URBAN DEVELOPMENT
IN RELATION TO AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

by

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Introduction

The subject of urban development may seem at first glance unrelated to the problems of food and agricultural development or at best loosely related to it. In this presentation we will try to show that in the Egyptian context and possibly other similar countries the problems in these two fields interact, policies related to each of them contradict or complement each other. We hope also to illustrate the possible directions of eliminating the contradictions and enhancing the coordination potentials in these two fields to help solve the problems facing both urban development on one hand and food and agricultural development on the other. Hence contributing to the total development of the country, and the welfare of its population.

We will start by first explaining the Egyptian urbanization trends and problems together with their effects on agricultural development. Secondly, we will examine the solutions currently discussed to solve the urban development problems and then evaluate them from the point of view of their abilities to contradict with or complement the efforts to increase agricultural development and indeed food production. Egypt population problems could be properly understood only through the appreciation of its two major dimensions. First, the rate of growth of the population and secondly, its spatial distribution.
The Egyptian population has increased from about 18 million in 1946 to 37 million in 1976. That is, it has doubled in 30 years. With the current annual rate of increase of about 2.3%, it may double to 70 million and this time in only 20 years. It is well known that most of Egypt's population is concentrated on only 4% of its land along the banks of the Nile.

The present population pressure on inhabited land is severe, with the average density of more than 1000 persons per km² among the highest in the world. Per capita cultivated area has dropped from about 0.5 acres at the turn of the century to less than 0.2 acres today in spite of the land reclamation efforts. Despite the anticipated efforts for land reclamation, it will have another drastic drop by the end of this century. This of course have posed the tremendous problems and challenge of food production which is certainly one of the main issues discussed in this Congress.

In the same time, this population growth and the slow growth in agricultural land created very problematic urban trends as well as changing some of the major characteristics of the population. To these aspects of urbanization we will turn our attention now.

The Urbanization Trends and Problems

For very long periods, Egypt was considered as an agricultural country. The people of Egypt have traditionally increased at 3 - 6% annually. The total urban population may have grown by 27 million, from 18 million in 1978 to 45 million in the year 2000. This trend is continuing for the known reasons of 'rural population' and 'urban population'. The pressure on the agricultural land and the high cost of reclamation constitute the 'push' factor for urbanization. The employment created by rapid economic growth is the 'pull' factor. Experience in other countries as well as in Egypt shows that diversified industrial and employment growth that are necessary to sustain economic growth can be achieved mainly in cities.
This have posed a set of major problems. In this paper, we will concentrate on those issues that have bearing on both urban development and agricultural development.

1. The Burden of accommodating the growing urban population.

2. The consumption of arable land in the process of expanding many of the existing cities.

3. Speculation on agricultural land.

4. Speculation of potentially reclaimable land.

5. Using the top soil of the agricultural land adjacent to urban areas in manufacturing bricks to meet the demand of urban constructions.

The Burden of Accommodating the Rapidly Growing Urban Population:

The influx of rural immigrants to urban areas besides the natural urban population increase have surpassed all urban planning efforts. Uncontrolled urban sprawl occurred in all Egyptian cities. This is particularly noticeable in major cities like Cairo where it is estimated now that over 40% of its population is living in unplanned informal areas. Cities were not capable of accommodating this urban increase in a planned and orderly manner that could achieve at least a minimum standard of health and of decent living conditions for the majority of their population.

Resources both financial and technical were not available and the size and magnitude of the problem was not apparent except when it was too late.

A large portion of the urban population are living now in over-crowded areas, substandard housing and lacking in elementary water and sanitary facilities. Improving, what specialists in urban planning now call 'upgrading' if existing areas to provide basic services of water, sewerage and facilities such as school
health and community centers is proving more expensive exercise than
with initial planning areas. Also this uncontrolled urban sprawl have
created problems of transportation, food and supplies distribution and a
last of other problems. These will continue to absorb inefficiently ever
increasing proportions of the national resources to temporarily supress
these problems. Unless new urban and population strategies are persistently
adopted.

The second problem of the increasing urban population is:

The Consumption of Scarc Arable Land in the Process of Expanding
Existing Cities:

Most Egyptian cities have started in locations to function
as 'service towns' for agricultural areas and thus are surrounded by
agricultural land. Accordingly, urban expansion in most Egyptian
cities have been done on the expense of arable agricultural land.

It is estimated that between 3 - 6 % of the country's agri-
cultural land have been converted to non-agricultural uses (mostly
urban) since 1950's. All the massive land reclamation efforts during
the same period have not been capable of compensating that loss. If
this trend continues, it is not unlikely that another 300,000 to half
a million acres or about 8 - 9% of arable land could be lost to non-agri-
cultural uses, earned their living from the land. In 1900 over 80% of
the ten million population were rural. Due to the population explosion refered
to earlier an² despite land reclamation offers the proportion of urban
population has been increasing. Now Egypt is a highly urbanized country
considering its economic structure and per capita GNP (£. 81,280 in 1976).
Out of a resident population of 37 million, 17 million or about 50%
live now in urban settlements. Urbanization is continuing at a rapid
pace, whereas Egypt's population is growing at about 2.3% per year, its
urban population. This certainly have adverse affects on food production
and its prices.

