

The case of  
**Cairo, Egypt**  
 by David Sims

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Source: CIA factbook

**I. INTRODUCTION: THE CITY**

Cairo needs no introduction to most readers. It is the largest city in both Africa and the Middle East, capital of Egypt for over a thousand years, and an important political and cultural focal point in the region.

**A NATIONAL CONTEXT**

Table 1 shows that Egypt has been urbanising from quite early in the 20th century, but it also shows that that the urban population appears to have levelled off (and even declined) in the last decade, at roughly 42 per cent of the total. Over the same period national population growth has been brought down from 2.8 to 2 per cent annually. Does this mean that Egypt is well advanced in its demographic transition and that urban population has stabilised? Probably not. Two per cent national annual growth is still high, and seems to be worryingly stuck at this level. Total female fertility has also stagnated at 3.5 children/lifetime.

The figures presented here are from the Census of Egypt, which maintains an administrative definition of what is an urban place. This means, for example, that there are cities (provincial sub-capitals in frontier provinces) with populations numbering in the hundreds and at the same time there are rural villages on the periphery of Cairo and in the Delta whose populations are in the hundreds of thousands. A recent study of the 1996 Census results has redistributed the Egyptian

Table 1: Egypt's Population and Urbanisation

Year	Total Population (millions)	Urban Population (millions)	Urban %	Annual Growth %
1960	25.98	9.87	38.0%	n/a
1976	43.73	19.15	43.8%	3.0%
1986	48.25	21.23	44.0%	2.8%
1996	59.31	25.27	42.6%	1.8%

Source: Census of Egypt, various years

population by settlement type and size, and it calculates that 66.8 per cent of the population now lives in cities and “urban villages” with populations over 10,000, while only 33.2 per cent of the population in rural villages (Denis, 1999)<sup>1</sup>.

**1. History of Cairo**

Cairo (*al qahira*, “the victorious”) was founded in AD 969, on land adjacent to Fustat, another Islamic city established at the dawn of Islam in AD 647. These cities were themselves preceded by Roman and Pharaonic settlements (Babylon

and Memphis) in the same approximate location at the strategic southern apex of the Nile Delta.

By the 14th century, under the Mamaluks, Cairo had become a metropolis unrivalled anywhere in the medieval world, dominating regional trade and exhibiting a vast concentration of wealth and architectural splendour. But by the 17th century, under Ottoman rule, Cairo had entered a long period of decline. It was only in the mid 19th century, under Mohamed Ali Pasha and his successors, that Cairo began to reassert itself politically and to enter into a process of economic growth and modernisation, dependent in large part on European entrepreneurs and technicians. Entrepreneurial minorities such as Copts, Greeks, Armenians, and Levantines figured heavily in economic life. From 1882 until 1936 Cairo, and Egypt as a whole, fell under British colonial rule.

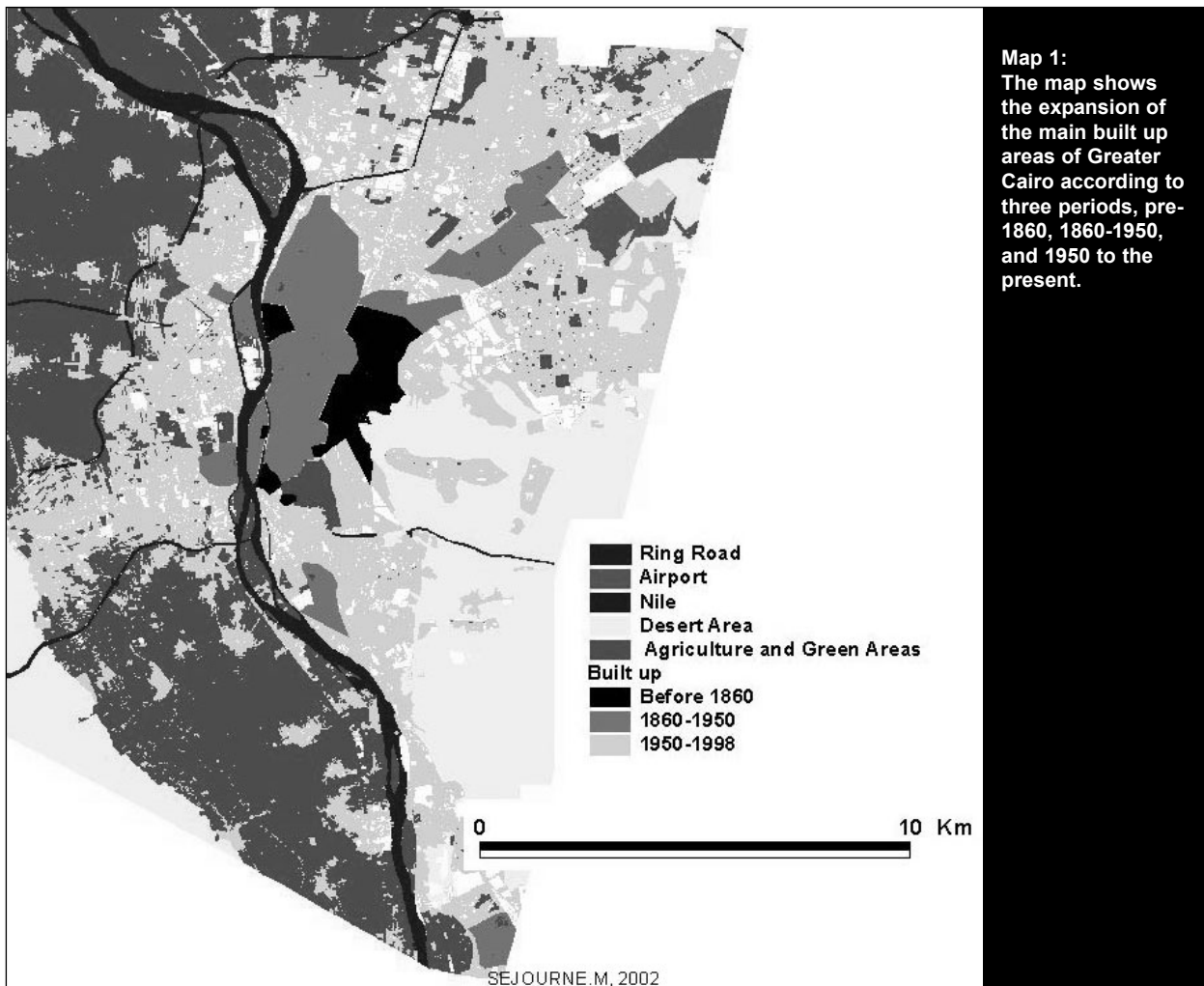
Following World War II and the July 1952 Revolution, Cairo's expansion accelerated under a socialist government which saw itself as the vanguard of development. At the same time, the phenomenon of informal urban development, that has become the defining feature of Cairo's growth in the last four decades, began to appear.

## 2. The Physical City

Cairo is situated on the Nile at a point where the flat flood plain, constricted by desert hills both to the west and the east, begins to open out into the Nile Delta (See **Map 1**.) Historic Cairo (i.e. pre-1860) was confined to slightly higher ground abutting the eastern hills. Modern urban expansion under Ismail Pasha and his successors was concentrated to the west of the historical city up to the Nile, north to Abbassia, Shubra, and Heliopolis, and south to Maadi and Helwan. Only in the post-war period did Cairo's expansion extend across the Nile into Giza and north into Shubra el Kheima Governorate.

Practically all of Cairo's expansion has been on rich agricultural land. Only the eastern districts, most notably Medinet Nasr, Nozha (and earlier Abassia and Heliopolis), have been created on what was desert land.

Cairo has a hot dry climate. Rain is very rare. The city has no surface water drainage system, and the rare showers can cause traffic chaos. Dust-bearing desert winds are frequent, especially in the spring, and combating dust is a never-ending domestic chore.



## B DEMOGRAPHY

The population of Greater Cairo is currently around 14-15 million inhabitants<sup>2</sup>, which represents almost a quarter of Egypt's population of 67 million inhabitants and almost half of the country's urban population. Cairo is a "primate city" and has maintained its urban dominance over the last few decades. The second largest city, Alexandria, is only 30 per cent the size of Cairo, and below this there are a grouping of provincial towns in the 200,000 to 400,000 population range, none of which contains even 5 per cent of Cairo's population. The inhabitants of entire Egyptian provinces (not to mention Gulf sheikhdoms) could easily fit into a number of Cairo's crowded neighbourhoods.

The demographic composition of Cairo is markedly homogeneous. That is, there are very few minority communities and these are mostly quite small. In addition, these minority groups do not concentrate in exclusive neighbourhoods. There are practically no ethnic minorities, except perhaps Nubians and northern Sudanese and, lately refugees from Southern Sudan and the Horn of Africa. Coptic Christians, who make up roughly 10 per cent of the population of Cairo, are well integrated to urban life. Foreigners (Westerners and also residents from various Arab countries) have a strong presence, as one would expect in a cosmopolitan regional capital.

The population of Cairo is characterised by its youth. Over 33 per cent of the population of Greater Cairo is under 15 years of age (versus 37.6 per cent nationally). The sex ratio for Cairo is exactly the same as that of the country as a whole (48.8 per cent are females).

The demographic growth of Greater Cairo is clearly shown in **Table 2**. Note that the total population figures for Greater Cairo can vary considerably, depending on the geographical definitions used.

Currently the population of Greater Cairo is estimated to be growing at roughly 2.0 per cent annually. However, the labour force is probably growing at over 3.0 per cent per annum, due to the large youth bulge in the population pyramid now reaching working age.

Greater Cairo is a rare phenomenon of a third world mega-city where, since the 1980s net in-migration has almost stopped. The metropolis's expansion is fuelled by natural increase and the incorporation of surrounding rural populations.<sup>3</sup> This fact, clearly supported by census figures and various studies, seems however to be ignored by most Egyptian observers, and the view is commonly held that rural migrants continue to pour into the city and that most of the problems are due to them.

## C THE URBAN ECONOMY

As the capital and primate city of Egypt, the economy of Greater Cairo largely reflects that of the nation and, indeed it probably contributes half of the Gross Domestic Product. In spite of many calls for decentralisation of the bureaucracy, government is heavily concentrated in the capital, and it also contains most of the higher-order private sector services. With the establishment of industrial zones in the new towns of Sixth of October and Tenth of Ramadan (30 and 50 km from the city centre respectively), Cairo has also become the focal point of most modern manufacturing. Finally, Cairo has a well-developed tourist economy, catering both to Western tourists and Gulf Arabs, and it also enjoys an important position as a regional centre for conferences.

Paralleling the formal economy, Cairo also has an immense informal economy, made up of hundreds of thousands of small and micro-enterprises. The informal sector absorbs over half of the city's labour force and informal employment is expanding at a faster rate than formal employment. Also, as estimated in the recent work of Lima's Institute for Liberty and Democracy, informal investment in residential real estate in Greater Cairo is valued at over US\$ 36 billion, representing 39 per cent of the city's total (Sims, 2000, p 38).

