



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

IFAD-UNESCO Global Seminar on “Learning Knowledge and Skills for Agriculture and Improving Rural Livelihoods”



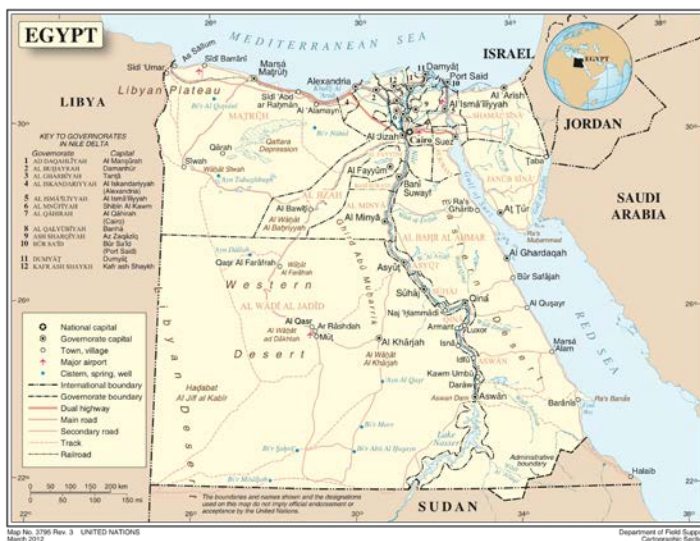
Country Study Summary Arab Republic of Egypt

Country context:

With over 83 million inhabitants, of which about 57 per cent of them live in rural areas, the Arab Republic of Egypt is one of the most populous countries in the world¹. An estimated labour force (economically active population) is 32.4 million with 30 million people employed². The unemployment rate is on the rise from 9 per cent in 2009 to 13 per cent in 2013. Women constitute only 23.9 per cent of the employed labour force.

Egypt is a middle income country with the GDP annual growth rate of 2.2 per cent³. Agriculture represents an important sector of the national economy, engaging about 34 per cent of the total employed population. The sector contributed to about 15.5 per cent of GDP in 2005/2006 with a growth rate of 3.2 per cent per year.

While many indicators reflect country’s remarkable progress, there remain challenges. The poverty rate in Egypt reaches 25.2 per cent of the population, with 4.8 per cent of the population (4.32 million) living under extreme poverty conditions. The poverty rates of 17 per cent in Lower Egypt and 51.4 per cent in Upper Egypt reveals significant regional disparities. Of 1.6 million of child labourers, 83.8 per cent of them reside in rural areas and 64 per cent of them work in agriculture. The illiteracy rate is reported to be 24.9 per cent of the population, concentrating among female population and in rural areas.



Source: UN Map (No. 3795 Rev. 3 March 2012)

¹ Unless otherwise specified the main data source of this section is the IFAD-UNESCO Egypt Country Study.

² 2009 Census

³ World Bank World DataBank <http://databank.worldbank.org/data/views/variableselection/selectvariables.aspx?source=world-development-indicators#>

Site selection

Qualitative research methods were used for the investigation of the research questions through field studies in the Fayoum governorate which is one of Upper Egypt's largest governorates. Fayoum is characterized by a green oasis located in the Western Desert in the south-west of Cairo Governorate, with around 2.8 million inhabitants in six districts. The main economic activity in Fayoum is agriculture, producing fruits, wheat, cotton, rice, sorghum, beet and sunflower. It has also two industrial zones and is known for tourism. In this region, almost one in four young people, aged between 15-35 years old, is illiterate (23.97 per cent)⁴.

In the Fayoum governorate, two villages were selected: Tounis and Gemi villages at Monshaet Senoras, considering varying demographic and socio-economic conditions. Tounis represents a village with relatively better living conditions due to tourism, while Gemi is a relatively poor village with limited natural resources.

Overview of main findings of the country study

The desk study and field research work contributed to deepen the understanding of realities faced by rural young people in the two communities in the Fayoum governorate as well as their perceptions towards agriculture, rural livelihoods and learning of relevant knowledge and skills in evolving Egyptian communities.