However, we have to draw the attention that the human and physical
capital that have accumulate in existing towns and cities is considered
by planners and economists as a valuable base for commercial and industrial
expansion. Thus urban development in some cases have 'value', in the sense
if allowed to grow will increase the national product by more than the
loss of farmland as have been indicated in a recent State. This does
not mean that we do not advocate the preservation of arable land but to
show that it should not only be seen from one route only but to seek
solutions that contribute to both food production and the accommodation
of the urban population as we will refer to later in this paper.

Egypt's population problem could be properly understood only
in terms of both the population rate of growth and its partial
distribution.

The third problem of urban expansion that is related to food
and agricultural development is:

Speculation of Agricultural Land on the Fringe of Urban Areas:

As cities are expanding in the direction of agricultural land,
prices have been increasing as a result of increasing demand to convert it
or in the hope of converting it to more expensive urban land. This in
itself have no effect on food production as long as the arable land is
continuing production. However, I would like to draw the attention to a new
phenomena, that is the entering of urban land speculators in the farmland
market. Thus holding increasing amounts of farm land in the fringes in
conditions below the optimum in terms of agricultural productivity and in
few cases deteriorating conditions for either lack of interest or know-
ledge or for avoidance of certain arrangements with farmers to cultivate it.
A trend which should not be allowed to grow through legislation and
other measures before it is added to the stock of problems that are too
late to solve them.

The fourth problem that have one foot in urban development and
another in agricultural development is:

Speculation of Potentially Reclaimable Lands for Non-Agricultural Usage:

This potential problem similar to the last one is still in its
infancy. Under the pretence of desert land reclamation for agriculture,
some individuals and organizations started to hold land that have
potentials for both or either agricultural and non-agricultural uses. Without actually reclaiming it. Existing laws, however, state that land could be withdrawn and brought back to public ownership if not reclaimed within a certain period. This is certainly the right direction, however, there is a tendency between few to reclaim the land to the point only of qualified to its title, that is full ownership and not among the objective to add it to the productive agricultural land. Again action is required in this sphere.

The fifth and last issue we will discuss which related both urban and agricultural development is:

The use of the Top Soil of Farmland to produce red clay bricks to meet the demands of the Increasing Urban Constructions:

Traditional methods of construction in urban areas rely mainly on the use of red clay bricks. The raw material required for its production comes at present predominantly from cutting off a portion of the top silt and clay soil of the agricultural land. This have adverse effects on the fertility of the land. Current laws forbid this action however, it proved almost impossible to enforce. The present governmental efforts to produce alternative building materials will aid is reducing the size of this problem. However, the higher costs of those alternatives is a problem that need is important attention.

Having discussed some of the common issues between urban and agricultural developments, we will end this presentation by evaluating some current policies and trends in both areas in terms of their mutual implications.

First Policies in Land Reclamation and Agricultural Development:

Current policies encouraging the opening of new lands for agriculture to increase food and other agricultural production will certainly have favourable effects on urban development. It will enable the absorption of larger portion of the increase of population in rural areas, thus reducing the pressure aggravating urban problems. Increasing
the yield of existing lands would also achieve the same objective, but we believe at a lower cost from the point of view it utilizes existing infrastructure and facilities in rural areas.

Thus agricultural policies do not contradict with urban development policies, which unfortunately, is not the case of urban development policies in relation to agriculture development.

Current Urban Development Strategies and their Effect on Agricultural Development:

Most of the current urban development strategic and policies aim at preserving arable land. But they have not been successful so far:

a. Suggestions to control by legislation rural - urban migration although occasionally discussed has always been rejected.

b. Forbidding the conversion of agricultural land to urban land by law did not and will not stop process as long as the demand for urban land continues.

c. Increasing population densities in existing urban areas by allowing the building of vacant lands or increasing the utilization of existing plots by allowing in the new housing lieu the demolition of poorly utilized areas for rebuilding them at much higher densities.

This trend will take time to materialize. Also the prohibitive cost of changing or remodeling the existing infrastructure networks to cater for the increased density make us believe that this direction will have only marginal effects on both problems.

The last and most important current urban strategy is the creation of a set of new towns. 10th of November city which occupies land roughly 50 kilometers north east of Cairo, Safari city at roughly the same distance but north west of Cairo. The third, New America, at about 50 kms. west of Alexandria. These three cities are now at the early stages of implementation. There is also a number of smaller cities around Cairo.