's Participatory Development Program in Urban Areas (PDP). "In addition to a small upper and middle class able to afford a decent living, there is a continuously increasing number of poor people." These poor people, a majority in most Third World or developing countries, will have to turn more and more to illegal options in order to find a place to live. In Fischer's opinion, these illegal settlements do not necessarily differ from their legal, but similarly poor, counterparts in terms of standard of living, infrastructure, and social services.

Informal settlements have ceased to be a problem existing only at the edges of the society. In cities like Cairo, they represent the average way of living and housing today. Almost three out of four Cairenes already live in informal settlements. Nobody is able to illustrate this development better than Mohamed Ibrahim from the PDP's GIS Unit. Within a few seconds, he displays satellite images on his computer screen that impressively show the spread of informal areas in Greater Cairo and, moreover, give a frightful insight into the disastrous living conditions there.

"I joined the PDP in 2002 to identify the exact number of informal settlements," says Ibrahim. The task appeared to be a difficult one, since informal areas are subject to certain, sometimes differing, criteria. For this reason, the GIS Unit set up a list of definitions, which included high population density, narrow streets and alleys, lack of infrastructure and social services, as well as the fact that most of these settlements were built without proper municipal planning and many without a clear land ownership situation. After that, explains Ibrahim, we were able to identify an area of 133 km² of informal settlements in Greater Cairo. This is four times the area that official authorities have previously acknowledged as being informal. "They don't like to see the real picture," he says, "because it makes them look bad. In some cases, it has been really hard work to convince local administrations to define certain areas as informal."

Ibrahim shows a satellite image of Manshiet Nasser. Clearly visible are a huge number of dark buildings that have become almost black because of the high level of pollution in this area. "They burn

garbage there," explains Ibrahim, "inside and outside of their houses." Another image shows the streets of Boulaq al-Dakrour, with streets too long and narrow for any fire truck to reach a place inside the neighborhood in the case of a fire.

The GIS is not only for collecting satellite images. It is combining them with a large database of communal information. Ibrahim directs his computer mouse to Mounira, an informal area in the district of Imbaba. It takes him a few mouse clicks to show the number of schools there, he even can see how many boys and girls study there, and in how many classes and shifts. Mounira, with its 400 000 inhabitants, runs only two schools, while the neighboring Medinat al-Tahrir district receives 8 000 pupils more than it should according to its population size.

This is important information for local authorities who want to improve the social infrastructure according to the needs of the residents. The GIS can also help in case of emergencies. For example, Ibrahim explains that during the 2008 bread crisis, it took a few mouse clicks for him to identify areas without enough bakeries. The GIS was set up in cooperation with the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS), the General Organisation for Physical Planning (GOPP), as well as other governmental and local administrations. The GIS is more than suitable for authorities around the city to use for their own administrative purposes. Within the PDP, GTZ offered 12 GIS training courses in 2008, with around 50 local administrative employees participating.

By transferring knowledge to the communities, GTZ tries to achieve one of its main goals: to leave self-supporting and sustainable development processes after the PDP comes to an end in 2011. Throughout the years it has implemented pilot projects, brought many members of the civil society together, and has conducted needs assessments in

order to learn about the problems and expectations of both residents and authorities. On various occasions, it has demonstrated that all stakeholders depend strongly on each other.

It is far from being clear, however, whether GTZ alone will succeed in empowering all participants to continue in this line of work. "We have developed models, but it's not clear how well they are replicable," Fischer says. "GTZ and KfW have made significant efforts in these pilot areas. Now the big challenge is to have the models replicated by the public administration. Therefore, PDP is now focussing on capacity development of public administration staff."

In recent years, ministries and governorate administrations have shown themselves to be open to a participatory development approach. As PDP staff members have learned, it has become easier to find responsible people in higher-level state administrations and in countrywide NGOs, who understand the necessity of such an approach and who promote it. For example, First Lady Suzanne Mubarak's Integrated Care Society (ICS) is collaborating with GTZ, as is the global bank Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation

(HSBC), which runs corporate social responsibility operations in Egypt. It has asked for support in the field of needs assessment and, as Fischer adds, even headhunted a staff member from the highly professional Egyptian PDP team.