Female participation in the labour force is slightly higher in Cairo than the nation as a whole (19.7 per cent versus 15.3 per cent), with female employment showing a marked concentration in the ranks of the civil service (59 per cent of Cairo's female labour force), (Institute of National Planning, 1998, p. 132).

## D GOVERNANCE

Greater Cairo is made up of the whole of Cairo Governorate and the urban parts of Giza Governorate (west of the Nile) and Qaliubia Governorate (north of Cairo Governorate). Governorates are the main divisions of local administration in Egypt, and there is no macro-administrative structure which covers Greater Cairo as a distinct entity. However, there are certain

**Table 2 Growth of the Population of the Greater Cairo Region (GCR)**

Census Years	Greater Cairo Region Population (in millions)				GCR annual Growth Rate (%)	% of Egypt's total population
	in Cairo Gov.	in Giza Gov.*	in Qaliubia Gov.*	Total GC Region*		
1947	2.062	0.668	0.281	3.013	n/a	12.5
1960	3.358	1.118	0.434	4.910	1.82	15.7
1966	4.232	1.420	0.560	6.211	4.50	17.4
1976	5.074	2.137	0.879	8.090	2.68	18.5
1986	6.069	3.332	1.460	10.860	2.99	18.2
1996	6.789	4.273	2.081	13.144	1.93	17.3

\*constant limits  
Source: Denis (1999), p.19

service authorities (e.g. water, wastewater, public transport) whose responsibilities extend through all of Greater Cairo. For planning purposes, a “Greater Cairo Region” has been established in the national-level General Organisation for Physical Planning.

For most investments and day to day administration, governance in Greater Cairo is organised through the three governorates and their administrative districts, as follows:

- Cairo (classified as an “urban” governorate): 26 districts (*ahiya*)
- Giza (classified as a “rural” governorate) 5 districts of Giza City plus outlying village administrative units
- Qaliubia (classified as a “rural” governorate) 2 districts of Shubra El Kheima City plus outlying village administrative units.

Governorates have considerable local executive powers, but they command practically no own-source revenues. They are dependent on central government budget allocations both for recurring and capital costs. They are also weakened by the peculiar dual executive system whereby national ministries have their own directorates at the governorate level through which sectoral budget allocations flow. Governorates suffer from the ills present throughout the Egyptian civil service: incredibly bloated bureaucracies and abysmal salaries, which makes it nearly impossible for the administration to play its assigned role as the primary agent of development.

Governorates are purely executive bodies, with all important officials (e.g. governors, city council and district chiefs) appointed by central government. Since 1979 a parallel system of representative government has been in operation, with elected local popular councils at the district and governorate levels. These councils must approve development plans and budgets, and are to provide the voice of citizens in the deliberations of executive government. They are completely dominated by the ruling National Democratic Party and in practice their powers and influence are quite limited.

Although there has been a recent rise in civil society organisations at the national and regional levels (NGOs, professional syndicates, businessmen associations, etc), at the local and neighbourhood levels such organisations remain very limited in number, scope, and effectiveness.

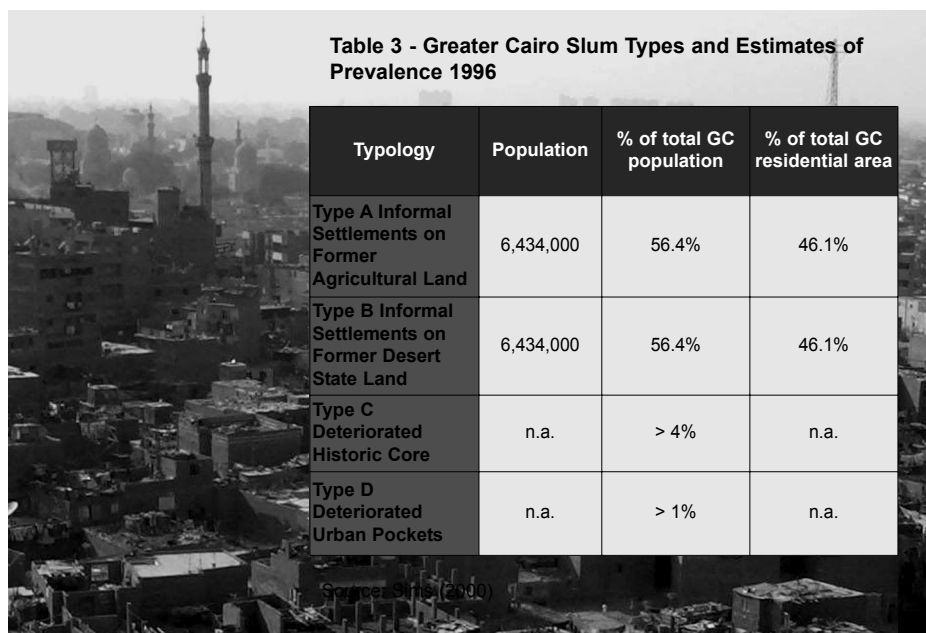
## II. SLUMS AND POVERTY IN CAIRO

### E THE CORRELATION BETWEEN SLUMS AND POVERTY

In Cairo, as in Egyptian cities in general, urban poverty is not notably concentrated in particular geographic areas. Except for a few small and marginal urban pockets (see slum typology below), poor and ultra poor families are found mixed in with lower and middle income families in a wide number of older core neighbourhoods and in the vast informal areas of Greater Cairo. A small percentage of poor families may also be found even in older upper class neighbourhoods. Conversely, in most informal areas a small percentage of well-off entrepreneurs and professionals will be found. This mix of income groups or “income heterogeneity” in geographical space is due to a number of historical factors, including the lack of residential mobility due to rent control and imperfect real estate markets. It is important to keep this fact in mind when reading the following sections.

### F TYPES OF SLUMS

The following are descriptions of the four main types of slums found in Greater Cairo. Salient features and relative sizes are presented in **Table 3**. The location and geographical extent of these types are presented in **Map 2**.<sup>4</sup> It must be stressed that there are many sub-variations of these general types and that detail is lost in their generalisation. And it must be repeated that, for Type A, many observers would object to the use of the term “slum”.



**Table 3 - Greater Cairo Slum Types and Estimates of Prevalence 1996**

Typology	Population	% of total GC population	% of total GC residential area
Type A Informal Settlements on Former Agricultural Land	6,434,000	56.4%	46.1%
Type B Informal Settlements on Former Desert State Land	6,434,000	56.4%	46.1%
Type C Deteriorated Historic Core	n.a.	> 4%	n.a.
Type D Deteriorated Urban Pockets	n.a.	> 1%	n.a.

Source: Birds (2000)

### Type A: Informal Settlements on Former Agricultural Land

This typology is defined as private residential buildings constructed on agricultural land purchased from farmers in areas where there were no subdivision plans and where building permits were not given. As such, the words "squatting" or "invasion" cannot be applied. The typology contains over half the population of Greater Cairo and almost half the total residential area. As such, it can hardly be considered a marginal phenomenon.

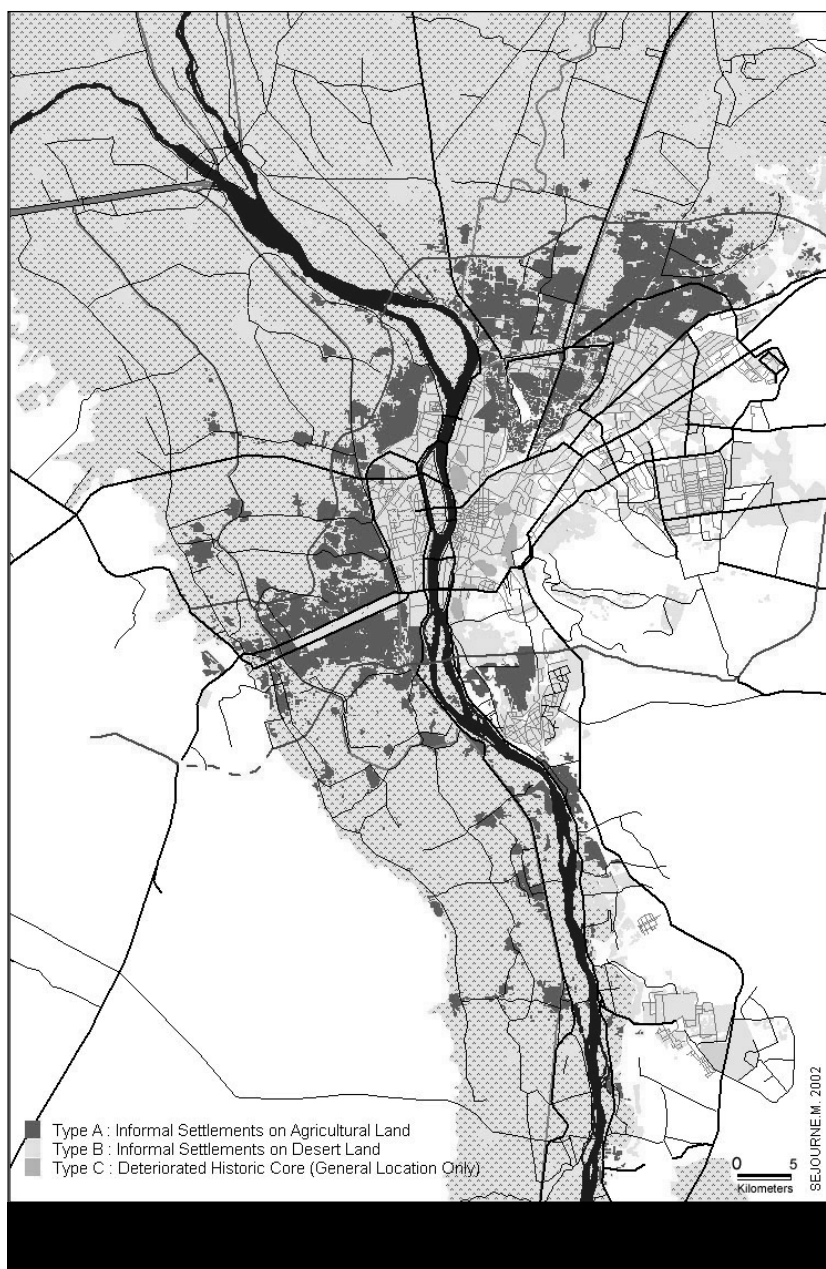
The phenomenon has its roots in the 1960s, when small agricultural areas on the fringes of "formal" Cairo began to be subdivided by farmers and middlemen and sold to individual owner-builders. It accelerated dramatically after the 1974 open door policy was proclaimed, fuelled by ever increasing flows of remittances from the hundreds of thousands of Egyptians working mostly as labourers in the Gulf and in other oil economies. It was at first totally ignored by the authorities, even though the very act of subdividing land for building purposes without a permit was illegal, as was building without a permit.

The process was completely informal in the sense that land was bought and transferred and buildings were erected with no legal paper work and a total reliance on personal trust, mediated when necessary by the existing community. Government - in the form of permits, fees, taxes, and services - was totally absent, at least during the formative stages. Finances were in every case from personal savings, remittances from relatives, or conversion of other assets. Under such financing, incremental construction was a necessity. Although these were new neighbourhoods, tight networks of kinship and geographic association were present from the beginning, as plot purchase opportunities were always conveyed by word of mouth.