Since one of the PDP's slogans is "not more investment, but investing more intelligently," everything depends on the manpower at lower levels of administration and in communities. The people there have started to talk to each other, but their attitude is still the same. "Money will have no effect, if the people don't change," says PDP member Khaled Abdelhalim. When development NGOs come to them, the people still wait for money and for someone to do their job. "Everyone expects donors in Egypt," explains PDP team member Salma Sabri. "The local NGOs know that donors have to get rid spend their money in a limited time, so they are used to just writing proposals for projects to be financed by the donors."
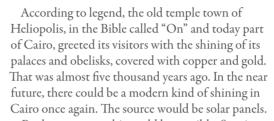
The success of every participative initiative is strongly based on the skills and the willingness of local politicians. It is difficult, however, to blame a governorate department chief for not developing enough passion while he earns only 80 Euros

per month for a job that is highly stressful and demanding. Furthermore, district chiefs rotate yearly, and most of them are more than happy to leave a position in an informal neighborhood. This makes it difficult for PDP to establish a truly close connection to local decision makers and to mobilize them.

It looks as if Egyptian society will have to re-invent itself in order to face the huge challenges that population growth and increasing social problems produce in informal settlements. The pressure on all administrative levels is growing constantly. During the 1990s, the Egyptian government suddenly turned its attention to the informal neighborhoods of the Imbaba district because social distress had transformed them into a hotbed for radicalism and extremism. If things do not change dramatically, the government may soon face the same situation in many of the other informal settlements of Greater Cairo.

Buying subsidised bread. Boulaq al-Dakrour.

Mission Possible?
Towards a Sustainable
Future for Cairo

by EDGAR GÖLL

According to legend, the old temple town of Heliopolis, in the Bible called "On" and today part of Cairo, greeted its visitors with the shining of its palaces and obelisks, covered with copper and gold. That was almost five thousand years ago. In the near future, there could be a modern kind of shining in Cairo once again. The source would be solar panels.
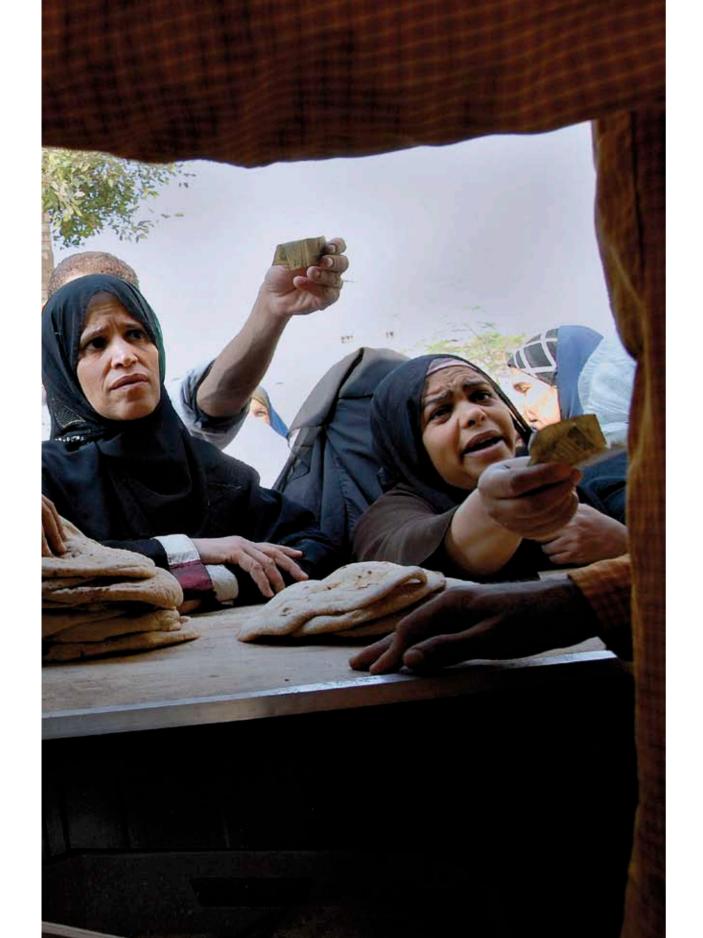
By the year 2020 this could be possible. Starting today it could be a very smart solution, because a region blessed with year-round powerful sunshine would no longer be wasting this potential source of energy. A big part of the consumption of electrical energy would be produced by solar panels on top of big buildings, and of schools, public buildings, ministries, factories, using their roofs or even facades as platforms for panels. This precious source of energy could power production machinery, households, infrastructure, notebooks, and many e-cars and e-buses.

This 'shining future' of Cairo would not come just in the field of energy. What else would a visitor come there to see in the year 2020? Many run-down buildings and areas could become green islands for recreation and sports. Apartment buildings could be renovated, many of them affordable and filled with young families, and many of the buildings would be 'green'—using modern architecture, materials, and technologies to reduce resource use and improve living conditions. Streets and roads would be less crowded and less chaotic because of attractive public transportation, smart parking management, enforced traffic regulations, more awareness-building in schools, driving schools, and the media with regard to responsibility, care, and security. The supply of clean water could be much better and meet the demand in terms of quantity as well as quality.

The megacity would be less densely crowded than before, due to a strong and systematic regional development strategy that reduces population growth and redistributes it towards regions beyond

the center. A special attraction—not least for tourists—would be solar boats and buses, which would service and connect several important areas of Cairo (the pyramids of Giza, the American University of Cairo, and the airport, for example). These services would also be an indirect and positive advertisement for the solar and wind energy that Egypt might export by 2020 to the EU. People in Cairo would smell the clean air. And what visitors would not immediately see or smell would be another new quality of Cairo: the advanced education system. Decision makers, in collaboration with stakeholders, will have renovated the old facilities, built new ones, co-operated with parents and students and the neighborhood, using external funding for renewable energy production and effective water utilization. The image of the schools in 2020 would be very positive because they would have become power centers for sustainable innovation activities and concrete solutions.

Such a 'shining' future! for Cairo would be based on a major change in the culture, ethics, and habits of the citizens and the leadership. The basic rule would be to utilize all available resources in a smart and sustainable way. This would be supported by a philosophy

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A boy enjoying some greenery in his neighborhood.
Boulaq al-Dakrour.

of appreciation, responsibility, transparency, and solidarity. This development is not a machine-like process, but a complex change requiring many impulses, various resources, many supporters and promoters. This can be and should be done in almost every institution, in every family, every school and university, in newspapers, the radio and television, in books and in shops, in markets and stores. It is about education and raising awareness, about supportive context conditions (incentive structures) and top official leadership. Over time, the attitudes among the elite as well as among citizens would become more oriented towards a sustainable development 'Egyptian style.' Yet a better and sustainable future for Cairo needs two ingredients: a collectively shared vision, and more efficient modern management.

Of course, the starting point today is very complicated. Just to name an example of how such challenges look in Cairo 2009:

• Many urban housing units are unused, either vacant or closed (around 3.7 million, which is 32% national average and even more than 40% in New Towns). These are precious potential resources to be mobilized instead of building new or wasting existing resources.

• There is an enormous gulf between supply and demand, and most newly formed households cannot afford a formal sector produced house.

• At least 45% of new Greater Cairo housing is produced without formal authorization, and around 90% of real estate property is not registered.

It seems that—as in most other cities and countries—many politicians and administrators in Cairo follow traditional and convenient approaches like 'muddling through,' or rely on insular, symbolic actions. Sometimes, additional exotic projects are adapted from Western countries. However, experience from many other large cities and of Cairo itself proofs that the complex problems of a megacity like Cairo cannot be solved with old

policies or with singular activities. Instead, strategies with a new quality have to be utilized.

Fortunately, in Egypt some important and promising steps have been taken in this direction, such as the ambitious Greater Cairo Master Plan, the New Housing/Building Law 119/2008, and national decentralization efforts. New sustainable approaches have received support from the Arab Urban Development Institute (AUDI), which has good experience with innovative urban development activities. In one of its reports it concludes: The economical future of countries is determined by their urban centers, this is mainly due to the increase in urban population. Generally, within the framework of decentralization, more power and resources have been given to cities and its population worldwide. This in turn will double the importance of good governance and good management of cities' economies.