Increasingly, the government began to look upon the phenomenon with disfavour, particularly because of the amount of scarce agricultural land that was being eaten up by urban expansion. Starting in 1978 a series of laws and decrees made it increasingly illegal to build on agricultural land. The latest (and most respected) was promulgated in 1996 and made

such building a criminal offence to be handled under military law.

In physical terms, the layouts of these informal areas are always determined by the prior agricultural field and irrigation patterns, with canals becoming the only main thoroughfares. Local streets are straight and very narrow (usually 2-4 metres), the minimum required to allow access. There are normally no public open spaces or areas for services of any type. Plots tend to be small, ranging from 60 to 140 m<sup>2</sup> with 80 m<sup>2</sup> being average. Frontages are usually 7 to 10.5 metres. There is 100 per cent plot coverage except for small air shafts or light wells. Buildings are mainly of reinforced concrete frame and floor slab construction with red brick infill walls and are designed for at least five floors, although in older buildings and in core villages (a sub-





typology) load bearing walls and concrete slab floors are common. Incremental (room by room and floor by floor) construction is the norm. In some fringe areas a relatively new phenomenon is appearing of taller buildings (up to 10 and 14 floors) with larger footprints which are built once-off for sale. These buildings represent the appearance of small developers, in the Western sense, along side the more common owner-builder.

Whereas the quality of construction of housing is generally good, there is a very common trend of increasing densification of areas over time and a parallel phenomenon of serious overcrowding. As families grow, and as it becomes more and more difficult for newly formed families to afford new units, the apartment and room rates of overcrowding soar, especially in mature inner settlements.

### **Type B: Informal Areas on Former Desert State Land**

This typology is defined as private residential buildings constructed on vacant state land by citizens under the process of "hand claim". Such a typology is analogous to the squatting and invasions found in Latin America and throughout the third world. In every case in Greater Cairo the land was marginal desert land without any specific purpose.

The history of the phenomenon is particular to each location. For example, Manshiet Nasser began as a site for relocated slum dwellers and garbage collectors, and Ezbet El Haggana began as a hamlet for the families of

coast guard soldiers stationed nearby. In every event a core settlement was allowed to take hold, slowly expanding as the usual neglect of the government towards its own property became apparent. Usually quite large plots on the fringes of the established core were walled, and then sub-parcels would be sold by these pioneers to other settlers. The rate of growth of individual communities varied greatly, with spurts of expansion at certain periods being quite common.

As with Typology A, the development process was completely informal, with no legal paper work and a total reliance on personal trust, mediated when necessary by the existing community.

These areas are illegal, but settlers have certain customary rights derived from interpretations of those portions of the civil code pertaining to hand claims on desert land. In any event, settlers amass either the receipts from paying "*tahkir*" (a nominal rent imposed by a Governorate's Amlak (properties) Department) or "awayid" (property tax), from electrical connections, and other items to gain as much paper legitimacy as possible.

Despite the illegality of these areas, the regularisation of their tenure status is not difficult should government make it a definite policy to do so. The key is that, unlike Typology A, there is only one legal land owner, the State, and there are no convoluted transactions, subdivisions, and inheritance histories to be considered to reconstruct and legalise post-facto.

Although it is difficult to generalise, housing conditions are in general worse than those found in Typology A. There are higher incidences of dilapidated structures and of whole families living on one room.

### **Type C: Deteriorated Historic Core**

In the historic city, that is Cairo before the expansions which began after 1860, are found neighbourhoods with a high percentage of old, crowded, and deteriorated structures within the medieval urban fabric. Examples include Darb el Ahmar and El Gamalia (especially the eastern sections along the Fatamid walls), and parts of Masr el Qadima, Boulaq Abou Aala, El Khalifa, etc. Also included are historic "villages" such as Qait Bey and el Tonsa which serve the vast historical cemetery areas. (Contrary to journalistic exaggeration, the phenomenon of squatting in tombs is an extremely rare phenomenon in Cairo).

The deteriorated buildings found in these areas are the result of confused ownership (mostly inheritance quarrels) and/or owner neglect due to controlled rents. Many of the families inhabiting these structures are quite poor. But it is extremely difficult to classify the whole areas where this phenomenon is found as distinct slums, since there are also mixed into the area newer and quite sound buildings. Also, the populations of these historic areas are declining as residential space is converted to commercial and workshop use and as buildings completely collapse.<sup>5</sup>

### Type D: Deteriorated Urban Pockets

In various inner areas of Cairo, especially those developed around the beginning of the 20th century, are found small pockets of very dilapidated one- to three-storey structures which accommodate quite poor families. Examples include areas around Masr el Qadima, Hekr Sakakini in el Wali, and Teraa el Towfiqia in Mataria. In every case the existence of these pockets is due to precarious land tenure situations which put in doubt the wisdom of serious housing investments, resulting in a very precarious type of housing which in turn attracted very poor families seeking the cheapest possible housing solutions. Although there are no overall studies of these areas, they represent an insignificant portion of the city's population, probably not exceeding 1 per cent of the total. Most are slated for removal, and some have already been converted to parks (with the inhabitants relocated in public housing estates).

One could add to this category rural villages which have been overtaken by urban expansion, such as Mit Oqba, Agouza, and the core of Giza. However, these areas more closely reflect the older kind of settlements already categorised under Typology A.

### G OFFICIAL AND UNOFFICIAL DEFINITIONS OF SLUMS

The Egyptian Government has only recently recognised that there are deteriorated or under-served urban residential areas. Starting in 1992, after some poorer urban areas were perceived as breeding grounds for Islamic fundamentalism, the government launched a programme to improve informal or *aashwa'i* areas throughout Egypt. In Greater Cairo a total of 81 *aashwa'i* areas were identified, of which 63 were deemed upgradable (mostly of Type A and B) and 18 smaller pockets (mostly of Type D) were slated for demolition and the resettlement of the inhabitants. (Ministry of Local Development 2001).

The term *aashwa'i* is the only one used officially to indicate deteriorated or under-served urban areas. It actually means "random", implying that these areas are unplanned and illegally constructed. Thus they are not necessarily slums, although being informal/illegal, they tend to be the least well served in terms of infrastructure and public services, and they suffer from poor accessibility and high levels of overcrowding.

The term *aashwa'i* has also become a synonym for slums in unofficial or popular language, and it carries a pejorative connotation. Government officials and the national press frequently see these areas as "black stains" and ascribe to them a whole set of social ills – crime, drugs, and 'backwards' behaviour.

In addition, in general language the term *shaabi* is used to describe popular or working-class neighbourhoods. Also, the term *baladi* is popularly used to describe areas where poorer inhabitants, especially those of rural origin, are found. Neither of these two latter terms has a particularly negative connotation, except perhaps with reference to modern real estate markets.



Slum Typology B: Ezbet-Bekhit

## **H** POVERTY IN EGYPT

### 1 Official and Unofficial Definitions of Poverty

The Egyptian Government tends to avoid the use of the term "poor" (*el faqr*), preferring the less emotionally charged term "those of limited-income" (*mahdoudi el dakhli*). However, the work of the Institute for National Planning, which produces the annual Egyptian Human Development Report (EHDR), the findings of which are discussed below, directly uses the terminologies of poverty, poor families, and the ultra-poor. This report is only available in English.

As for unofficial definitions or popular terms for poverty, these only relate to the living conditions of particular families. Thus a poor person or family in a desperate situation may be called *ghalban* or *maskiin*. These terms do not apply to neighbourhoods or certain social groups.

### 2. The Extent of Poverty in Egypt

It is only during the last decade that the nature and dynamics of poverty and social deprivation in Egypt have begun to be studied in depth. Most studies define poverty in terms of household consumption, using a reference poverty line which is derived from food or caloric minimum requirements. As there is a large concentration of households around poverty lines, even small definitional or methodological variations can produce significant shifts in estimates of the incidence of poverty. The 1997/98 EHDR estimates a household poverty line of LE 4,438 per annum (equivalent to US\$ 1,268 in 1998) for urban households and LE 3,963 (US\$ 1,132) for rural households, yielding an overall incidence of household poverty of 22.9 per cent (Institute of National Planning, 1998, p 112 and p 123). To put it in the terminology current in international practice, the EHDR urban poverty line is equivalent to \$0.83 per capita per day.

Various independent studies of consumption poverty in Egypt give even significantly higher percentages of the population living in poverty, up to 48 per cent, especially when calculated on a headcount basis (Handousa, 1999, pp 3 – 4). After analysing various studies, one respected observer concludes "that at least one quarter of the population is poor by any standards and another quarter is on the margins of poverty" (Assaad and Rouchdy, 1998, p. 9).

Income poverty is closely linked to asset poverty. In the countryside the main asset is productive agricultural land, but the overall supply of this land is extremely scarce. (Egypt, with 19 persons per hectare of potential arable land, is the most densely populated agrarian country in the world.) The rural poor characteristically own little or no agricultural land or other forms of immovable property, and there are recent signs that many poor

are being forced to sell off their remaining farm holdings. Absolute landlessness, and the resultant reliance on intermittent and very lowly paid agricultural day labour combined with non-farm activities, is increasing. In urban areas crucial assets of the poor are housing with secure tenure and productive assets such as craftsmen's tools, vehicles, shops, and stalls. As in rural areas, these assets are vulnerable to loss in times of family crisis.

The Human Development Index, developed by UNDP, is a composite indicator of average standards of living, which reflects a mix of life expectancy, educational attainment, and income per capita levels. It shows that, while Egypt ranked 112 of 174 countries in 1998, there has been a slow but steady improvement over the last two decades. It also shows that Upper Egypt scores significantly lower than the rest of the country (Institute of National Planning, 1998, p. 14 and p. 127).

### 3. Vulnerability to Poverty, Vulnerable Groups, and Coping Strategies

Poverty in an Egyptian family brings with it vulnerability to outside events such as illness, loss of job, death, etc. These events can wipe out the assets of a marginally poor family, reducing it to absolute poverty. And for a family without assets, these events can be catastrophic, leading to chronic indebtedness, social exclusion, and destitution in the long term.

The poor of Egypt have developed a number of coping mechanisms to insulate themselves from the worst effects of their poverty, especially in times of crisis. These mechanisms (such as kinship support, revolving credit and savings *gamayias*, and neighbourhood solidarity networks) are slowly eroding as traditional social ties weaken in the face of rising material consumption and increases in nuclear families. And some coping strategies employed by poor families may have prevented an erosion of evident living standards in the short term, only to increase vulnerability in the longer term, especially for succeeding generations.

In Egypt certain groups are more likely to be poor and more vulnerable to the effects of poverty:

- **Women-headed families**, variously estimated at 12 to 15 per cent of households in Egypt,<sup>6</sup> are much more likely to be poor than male-headed families.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, the daily burden of poverty is greater on women members of poor families, since the difficult task of managing the meagre household budget usually falls on them as they cope with child rearing and household chores.

- **The children of poor families** suffer greatly, in terms of poor nutrition, health, and education opportunities. There is considerable evidence that these children grow up to be poor themselves and that poverty is a transmitted or inherited phenomenon. And poor families



tend to have significantly more children than the average. Poor families are often forced to send their children out to work to supplement household incomes, and child labour is receiving considerable attention in Egypt as a serious social problem. Street children, who have lost their family ties and who live a precarious existence in towns, are a phenomenon which is on the rise in Egypt.

■ The **mentally and physically handicapped poor** are an especially vulnerable group. Disabled heads of households in Egypt have few means to become productive, and many must resort to begging and charity. Programmes that target the disabled to allow them to earn a livelihood are rare in Egypt.

■ The **elderly poor** who live outside the extended family are another vulnerable group. Until now their incidence has been very low, given the very strong kinship ties and respect for the aged prevalent in Egypt. However, some consider their incidence to be emerging.

#### 4. Rural and Urban Poverty

Several studies have confirmed that poverty and human deprivation are more prevalent in the provinces of Upper Egypt, followed by the provinces of Lower Egypt, followed by frontier provinces. Urban provinces (Cairo, Alexandria, Suez, and Port Said) are on average the best off.

However, relying on governorate aggregates as indications of poverty masks considerable variations. In rural areas there are indications that remote hamlets are likely to contain higher proportions of the poor than larger village agglomerations and rural areas in close proximity to towns and cities. And *within* any particular rural settlement there are considerable variations between families in terms of their incomes, wealth, and general well being, with quite prosperous families living adjacent to the poor and even destitute. The stereotyping of an amorphous mass of rural poor needs to be avoided, and this has implications in targeting poverty alleviation measures.

Very little analysis has been made of urban poverty, but there are indications that the prevalence approaches that of rural areas. For example, the 1997/98 EHDR reports that overall in urban Egypt 22.5 per cent of persons are poor versus 23.3 per cent in rural areas (Institute of National Planning, 1998, p. 142). The International Food Policy Research Institute study of poverty, which corrects for price differences in large metropolitan areas such as Greater Cairo and Alexandria, finds the incidence of poverty and ultra-poverty in these areas to be higher than any other region of Egypt (Assaad and Rouchdy, 1998, p. 11).

A representative sample survey carried out in Greater Cairo in 1998 concluded that the average (mean) household income was LE 705 (US\$201) per month,

but that 68 per cent of households earned less than LE 500 (US\$143), roughly the INP poverty line for urban areas (Nassar, 1999, pp. 22-23). Various anthropological studies highlight the extreme difficulties faced by poor urban families, particularly in access to housing and in meeting the requirements of new household formation. Poverty in urban agglomerations could actually be greater in absolute terms than in rural areas, were the census definition of urban areas in Egypt adjusted to reflect the reality of urbanisation.

## I ORIGIN OF SLUMS - THE GROWTH OF MODERN CAIRO AND THE DYNAMICS OF INFORMALITY

By far the most dominant types of slums in Greater Cairo are Types A and B, which relate to informal settlements which have mushroomed in the post World War II period and which together now contain over half of Greater Cairo's population. The following short historical narrative will help readers to understand this phenomenon of informality.

### Post-War Cairo

The immediate post-World War II period is a convenient point at which to look at Cairo and to set the scene for its subsequent explosive growth, of which the development of informal areas played such an important part. In 1947 the Census recorded that Greater Cairo contained a population of just over 2.8 million inhabitants. Already migration to Cairo had been heavy, and the city's population was expanding at over 4 per cent per annum. Construction activities had been frozen during the war years, aggravating the already high levels of overcrowding of the existing housing stock (densities *averaged* over two persons per room).

Due to the free-spending ways of the Allied armies, the city's economy had enjoyed a boom, and Cairo's industrial base soon started to expand rapidly, as bourgeois industrialists began to invest heavily in consumer industries protected by high import tariffs. Basic infrastructure was in place -- in terms of roads, Nile bridges, railways and trolley lines and also in terms of water and wastewater systems and power grids.

In effect, Cairo was poised to begin expanding at a scale never before seen in its history. Leading up to the war Cairo had already begun expanding out of the traditional core made up of the historic or Eastern Town and the European or Western Sector (today's downtown), mostly to the north on two axes, Shubra/Rod el Farag and Abbassia/Heliopolis/Matariya/Ain Shams. In the south the agglomerations of Maadi and Helwan were small isolated satellites. Across the Nile there was very little development, restricted to urban quarters near the traditional village of Giza/Dokki/Agiza.

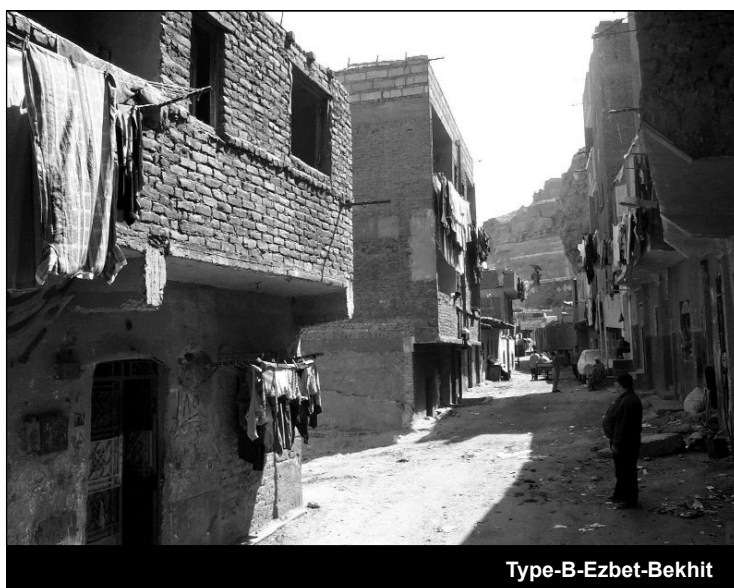


In post-war Cairo the poor mostly crowded into the Eastern Town. Already there were quarters which might be called informal, although sub-standard tenements were the preferred descriptor (Slum Types C and D), especially in Boulaq, Rod el Farag, and historical parts of Cairo. Unplanned and random extensions were limited to incipient add-ons to traditional in-lying villages such as Embaba, Mit Okba, Kom el Gharab, etc.

There was already an established pattern of poor rural migrants finding basic accommodation in the crowded Eastern Town and, as they prospered and their families grew, to seek affordable housing in either the tenements or expanding villages.

In the late 1940s Cairo had no independent local administration, and urban affairs were rather confusingly controlled by central ministries and utilities concessions. Moreover, there was no form of planning mechanism or guiding master plan. Urban development was regulated mainly through the Subdivision Law (52 of 1940), which set quite high and European standards for lot layouts, public spaces, and the requirement that infrastructure needed to be in place before plot sales could begin. Up until 1950 the Egyptian Government had not undertaken a single public housing project.

Governorate of Cairo in 1960/61. A Master Plan of Cairo was published in 1956, which foresaw the need for east-west expansion into the desert flanks. A public housing programme was launched, and by 1965 Cairo Governorate had constructed almost 15,000 units for low-income families (Abu-Lughud, 1971, p. 231). And in 1958 the Government launched the Nasr City scheme, a very ambitious desert fringe development which was to be executed by the Ministries of Housing and



Type-B-Ezbet-Bekhit

### Expansion up to 1967

With very few exceptions, Cairo's expansion during the two decades 1947–67 was at the expense of agricultural land. Most of this was formal up-market expansion, especially in Mohendesiin, Dokki, Hadaek el Quba, Abbassia and Shobra, and it was either directly government sanctioned or through private land development companies.

The population of Cairo continued to grow rapidly (expanding to 3.4 million inhabitants by 1960, at a rate exceeding 4 per cent per annum).<sup>8</sup> The main axis of growth continued to be to the north, where the wide delta plain invited easy conversion to urban use and where development was pulled both by the newly established industrial areas of Shubra el Kheima and also by numerous public housing projects and factories located in the wide wedge of agricultural land (Ameria, el Wayli, Zawia el Hamra, etc.) lying between the earlier two northern growth paths and conveniently accessed by the new extension of Port Said St. The west bank of the Nile also quickly urbanised, mostly in the form of middle class subdivisions at the vanguard of which was Medinet el Mohendessin. There were also additions to Helwan and Maadi/Maasara and to the northeast axis.

In terms of urban management and urban planning much happened during the two decades before 1967. In 1949 the Municipality of Cairo was created, to be transformed into the Housing and Utilities Directorate of the

Defense, organised through a public sector concession company affiliated to the Ministry of Housing. By 1966 there were four similar such companies: Nasr City, Heliopolis, Maadi, and Ain Shams.

It was towards the end of this period that the first informal areas began to appear. It is unfortunate that there is virtually no recorded history of the germination of the phenomenon of informality, but then, because of its marginal character (and at the time rather insignificant scale), informal areas did not generate academic or professional interest.<sup>9</sup> One can only deduce how these first areas began to blossom by looking at old maps and trying to read from the urban fabric one encounters today. It appears there was no official resistance, even though these early informal subdivisions clearly contravened the subdivision law and building code. Perhaps it was simply the fact of a government increasingly preoccupied with creating new socialist zones and prestige heavy industry, where private sector development was seen as something from a bygone era.

One can surmise from maps and from oral histories that a number of informal areas began their incipient growth in the mid-1960s. Prominent examples include Boulaq el Dakrou, Waraq el Hadir, Basatiin, and Embaba (all Slum Type A) and Manshiet Nasser (slum Type B.) In almost all of the earliest cases, subdivision and development began from or was grafted onto existing village

settlements. This helps to explain, at least to some extent, the lack of official reaction. Rural housing was not regulated (building permits were unnecessary outside city limits), so local administrations had a plausible excuse for overlooking what was already becoming quite evident. And the logic probably went: if some peasants want to sell off some strips of agricultural land, well, this can hardly be construed as contravening the Subdivision Law, which was meant for modern, proper housing areas.

### **Infitah and the Oil Boom 1974 - 1985**

Starting in 1974 domestic economic conditions in Egypt changed dramatically for the better. The economy was progressively opened up (*infitah*), the financing of infrastructure resumed (for example, the October 6 bridge and overpasses were begun in 1974), and, most importantly, Egyptians were allowed to travel freely. This coincided with the oil price rise of 1973 (and later 1979), which soon made neighbouring countries (most impor-



### **Hiatus 1967 - 1974**

The 1967 war with Israel, the subsequent War of Attrition, and the run up to the 1973 war completely froze formal development in Cairo. All the nation's public funds were reserved for the war effort, urban infrastructure plans were shelved, and Cairo's formal expansion more or less stopped. However, the demographic growth of Cairo did not. Migration continued, if somewhat abated, and the natural increase of Cairo reached its highest levels. In addition, Cairo had to accommodate a significant number of the over one million people evacuated from the Suez Canal zone.