Experience proves that it is quite possible to start such ambitious sustainability strategies and be successful. This has been shown by examples like that of Alexandria, which had organized a City Development Strategy (CDS). Among their lessons learned are the following:

The Alexandria CDS, and the resulting capital investment plan that will be partly implemented under the Alexandria Development Plan, resulted in a shift in local development practice in Egypt away from the traditional top-down, supply-driven approach. The latter was criticized for: (a) its narrow focus on infrastructural issues and little emphasis on the local economy dynamics, needs and institutional/financial dimensions, (b) little private sector participation and understanding of market dynamics/trends, and (c) non-participatory nature in planning, decision-making and implementation. Instead, the Alexandria CDS and follow-up investments rely on a bottom-up approach where ownership rests with local authorities/stakeholders with emphasis on broad-based participation in

formulating the long-term vision and identifying development programs.

There are two basic prerequisites. The first would be to realize that doing business as usual is no longer possible, and that the costs for not changing today's course would be extremely high, with many negative effects. The second prerequisite of a strong sustainable strategy would be to understand the reasons for the deficits and failures of the traditional policies and management systems, to utilize all local and regional sources, including stakeholders, and to use all available lessons learned from earlier experiences and from other cities and societies. Most importantly, such a strategy should develop a more adequate and effective governance system, and give impulses to various institutions and actors in this direction, to orchestrate the improvement of living conditions and policy-making. Otherwise, it would be like having a 'great recipe without an able cook.'

In a major report about Cairo this is made clear. In referring to the implementation of the Master Plan, it states:

"Four administrative bodies exist in the study area, and ministries take responsibilities of their own entities. Tasks of the General Organization for Physical Planning (GOPP) focus on formulating the Master Plan of the study area, and there is no agency to implement the proposed Master Plan, which needs to develop inter-governorate and regional projects. Hence, a new organization shall need to be established to implement the Master Plan" (Nippon Koei Co. LTD., 2007).

Similar insights come from experts and practitioners from many different places. For instance, in Alexandria experts have proposed

establishing a "thinking unit" with the tasks to become "a bench-mark tracker, a coordination center, and liaison between all the different task groups to assure synergies and effective implementation" (Dajani, 2005). With regard to sustainable development, several cities in the EU have started sustainable management processes in order to become more effective and successful.

Among the lessons learned from such huge challenges is that there needs to be a concerted effort of all important institutions concerned, all stakeholders have to become involved, and their various resources utilized. Furthermore, there has to be strong political will, a new division of tasks between the central government and the cities and communities, and a change of old perceptions and roles. Last, but not least, there are huge financial and administrative resources required to improve the living conditions in Cairo. These, however, will be much less than the business-as-usual approach, which has dominated for so long.

Finally, the 'power' for such ambitious activities can only come from the people. The civil society and the private sector have to be mobilized in careful and specific ways, trust has to be built through adequate forms of communication, transparency, participation, and decision making. One major part of this strategy would be to develop visions for the city (using existing work by GOPP, IDSC, and others) and to refine them on a much more local, even neighborhood, level in Cairo. As soon as people find themselves taken seriously, many of them will mobilize their potential and energies for a collective and social vision. In this way, Cairo could become a 'shining city' again.

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About the Contributors

Dr. Khaled Mahmoud Abdel Halim (*khaled.mahmoud@gtz.de*) is an architect with a social inclination, who has been working in community development for eleven years. He received his masters and Ph.D. degrees in housing policy, planning, and practice. He has been working for GTZ in the Participatory Development Program in Urban Areas since April 2004. Dr. Abdel Halim is a lecturer in the Department of Architecture at Helwan University, and a founding member of the Egyptian Earth Construction Association, an NGO that promotes appropriate building technologies and sustainable development. His work is aimed at making the development and management of human settlements more people-centered and environmentally friendly.

William Cobbett (*wcobbett@citiesalliance.org*) is Manager of Cities Alliance, based in Washington DC. Previously, he had served as the Alliance's Senior Urban Upgrading Advisor on secondment from UN-ABITAT, where he had been acting Chief of the Shelter Branch. Cobbett began his urban career in 1988 as Coordinator of Planact, an urban NGO in Johannesburg. In 1992 he was appointed National Coordinator of the Department of Local and Regional Government, and Housing, for the African National Congress (ANC). After the 1994 election, he was appointed Director-General of the National Department of Housing. Prior to joining the United Nations, he was Director of Housing for the City of Cape Town.