Cairo's formal growth may have halted, but its informal growth was just beginning to build up momentum. Based on maps derived from 1977 aerial photographs, quite substantial fringe areas must have already been largely subdivided and sold during the 1967 - 1974 period. These include all of Dar es Salaam and almost all of Basatiin, vast areas of Embaba, and most of Boulaq el Dakroul, Amrania - South Giza, Zawia el Hamra, etc. And significant expansion out from core villages also was registered, as illustrated by Saft el Leban and el Baragil. One can surmise that all levels of government the State, preoccupied with the war, could easily turn a blind eye to what was happening.

tantly, Saudi Arabia, Libya, and Iraq) awash in money and eager to hire all classes of Egyptians to do their work, particular unattractive work such as construction. The earnings of these Egyptian expatriates soon found their way back into Egypt and began to create an unprecedented cash-based economic boom that a portion of the peasantry and lower classes could also enjoy.

This boom provided the main financing for and acceleration of the development of informal areas in Cairo. It was particularly important because it put serious investment money in the hands of the kinds of *baladi* and blue collar families who are attracted to live in informal areas. Not unreasonably, for many the choice of investment was land, bricks, and mortar. The level of construction in the large fringe areas already established before 1974 rose to fever pitch, with new buildings going up and, equally common, vertical extensions being added. Also, new informal areas began to be created during this period and urbanising villages continued to grow. In 1981 a much-quoted study concluded that an overwhelming 80 per cent of the additions to Cairo's housing stock over the previous ten years were informal (ABT Associates, 1981).

Although this 1974-1985 period could be called the heyday of urban residential informality in Egypt, it was also the period when the State finally took notice of the phenomenon and began to proscribe it. Starting in 1978 a series of decrees and orders made it increasingly ille-

gal to build on agricultural land, and in parallel efforts were stepped up to preserve state lands from encroachment. Throughout the period in question, these proscriptions had little real impact, only making it more difficult for authorities to turn a blind eye and opening up a considerable business in petty bribes. There was little official commitment to tackling the issue, since it began to dawn on decision-makers just how vast informal areas had become. For urban planners and the State alike, it was an unwelcome reality which hopefully could be wished away.

And wish-away they did, through the launching of the new towns policy in 1977. Starting with the establishment of 10th of Ramadan City 60 km east of Cairo and formalised in the Law of New Communities in 1979, the new towns movement quickly came to dominate both Egypt's urban development discourse as well as budgetary allocations, and it is still dominant today (at the latest count, there are 39 new towns in Egypt). Regardless of the huge investments required and the pathetic record of success in terms of population attraction, the policy of creating modern planned desert settlements was and still is offered by government as the ultimate solution to the phenomenon of urban informality, one in which alternatives are offered which will absorb the millions who are in or would otherwise go to informal areas of Greater Cairo.

### Retrenchment and Consolidation 1986-2000

Map analysis of Greater Cairo comparing 1982 with 1987 shows that, at least in terms of *additional* lands coming under informal urbanisation, informal development had slowed, with few additions to the large fringe developments, and a somewhat reduced level of activity around satellite villages. How much effect government control was having is debatable, but probably the decisive factor was the drying up of remittance income from Egyptians working abroad. World oil prices began to tumble in 1983-84, and host countries started to apply restrictions to Egyptian workers at about the same time.

Another factor working against the phenomenon of expanding informality was demographic. Starting in the

mid-1970s, the population growth rates of Greater Cairo started to fall significantly. During the 1961-75 period Greater Cairo was growing at an average of 3.1 per cent per annum, and this rate fell to 2.7 per cent for the period 1976-1986 and to 1.9 per cent for the period 1986-1996. Natural increase rates slowed (urban Egypt was the first area to exhibit significantly falling fertility), but also due to much decreased migration into the city.

A final factor which has had an important impact on informality was a much more rigorous prohibition of the phenomenon embodied in two decrees issued in 1996. In effect, they stipulated that any new building on agricultural land and any urban construction without a permit would be severely punished through military courts, thereby avoiding the many well-established



Type-D-Geziret-Badran



Type-D-Hekr-Abu-Doma

manoeuvres familiar to lawyers in the civil courts. For a while this considerably dampened informal construction both on agricultural land and in desert settlements, but informal building is still going on. In fact, a recent study which compared satellite images in 1991 and 1998 showed that informal expansion on mostly agricultural land continues at a rate which is three times that of “formal” expansion (CEDEJ 2002).

**J DATA ON THE CITY’S SLUMS**

There is very little systematic information on Cairo’s slum areas. Only informal areas (Types A and B) have received some attention in geographical analysis in the past two to three years. Using maps and satellite images, it has been possible to delineate these two types, based on physical appearances (very narrow streets, irregular street patterns, no structured open space, and obvious lack of building control). These areas are shown in **Map 2**. Also shown are the main areas where Type C slums can be found.

A few census statistics are available at the enumeration district level. Although there are problems of definition with many of the indicators, it is possible to reach some general conclusions about characteristics of informal areas by taking census data for typical examples of Types A, B, and C. Results are displayed in **Table 4**. (Type D areas, which are very small pockets, unfortunately cannot be identified statistically).

These figures, as well as a number of other indicators and field observations, show that Type A slums are, in average terms, only marginally worse off than the city as a whole. Yet these areas contain over 50 per cent of the metropolis’s population, and they are the most rapidly growing. Thus they contain, especially in the older, very dense areas, probably over two thirds of the poor and ultra poor. Other slum types (B, C, and D) are more classic “slums”, but even these exhibit considerable “income heterogeneity”.

**K DATA ON POVERTY IN THE CITY**

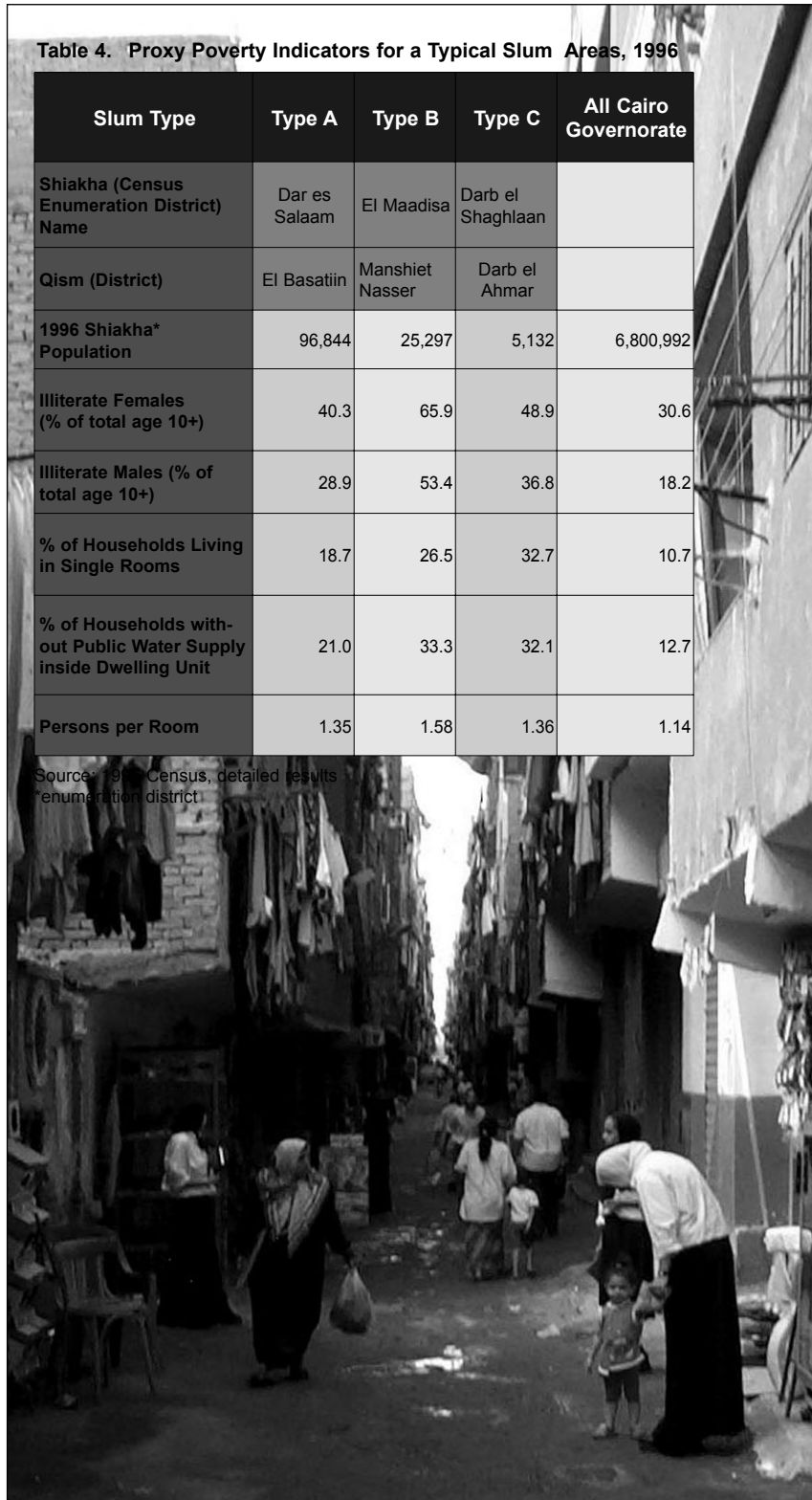
There has been no systematic analysis carried out on the geographical distribution of poverty within Cairo, or within urban areas of Egypt in general. Work on poverty indicators and geographic space to date (Institute for National Planning and the Social Fund for Development, for example) does not descend below the urban governorate level.

A preliminary attempt at mapping poverty indicators for Greater Cairo has been carried out for this report, using 1996 census data at the enumeration district (*shiakha*) level. As income data is not reported in the census (and in any event would be of dubious value), the following two proxy indicators have been used: (1) percentage of population over 9 years which is illiterate

**Table 4. Proxy Poverty Indicators for a Typical Slum Areas, 1996**

Slum Type	Type A	Type B	Type C	All Cairo Governorate
Shiakha (Census Enumeration District) Name	Dar es Salaam	El Maadisa	Darb el Shaghlaan	
Qism (District)	El Basatiin	Manshiet Nasser	Darb el Ahmar	
1996 Shiakha* Population	96,844	25,297	5,132	6,800,992
Illiterate Females (% of total age 10+)	40.3	65.9	48.9	30.6
Illiterate Males (% of total age 10+)	28.9	53.4	36.8	18.2
% of Households Living in Single Rooms	18.7	26.5	32.7	10.7
% of Households without Public Water Supply inside Dwelling Unit	21.0	33.3	32.1	12.7
Persons per Room	1.35	1.58	1.36	1.14

Source: 1996 Census, detailed results enumeration district



and (2) net residential density. The results are presented in **Maps 3** and **4**. As can be seen, the results tend to confirm in general terms the coincidence of poverty and slum types (compare with **Map 2**), but the fit is by no means perfect. Clearly, considerably more work needs to be done.



### III. Slums: the People

#### 1. SLUM DWELLER PROFILES IN MANSHIET NASSER

The interviews presented in this section are with people in Manshiet Nasser, a large (400,000 inhabitants) Type B Slum. The characteristics of Manshiet Nasser are very similar to the socio-economic profile of Ezbet Bekhit.

It was a shock for **Um Ishaq** when she first saw her new house in Manshiet Nasser. Although the house has two floors, each with two sleeping rooms, a living room, a kitchen and a toilet in a total floor size of 50 m<sup>2</sup>, once she steps out of the house, she finds herself surrounded by garbage. All streets adjacent to the house are covered with non-recyclable waste and sacks with plastic, paper, metal and glass waste are piled up against the walls of the houses. Goats, chickens and cats search through the garbage for food. The house is located in the Zabaleen area where most of Cairo's garbage collectors live. "The biggest problem is the mice and the snakes which come with the garbage. You just can't get rid of them" says Um Ishaq, "but what can we do, we have to live somewhere and we couldn't afford a house anywhere else".

Before coming to Zabaleen, Um Ishaq lived with her husband in a small village in Minia/Upper Egypt. However, after a new law was passed in 1997, the landowner who had rented farm land to Um Ishaq's husband terminated the rent contract and the family could not find another source of income. Um Ishaq's husband came to Cairo to work in a small factory in Manshiet Nasser until he was able to buy the house and bring his family.

Four daughters were already married when the family was struck by another crisis. Um Ishaq's husband became almost blind due to a genetically transmitted illness which affects several members of his family who are almost all married to cousins. Um Ishaq started to work as a cleaner at 48, and her eldest son left school at the age of 13 to start working to support the family. "He was always the best in class and we tried everything to convince him to continue" says Um Ishaq, "It was my dream to see him finish his education and make a better living than ours. But he feels responsible for us and refused. My biggest problem now is my husband

who cannot accept that he is no longer able to work. I don't mind working but a man's value in our society is defined by his ability to care for the family".

Work is also a big problem for **Zein**, 39 years old, who was not able to find a permanent job in Cairo since he returned from Saudi Arabia seven years ago. His savings from six years of work there were consumed with renting, finishing and furnishing a flat in Manshiet Nasser and marrying. As the oldest son of a female-headed household, he also had to pay for the wedding preparations for his three sisters. He has been working as a driver, a researcher and a shopkeeper since and is trying to establish his own shop to be independent and feel more secure.



Um Ishaq

*"All children in my mother's and my grandmother's family have been brought up without a father," says Zein. "We lived in a house in Qait Bey, a tomb area in Manshiet Nasser. The house is adjacent to the tomb of a rich relative of my grandfather. He came as a guard for the tomb. Then he married a second wife and went back to the village to live with her. My father died when I was still very young. That's why I know that it is very important for girls, too, to have a good education and to be able to support themselves when it is necessary. I would love to see my two daughters finish higher education and learn languages and computers which are the door-openers of our time to a better life."*



Zein and his family

Being able to provide a good education for his two sons and his daughter is also one of the main goals of **Ahmed**, a lawyer in Manshiet Nasser who was born in the area in 1967. His father was illiterate, and worked for 21 years as a construction worker in Libya. With his savings he bought land in Manshiet Nasser and built a family house with 10 flats together with his brother. They



Ahmed and his kids

have built the house gradually. Once Ahmed, his brothers and cousins had grown up, additional floors were added to build flats for them to marry. Additional finance was raised by renting out all space which was not needed for the family. Ahmed and his two brothers could all finish university and become professionals.

*“Education is the single most important means to move up the social ladder” says Ahmed “Therefore, my wife stopped working as a kindergarten teacher and social worker after the kids came. All of them go to private schools which are better than government schools but my wife still teaches them at home. This pays off, my eldest son and my daughter are always the first in class.”*

Ahmed is a successful, well-known lawyer in the area with his own office. But he had always several additional jobs as a legal adviser or a researcher to raise the family income. Although the area is scheduled for upgrading, Ahmed would like to move out of Manshiet Nasser.

*“It’s mainly for my children. I know that many good people live here. But even with upgrading and social development programmes, it will take years until the overall social environment will change. I don’t want my kids to be affected by all the social problems here like drugs, violence and the uncivilised behaviour of many people”.*

**Hayam** is 29 years old and not yet married. This is very uncommon given the prevailing social values according to which the main duty in life for a girl is to marry and care for her family. Consequently, she is under a lot of social pressure from her relatives and neighbours.

*“The problem is that I cannot easily accept any husband” says Hayam. “I am working as a literacy teacher and I have been involved in a lot of social development activities which raised my awareness of so many things. I want to have a partner as a husband, not someone who treats me as a servant. This is not easy to find here since men tend to be more backward in social consciousness than women. The social status of our family makes it, however, difficult to find a man from another area and another social stratum.”*

Hayam’s father died when she was 12 and left the family without a breadwinner. His pension was not enough but her mother could not find a job to complement the family income. So her two younger brothers left school at the age of 10 and 9. Hayam is the only one of four children who completed school and obtained a technical secondary school diploma. The family lives in a small, rented flat of 38 m<sup>2</sup> with only one window and poor ventilation. “It is not only the poor housing conditions of many families here” says Hayam. “One of the most important things to enable people to improve their living conditions are services, particularly educational and health services, awareness programmes and services which would open a window to the modern world like computer centres and adult training programmes.”



Hayam

## **M** SLUM HOUSEHOLD INDICATORS: A STUDY OF EZBET BEKHIT

In order to illustrate the characteristics of slum households and the challenges they face, one neighbourhood in Manshiet Nasser (Slum Type B) has been chosen and household information collected from various primary and secondary sources.<sup>10</sup> Manshiet Nasser is the largest settlement in Greater Cairo of Type B, with a population of roughly 400,000 inhabitants. Ezbet Bekhit is one typical part of it with a population of 37,000 made up of 6,600 households living in 1,500 buildings (properties) extending over 18.5 hectares.

For each of the following issues, results from surveys of Ezbet Bekhit are presented and, where comparable macro information exists, comparisons are made to city-wide averages. Where data on Ezbet Bekhit do not exist, data on Manshiet Nasser have been provided as a proxy. In some cases only anecdotal information is available.



### **Household Types and Female Headed Households**

The vast majority of households in Ezbet Bekhit are nuclear or extended families (members all related). Female headed households represent 10-12 per cent of the total, which is roughly the national urban average. (The incidence of female-headed households is probably higher, as respondents in surveys tend to mention a male head of household even if he is permanently absent, but this is also true of national averages). It is unfortunate, but official statistics, including the Census, do not separately count female headed households, so no socio-economic data is available for these families at either the level of Ezbet Bekhit, Manshiet Nasser, or all Cairo.

### **Household Income**

Stated household income in Ezbet Bekhit is as follows: 15.2 per cent below LE 150 (US\$44.1) per month, 50.1 per cent between LE 150 and 300 (US\$44.1-88.2) per month, and 34.7 per cent above LE 300 (US\$88.2) per month (Ministry of Social Affairs, 1998, p 7). One suspects that these are understated, but rich anecdotal information confirms that these income levels are relatively common. To put these figures on a comparable basis, city-wide household incomes average LE 700 (US\$205.8). It should be added that the incomes of most households are due to casual work and thus are unstable.

### **Household Size**

Reported average household size is 4.4 persons according to the Ministry of Social Affairs (1998, p 4). However, sizes of 5.1 to 6.0 persons per household in different parts of Manshiet Nasser are reported by the National Center for Social and Criminological Research (1998). Average household size for all Cairo Governorate is reported in the 1996 Census to be 4.06.

### **Birth/fertility Rates**

These are unknown for Ezbet Bekhit and Manshiet Nasser, but they are presumably higher than the national urban average. As an indication, the 1996 Census reports that 39.1 per cent of the population in Manshiet Nasser is under 15 years of age versus 30.6 per cent for all Cairo Governorate.

### **Housing Tenure**

All properties in Ezbet Bekhit are the result of squatting on state land, so land ownership remains until now in government hands. Properties contain on average 4.4 households. Of all households in Ezbet Bekhit, 48 per cent are "owners" and 52 per cent renters. Under "owner" households are included the household of the property owner as well as related families living in separate dwelling units in the same property. Absentee property owners are very rare. The majority of renters (pre-1996) hold unbreakable contracts with fixed rents.

Current rents are much higher than these. For all Cairo, dwelling units under rental tenure represent 59.2 per cent of the total according to the 1996 Census.

### **Literacy Rates**

For all of Cairo the 1996 Census gives illiteracy rates (for those over 9 years age who cannot read or write) of 24.2 per cent. The similar rate for Manshiet Nasser is 52.0 per cent, over twice as high. (Ezbet Bekhit is not separately counted in the census). Gender bias is clear: whereas the illiteracy rate for males in Manshiet Nasser is 45.1 per cent, for females it is 59.6 per cent.

### **Occupancy Rates and Crowding**

By all measures Ezbet Bekhit is very crowded. The net residential density is 2,200 persons per hectare or 220,000 persons per km<sup>2</sup>. Over 30 per cent of families live in one single room, sharing toilets. (For all Cairo the proportion is 8.2 per cent.) The remaining families live mostly in small two and three room apartments with internal toilets. The average gross floor area per person in Ezbet Bekhit is 6.2 m<sup>2</sup>. In Ezbet Bekhit there are practically no vacant dwelling units (under 2 per cent), whereas the vacancy rate for all Cairo is said to be 18 per cent.

### **Length of Residence**

The Survey of the Ministry of Social Affairs in Ezbet Bekhit recorded family length of residence as follows: 59.5 per cent under 15 years, 24.8 per cent from 15 to 25 years, and 15.7 per cent over 25 years (Ministry of Social Affairs 1998).

### **Employment**

In Manshiet Nasser the Census reports that only 12.4 per cent of those working are employed in government or in state enterprises, whereas the same figure for all of Cairo is 41.1 per cent. The remainder of those working in Manshiet Nasser are either in the private sector (about 16 per cent) or are self-employed (about 65 per cent), which underlines the marginal and casual nature of employment in the area.

### **Location of Employment and Commuting**

The census reports that a full 55.9 per cent of the workforce of Manshiet Nasser works within the area (in one of the thousands of small informal enterprises or self-employed). Thus for the majority a short walk to work is the main mode of commuting. For those working outside the area, there are very good microbus or public bus services (cost: LE 0.25 or LE 0.50 (US\$0.07-0.14) per ride). In fact, Ezbet Bekhit and Manshiet Nasser in general are well located within the central part of the Greater Cairo metropolis, and this is one of the main attractions of the area for the urban poor. For example, the main petty commercial centre of town (El Ataba) is at a distance of only 3 km.

### Availability and Costs of Water and Other Services

For households connected to the public water system (roughly 60 per cent in Ezbet Bekhit), the price of water is very low, usually a flat six month fee of LE 15-25 (\$ 3-5). Pressure in the system may frequently be zero and the quality of the water poor, but the service is very inexpensive. It is interesting that the Ministry of Social Affairs recorded that in Ezbet Bekhit 42 per cent of households stated they had no monthly cost for water. REF For households not connected, however, they rely on "borrowing" water from more fortunate neighbours or on purchasing water from vendors at the going rate of LE 0.35 per 20 litre jerrycan. This translates to LE 17.50 (\$3.5) per m<sup>3</sup>, which is 27 times the national potable water rate for metered consumption.

A partial sewerage network was introduced to Ezbet Bekhit in the 1970s, to which maybe 40 per cent of households are connected informally, but it is completely undersized for the current population and most households need to rely on soak-away pits. These need regular emptying by cart or suction truck which can cost up to LE 30-50 per month (\$ 6-10).