Manal el-Jesri (*meljesri@yahoo.com*) is a writer living and working in Egypt. Her work is published in the monthly English-language magazine *Egypt Today*. She studied journalism at the American University in Cairo, graduating in 1994. Since embarking on her writing career, she has covered various aspects of Egypt's cultural, political, and social life, but it is writing about the nation's underprivileged that satisfies el-Jesri the most. When asked by GTZ to represent the official point of view el-Jesri "was hesitant, since I always champion the point of view of the poor. But now that the work is over, I am glad I had the opportunity to see things from a different perspective."

Nahla M. el-Sebai (*nahla@idsc.net.eg*) is the Deputy Head of the Center for Futures Studies (CFS) at the Egyptian Cabinet's Information and Decision Support Centre (IDSC). She was a member of the key research team that worked on a holistic vision for Egypt in the year 2030, which was formulated under the umbrella of the Egyptian Cabinet of Ministers to draw up a complete picture for Egypt in the economic, political, and social fields for the year 2030.

Martin Fink (*martin.fink@cimonline.de*) is social scientist living and working in Egypt. Since 2007 he has been working as a Project Officer for CID Consulting, as part of the CIM integrated expert program of the GTZ in the fields of informal sector recycling and non-formal education.

Marion Fischer (*marion.fischer@gtz.de*) is the Manager of the Participatory Development Program in Urban Areas in Cairo. She has worked for GTZ as a development expert since 1984 in various countries in West Africa, as well as in Brazil and Germany. She specializes in community development, regional planning, and urban development.

Dr. Mona Gado (*mona.gado@yahoo.com*) is a lecturer in English and American literature at Banha University, Egypt. She holds an M.A. from the American University of Cairo and a Ph.D. from the University of Sheffield, U.K. Her research interests involve questions of gender and issues related to the role of the government. She is also concerned with education reform.

Julia Gerlach (*gerlach_julia@yahoo.com*) was born in 1969. Based in Cairo, she works as a correspondent for German Media. Before moving to Egypt, she worked as an editor and reporter for *Heute Journal*, the main news magazine of the German TV station *ZDF* in Mainz. Her book *Zwischen Pop und Dschihad* about the lifestyle of young religious Muslims in Germany was published in 2006.

Dr. Edgar Göll (*e.goell@web.de*) is a social scientist currently working as a Future Researcher and advisor at the Center for Future Studies (CFS) at the Cabinet's Information and Decision Support Center (IDSC) in Cairo, Egypt. He is on leave from the Institute for Futures Studies and Technology Assessment, Berlin, where he has worked since 1995. His major research interest is sustainable development, with a special focus on strategic and institutional aspects.

Gerhard Haase-Hindenberg (*haasehindenberg@versanet.de*) was born in 1953, and has been an actor, director, and dramatist at theaters in Nuremberg, Munich, and Berlin, as well as for television and films. He regularly writes reports and does interviews for *Die Welt*, the *Berliner Zeitung*, and for various radio networks. He has written several books in a nonfictional, novelistic style, published by Random House/Germany and translated into various languages.

Amira Howeidy (*howeidy@hotmail.com*) is an Egyptian journalist with 17 years of experience covering political, social, and cultural issues in Egypt and the Arab world. She is the political editor of the English-language Cairo-based *Al-Ahram Weekly* newspaper and Cairo correspondent for the Lebanese *Assafir* newsaper in Beirut.

Regina Kipper (*reginakipper@yahoo.de*) studied geography, journalism, and cultural anthropology at the University of Mainz, Germany. In her thesis she analyzed the importance of social networking in development cooperation projects, particularly the example of the GTZ Participatory Development Program in Cairo. During her studies she focused on urban and social geography. She has worked at the Center for Research on the Arab World, as well as in the fields of real estate and international cooperation.

Verena Liebel (*verena.liebel@googlemail.com*) is a cultural coordinator, focusing on intercultural activities between Germany and the Middle East, mainly Egypt. After graduation from her studies in sociology, politics and science of arts at the University of Konstanz, Germany, she stayed and worked in Cairo for two years as a freelance coordinator of art projects, and as consultant for the GTZ Egypt. She lives and works in Germany.