The electricity service in Ezbet Bekhit is remarkably good, with all buildings (and most dwelling units) connected and metered. Typical monthly electricity bills are LE 15-30 (\$3-6), depending on consumption.

### Housing Rental Rates

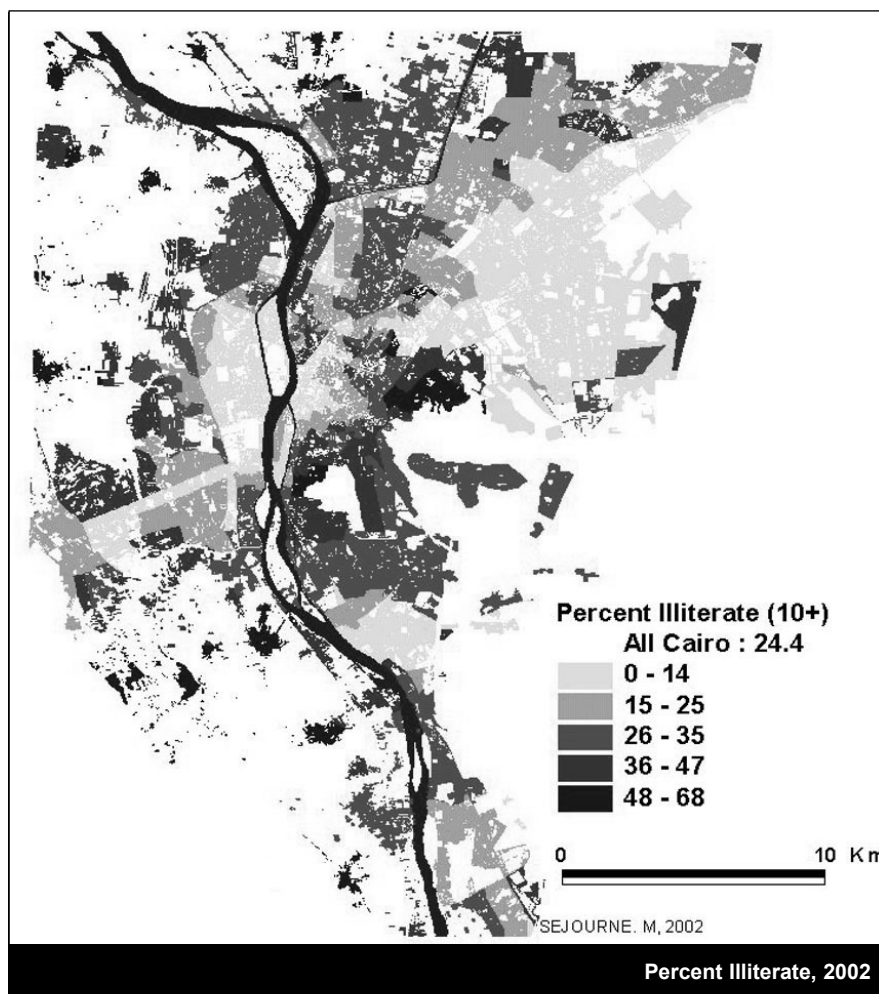
For the 50 per cent of households who rent their accommodation in Ezbet Bekhit, the large majority rented years ago and, due to rent control, enjoy very low rents, usually LE 10-25 (\$ 2-3) per month for a small flat and even less for single rooms. However, for those newly renting after 1996 (after the introduction of the new rent law), market rates prevail. A typical small 2 room flat will rent for LE 100-150 (\$20-30) and a single room for LE 35-50 (\$7-10), plus a negotiated down payment. Given that the median family income in Ezbet Bekhit is probably around LE 250 (\$50), these market rental rates are quite burdensome, even though they are among the lowest in the whole city.

### Availability of Housing Finance

There is no formal housing finance of any kind available to the residents of Ezbet Bekhit. Since there is no mortgage financing system in Egypt (repossession of the unit in case of non-payment is practically impossi-

ble), the same could be said for the whole country. A mortgage law was passed in 2000, but it has not yet become operational, and it is only expected to benefit the relatively well off.

In Ezbet Bekhit, as in all informal areas of Type A and B, finance of housing is a laborious step-wise effort spanning many years. Personal savings, help from relatives, and the conversion of other assets are the main means of housing finance.



### Health Problems and Health Services

Residents of Ezbet Bekhit frequently complain of health problems (especially diarrhoea and kidney, liver, eye, and skin ailments), and children are frequently sick, but there is no systematic collection of disease incidence or mortality rates at the level of Ezbet Bekhit or Manshiet Nasser. HIV/AIDS is not considered a significant health problem in Manshiet Nasser and in Egypt in general, but there is some prevalence mostly due to contaminated blood supplies. The infant mortality rate in Manshiet Nasser is presumably higher than the average for Cairo Governorate (28.8 per thousand live births, which is also the national average). Life expectancy is also presumably lower than the average

for Cairo Governorate (66.5 years at birth, compared to a national average of 66.7 years) (Institute of National Planning, 1998, p130).

A government health centre is located in Manshiet Nasser, but its health services are very rudimentary and most inhabitants must resort to a quite large private health sector (private specialist doctors and clinics) when they fall ill. However, the costs of these services (and the over-dependence on prescribing drugs for practically all conditions) means that for poor families an illness can mean a serious financial crisis.

### **Social Discrimination, Victimisation, and Psychological Trauma**

There is no social discrimination in Manshiet Nasser based on ethnicity or religion. However, women are discriminated against in the workplace, and there is considerable anecdotal evidence of violence against women within the family, with its attendant psychological trauma. The secondary status of women and their lack of opportunities in Manshiet Nasser reflect traditional rural and especially Upper Egyptian values. (Most families in Manshiet Nasser have Upper Egyptian backgrounds). Although child labour in Manshiet Nasser is common and working conditions are sometimes bad, it is difficult to say that child exploitation is high. Perhaps the main victimisation towards inhabitants in Manshiet Nasser is due to the pervasive bribe-seeking by minor officials for a myriad of presumed infringements of the law.

### **Insecurity**

Unlike many third world cities, violent crime in Cairo is extremely rare, and it is also rare in Manshiet Nasser. Petty theft is however relatively common, and women complain of harassment, especially at night. Although all inhabitants of Manshiet Nasser are, from a legal point of view, illegal squatters, evictions and housing demolition are extremely rare, and in all cases the government offers alternative accommodation before embarking on building removals. (However, bureaucratic abuses during the resettlement process can occur.)

### **Assets: Social Capital**

Civil society at the level of Ezbet Bekhit and Manshiet Nasser in general is very weak. There are *gamaiat* (community associations) based on area of rural origin, but they rarely undertake more than support for funerals and weddings. There are some Muslim charitable organisations centred around mosques, and the Christians of Manshiet Nasser (many of whom are garbage collectors and recyclers) enjoy a number of church-based social services. There are no inclusive local community development associations in the modern sense. In effect, true "social capital" is limited to close personal friendship ties (neighbours, co-workers, etc).

### **Assets: Financial Capital**

Household (liquid) financial capital in Ezbet Bekhit is mainly limited to household savings (including remittances from workers abroad) and support and loans from the extended family. The traditional Egyptian phenomenon of the *gamaia*, where a group of individuals pay regularly into a fund and take turns in using their share for large purchases (weddings, household durables, etc) is also prevalent in Ezbet Bekhit. There are no private lenders (usury is proscribed in Islam), and extremely few in Ezbet Bekhit can qualify for bank loans of any kind.

### **Assets: Human Capital**

Inhabitants of Ezbet Bekhit put a high value on formal education and training for marketable skills. Families make tremendous sacrifices to educate their children, and there are a remarkable number of youth pursuing post-secondary school degrees and diplomas. However, the quality of formal and vocational education available to those in Ezbet Bekhit is very poor and frequently irrelevant to job markets. (This is a fundamental problem with education throughout Egypt). Many parents make the rational decision to place their boys in informal workshops rather than schools, knowing that through the traditional apprentice system at least they will end up with a marketable skill and can, hopefully, start their own business.

### **Assets: Physical Capital**

The main form of physical capital, which also represents the most important family asset overall, is housing. This applies to roughly half of all households in Ezbet Bekhit. Although nominally squatters on state land, building and flat owners enjoy quite good security of tenure and properties are easily bought and sold in the informal property market. However, most properties are encumbered by sitting tenants. Other common forms of physical capital are workshop and commercial space and the equipment installed in these businesses. (There are over 700 businesses in Ezbet Bekhit, although most employ only one or two persons and are very minimally capitalised). A few residents of Ezbet Bekhit own taxis and pickup trucks.

### **Supportive Public Policy**

Attitudes of inhabitants towards public policies in Ezbet Bekhit could be summarised, until lately, as one of deep distrust. For decades the government had ignored the area, and for most "government" represented only intrusion and additional costs (formal and informal). Ezbet Bekhit is now a pilot upgrading area (a project of Cairo Governorate supported by German technical and financial assistance). But even after three years of this project and a number of physical and social improvements, a certain level of distrust and suspicion remain.

## IV. SLUMS AND POVERTY: THE POLICIES

### N POLICIES AND ACTIONS TAKEN TO IMPROVE SLUMS AND ALLEVIATE POVERTY

#### 1. Geographical Targeting and the Government's National Fund for Urban Upgrading

In 1992, after the problems of informal urban areas were highlighted by a serious earthquake and also due to security problems in some of these areas, the government launched a national Fund for Urban Upgrading. A survey of informal urban settlements was carried out nationally, and areas were classified as either in need of upgrading (the majority) or removal and replacement (a relatively small number). The main problems in these areas were identified and upgrading focused on 909 areas in six investment sectors: electricity, planning and organisation, municipal cleanliness, water, sanitary drainage, and road paving. This programme represents, to date, the only effort in Egypt to systematically address the problems of informal urban areas and the needs of their low-income inhabitants. (The only other interventions have been a small number of donor-funded urban upgrading projects of a pilot nature).

In 2000 a review of this national programme was carried out by the Institute of National Planning (Osman and El Hakim, 2000). Considerable sums were invested through various government agencies (LE 1915 million (US\$563 million) by 1999, of which Greater Cairo received LE 971 million (US\$285.5 million) or 51 per cent), and most of the funds went for sewerage systems (roughly 40 per cent), followed by potable water, electricity, and road paving respectively. However, the review pointed up a number of problems and deficiencies, the most important of which were as follows:

- accurate and systematic information on (and even maps of) informal areas and their needs were lacking frequently funds were allocated for large infrastructure projects that only partly (if at all) served needy informal areas, going instead to prestige roads, bridges, etc. in nearby formal urban areas
- it was often impossible to track what funds were actually spent on informal areas due to rigid accounting procedures
- there was a marked difference between projects planned, those approved, and actual executed investments

These are deficiencies which are internal to the programme or which reflect problems with the structure

of government financial disbursements. More generally, the programme could be faulted for what it did not cover. First of all, the effort was relatively small. Although according to the programme roughly 5.7 million beneficiaries were targeted (yielding investments per capita of LE 335 (US\$98.5), in fact the number of persons living in informal urban areas is more in the order of 13 million, meaning actual per capita expenditures were only LE 145 (US\$42.63) per capita. Secondly, investments were not directed towards social services, especially schools, which have been identified as the most severe deficiencies in informal areas. Finally, these investments were all very much top-down. Local populations had no role in identifying needs or in overseeing or monitoring investment packages. Most were not even aware that there was such a national programme.

#### 2 Socio-Economic Targeting and the Rural Bias in Poverty Alleviation

Overall, the Egyptian Government's attempts to alleviate poverty have never been particularly well targeted, and there is virtually no functioning safety net which offers significant transfers to the ultra poor and destitute. Fiscal constraints imposed by structural adjustment have recently reduced commodity subsidies consumed by the poor to three items, sugar, cooking oil and baladi bread, and because of leakage these subsidised items are consumed by more than just poor families.

The formal social safety net includes a number of compensatory measures run by the Ministry of Insurance and Social Affairs and its affiliates which are aimed at the poor and vulnerable groups. There are two main types, social assistance programmes which provide cash transfers and subsidised credit to qualifying poor households, and social insurance programmes which provide payments to former workers and also some non-contributory schemes. There are no unemployment compensation schemes. Overall, although coverage is fairly wide for the various pension schemes, in all programmes the sums transferred to beneficiaries are very small, targeting is a problem, and the programmes are little more than palliatives for those in need. And, it should be added, there is no systematic geographic approach.

The Egyptian Social Fund for Development, started in 1993 and heavily funded by a number of donor countries, is by far the most effective institution in Egypt aiming at poverty alleviation and fighting unemployment. It funds a number of programmes which mainly employ socio-economic targeting mechanisms. Among them are micro credit and training to women headed households, business loans to youth and small entrepreneurs, a range of human development projects targeted in part at retraining workers who have lost jobs due to privatisation, and public works projects which

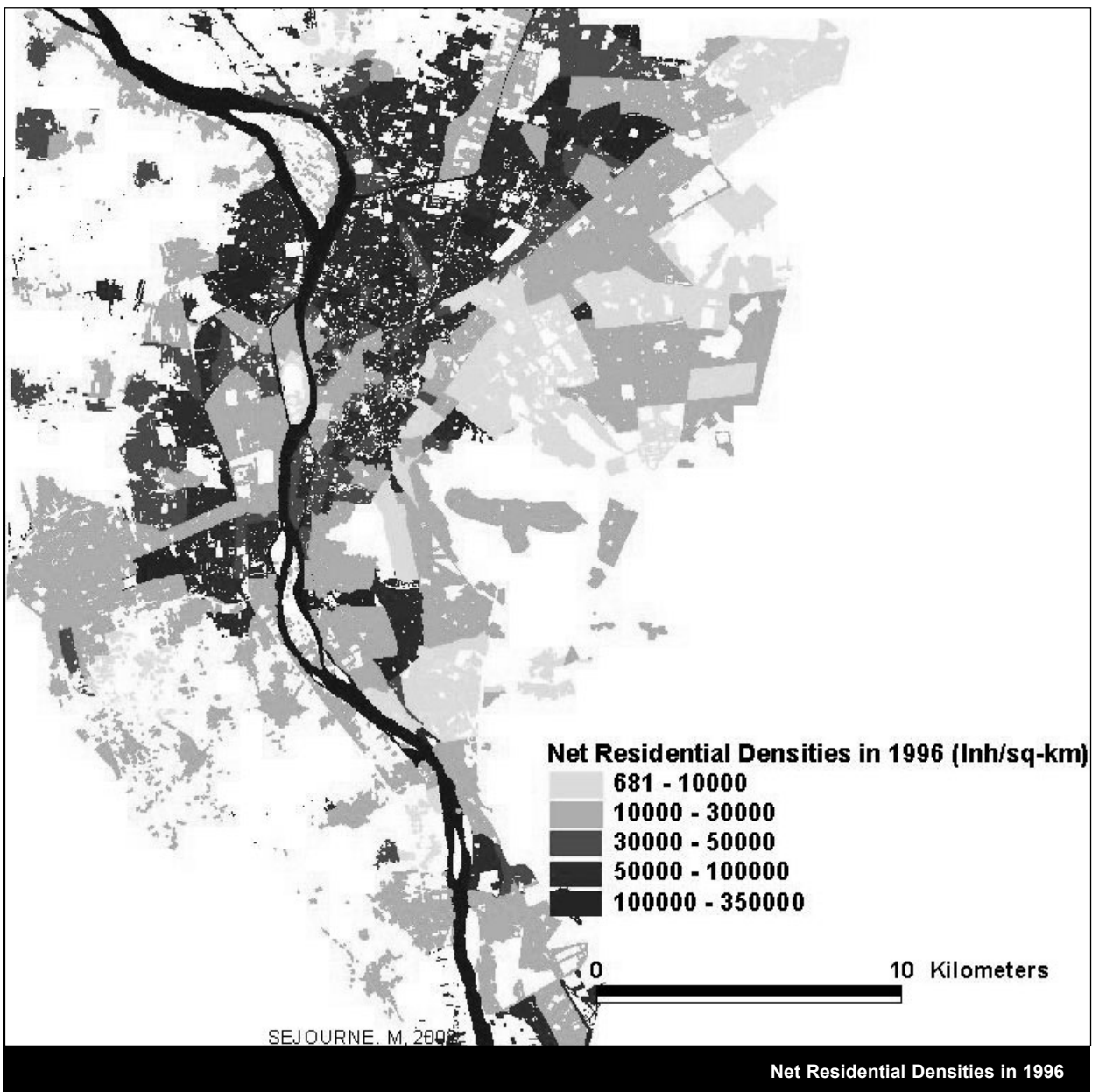
improve public services and provide needed infrastructure. Due to pressure from donor agencies, the Social Fund has maintained a policy of restricting its activities mainly to rural areas. The argument is that it is the Egyptian village where the most severe poverty exists, and that urban interventions will only accelerate the drift to the cities. Such a policy is not supported by hard statistics or any comprehensive studies, it is rather a pre-conceived understanding of 3rd world poverty which may apply to other countries but flies in the face of reality in Egypt.

### 3. NGO and CDA Activities

Over the last 15 years Egypt has witnessed a rapid increase in the number and scope of NGOs aimed at

social development and fighting poverty. These are many types, but large national service and charity NGOs dominate, and most enjoy at least partial foreign funding. They operate throughout Egypt, but there is an overwhelming concentration in rural areas and the provinces of Upper Egypt. CDAs, which must be sanctioned by the Ministry of Social Affairs, are more prevalent and more active in rural than in urban areas (the Social Fund itself channels much of its funding through NGOs and CDAs operating in rural areas).

A few NGOs also operate in urban areas, and there are a handful which are dedicated to particular slum areas, but these are the exceptions. There is no NGO (or league of CDAs for that matter) which specifically aims at the problems of urban slums and poverty.



## **O ASSESSMENT OF GOVERNMENT COMMITMENT TO POLICIES AND PROGRAMME WHICH ADDRESS SLUMS AND URBAN POVERTY**

It should be evident from the above discussion that, with the exception of the Government's National Programme for Informal Areas, until now neither the Government of Egypt or the donor community have focused on operational policies or programmes which address the problems of slums and urban poverty. It thus goes without saying that, in their absence, there is no regular monitoring and adjustment of approaches.

The cause relates partly to the fact that, as mentioned at the beginning of this report, Egyptian cities do not in general exhibit strikingly visible slums where there are overwhelming concentrations of the poor and ultra poor. Thus to date in political and development discourse slums and urban poverty have not been given much importance as problems for which specific policies and programmes are needed.

On the other hand, the development discourse in Egypt is full of the need to combat unemployment, to strengthen the informal private sector and micro enterprises, to provide social safety nets, to develop human resources, to address environmental issues of concern to the poor, and to target women, and there are a large number of policies and programmes in place to address these issues, with partners including central and local government, civil society, and the donor community.

It is a bit strange that there is this ignorance of the urban dimension, given that officially 50 per cent of Egyptians live in urban areas (and that, unofficially, perhaps as many as 70 per cent live in what are internationally considered urban places). And given that official definitions show that the incidences of poverty are practically the same in urban and rural areas, one would expect more policies oriented specifically at urban poverty and its geographical coincidence with informal and slum neighbourhoods.

And finally, one would expect, given that Greater Cairo represents almost 50 per cent of Egypt's total urban population, that the capital metropolis would be a logical starting point for a focused approach to combating urban poverty.

In the last year or two there appears to have been a beginning of focussed interest in urban slums and poverty. The Egyptian Social Fund for Development has started to target deprived urban areas, and German Development Co-operation is assisting the Ministry of Planning and other government agencies in policy reforms aimed at addressing the problems of the urban poor. Also, parliamentary representatives of the ruling National Democratic Party have initiated a debate on solutions to the *aashawi* phenomenon. ■

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> A very readable description of Cairo's history and its medieval importance is given in Rodenbeck (1998).
- <sup>2</sup> Definitions of the metropolitan region of Greater Cairo area vary considerably, leading to estimates of the total population which range from 12.5 million to 18 million.
- <sup>3</sup> For an early commentary on the decrease of migration to Cairo, see Shorter (1989).
- <sup>4</sup> In Map 2 only slum types A, B, and C are indicated. Due to their very small size, slum type D locations cannot be delineated.
- <sup>5</sup> For a description of the dynamics of historic areas of Cairo, see Supreme Council for Antiquities (1997).
- <sup>6</sup> The population of Greater Cairo at this time had grown to 4.5 million persons.
- <sup>7</sup> Janet Abu-Lughod, a very keen observer of Cairo whose main research covered the period 1963-65, did not note this phenomenon at all.
- <sup>8</sup> The primary data include two sample surveys carried out in Ezbet Bekhit. The first was a 36 household socio-economic survey undertaken by Mr. Farid el Kholi (2001) as part of his master's thesis at the Free University of Berlin. The second is a 130 household health, water and sanitation survey carried out by women of the Ezbet Bekhit Community Development Association in May 2002 for the GTZ technical cooperation project in Ezbet Bekhit. Secondary data include (1) results of the 1996 Census at the level of Manshiet Nasser Qism, (2) the results of a household survey of Ezbet Bekhit conducted by the Ministry of Social Affairs (Directorate of Social Affairs Cairo Governorate), in 1998 and 1999, and (3) a representative sample household socio-economic survey (sample size 1000 families) of all of Manshiet Nasser carried out by the Egyptian Center for Criminological and Social Research in 1998.

## ACRONYMS

CDA	Community Development Association
EHDR	Egyptian Human Development Report
NGO	Non-Governmental Association

## GLOSSARY

<i>Aashwa'i</i>	Informal areas
<i>Baladi</i>	Areas with poorer inhabitants, especially of rural origin
<i>El faqr</i>	The poor
<i>Gamaiat</i>	Community associations
<i>Gamayias</i>	Revolving credit and savings systems
<i>Infitah</i>	Opening up of the economy
<i>Mahdoudi el dakhl</i>	"Those of limited-income"
<i>Shaabi</i>	Popular or working-class neighbourhoods

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