Gundula Löffler (*gundula.loeffler@gtz.de*) is a GTZ expert working in the Participatory Development Program in Urban Areas as advisor on capacity development for local governance. She holds masters degrees in public policy and management and in urban planning. She specializes in administrative reform, intergovernmental relations and decentralization, and urban development.

Elena Piffero (*elenapiffero@gmail.com*) is a Ph.D. candidate in international cooperation and sustainable development policies at the University of Bologna, Italy. Her doctoral dissertation is about the impact of participatory practices in the development of informal areas in Cairo, where she has worked as an associate researcher for the GTZ Participatory Development Program.

Sarah Sabry (*sarahsabry@mail.com*) is a Ph.D. candidate at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. She has been a consultant to the Ford Foundation in Egypt, the International Institute for Environment and Development in London, the Arab Human Rights Fund, and the Arab Learning Initiative. Sabry has held a number of management positions in the IT sector, was chairwoman of a local Egyptian NGO working on poverty reduction, and helped establish the Community Service Program at the American University in Cairo. Her research interests include urban poverty, social policy, youth, civil society, and the role of the state.

Dr. Marion Séjourné (*marion.sejourne@gmail.com*) holds a Ph.D. in geography, focusing on informal settlements, land titling programs, and urban policies in Egypt. She has been working in Cairo for 10 years as a researcher at CEDEJ (a French research center), as well as an expert for aid agencies, including GTZ, USAID, and the World Bank.

Dr. Dina K. Shehayeb (*dina@dkshehayeb.com*) is a professor in the Institute of Architecture and Housing at the Housing and Building National Research Center in Cairo, as well as the principle of her own consultancy firm and an adjunct faculty member at the American University in Cairo. She graduated as an architect in 1984, and earned her Ph.D. from University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee in 1995, focusing on human aspects in design and planning. Specializing in transdisciplinary research, she works on bridging the gap between the physical, built environment and its socio-psychological and cultural dimensions, as applied to affordable and appropriate housing and planning, community-based urban design, participatory design, as well as user needs-based design and guidelines.

Jürgen Stryjak (*stryjak@weltreporter.net*) was born in 1962 and is a Cairo-based correspondent for German-language media in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. He reports regularly for the German public radio station *ARD* on political, social, and cultural affairs in six Arab countries and is a member of the global correspondent network weltreporter.net.

Claudia Wiens (*info@claudiawiens.com | www.claudiawiens.com*) is a photojournalist based in Cairo and Istanbul, and she travels frequently to other parts of the world for her work. She contributes regularly to international publications and is the author of two photography books, the recent one being about Myanmar. Her work often portrays unfamiliar aspects of the Middle East, and her work has frequently been featured in exhibitions in Germany, Egypt, and England.

Abbreviations

AUDI	Arab Urban Development Institute
BMZ	Bundesministerium für Wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung (Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development)
CAPMAS	Central Agency of Public Mobilization and Statistics
CBO	Community Based Organization
CDA	Community Development Association
CDS	City Development Strategy
CFS	Center for Future Studies
CID	Community and Institutional Development Consulting
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
CIM	Centrum für Internationale Migration und Entwicklung (Center for International Migration and Development)
DANIDA	Danish International Development Agency
ECHR	Egyptian Center for Housing Rights
EDI	Egyptian Decentralization Initiative
EQI	Environmental Quality International
EU	European Union
GC	Greater Cairo
GDP	Gross domestic product
GIS	Geographic Information System
GOPP	General Organization for Physical Planning
GTZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (German Technical Cooperation)
HSBC	Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation
ICS	Integrated Care Society
IDSC	Information and Decision Support Center
INP	Institute of National Planning
ISDF	Informal Settlements Development Facility
KfW	Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau (German Development Bank)
LE	Egyptian Pound
LPC	Local Popular Council
NGO	Non Governmental Organization
PDP	Participatory Urban Development Program in Urban Areas
PNA	Participatory Needs Assessment
Prep Con	Preparation Conference
SME	Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
UN	United Nations
UN HABITAT	United Nations Human Settlements Program
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

Deutsche Gesellschaft für
Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) GmbH

German Technical Cooperation

GTZ Egypt, Office Cairo
4d, El Gezira Street, 3rd Floor
11211 Zamalek
Cairo, Egypt
E gtz-aegypten@gtz.de
I www.gtz.de