Many of the rural youth participants depend on farming limited plots owned by them or their parents. In many families, two or three generations live together, and agricultural activities engage all the family members. But they lack capital, effective agricultural equipment and tools, and information on modern methods of agriculture and marketing. In addition to poverty, their communities suffer from environmental problems, lack of social services (e.g. school, healthcare units), shortage of irrigation and fresh water, and increasing prices of products such as fertilizers and pesticides.

Patterns of land ownership and access to water were pointed out as an issue. Plots of land owned by many families tend to be extremely small, forcing families to seek other sources of income. Poorest young groups do not own land, and work as low-paid wage labourers during farming seasons and in non-farming sectors to sustain their lives. Their local employment opportunities, however, are extremely limited in both communities and many young people migrate to urban areas or abroad in search of better job opportunities. Due to the absence of relevant knowledge and skills to meet the requirements of the formal contract employment in those places, however, they tend to accept to work as wage labourers. Despite their willingness to migrate, a number of young people remain in their communities due in part to family responsibilities and also to their skills levels.

The research revealed gender differences. While many women have a strong willingness to continue to study (e.g. literacy classes), ambition and self-confidence, which appears to derive from multiple roles they play in families, younger women in rural areas suffer from marginalization in different dimensions. Girls and young women tend to leave school earlier than their male peers, often without completing

⁴ Source: Adult Education Authority, Information Center, 2012

primary school, or do not attend school, due mainly to the tradition that favours male education. Girls usually help mothers in domestic work such as raising poultry stock, baking, cooking and cleaning. Many young women lack basic knowledge and skills, which lead to longer-hour and lower-paid work.

In terms of learning, the research revealed that knowledge and skills related to agriculture and rural livelihoods are gained mainly through informal learning from parents, neighbours and relatives or through their own trial-and-error experiences. But many rural youth lack knowledge and skills relevant to contemporary agriculture. As deprivation increases among the poorest in rural areas as a result of the lack of basic skills, they are often compelled to accept working at jobs that will prevent them from exiting out of poverty cycle.

The research findings highlight the need for young people to acquire knowledge and skills as part of their basic education. Those who have missed basic education still need a second chance to be able to develop the skills needed to access better jobs opportunities or better livelihoods. But formal and non-formal learning opportunities are still not sufficient, given the limited availability of schools and the weak relevance of some existing programmes for developing technical knowledge and skills.

Young participants in this study perceive that the government, public bodies and civil society organizations concerned with the provision of agriculture knowledge and skills programmes for young farmers are falling back from providing effective learning programmes. In their views, there is a gap between the national policies and strategies and the actual implemented activities.

Recommendations

Insights gained from this qualitative research, although its scope is limited to the two communities, illuminates many issues for potential further in-depth investigation and coordinated action by stakeholders, including the government, civil society organisations. The research team makes the following suggestions:

To link national policies and strategies with rural development plans and programs and to enhance monitoring and implementation mechanisms for greater transparency and accountability among concerned administrative bodies.

A vision of lifelong learning should be far-reaching in state public policy. Policies and programmes, targeting deprived rural youth, particularly women, should give greater importance to acquisition of relevant skills such as modern farming techniques for enhanced productivity. Models such as 'farming schools' and 'field schools' which cater the needs of farmers have a potential for improving the relevance of learning and therefore contributing to improved agricultural production, making job opportunities in rural areas more attractive, and reducing migration to cities.

Informal teaching and learning must also be recognized as part of coordination efforts between different ministries and sectors, such as education, social affairs, labour and employment, agriculture, communications and environment.

It is recommended to involve rural youth in planning of training programmes related to agriculture and associated activities such as marketing as well as cooperation with trade unions (commercial or agricultural), agricultural cooperatives, and agricultural banks, concerned with rural development, which is believed to improve the relevance of the programme and strengthen links with the local labour markets.

A second chance for education - for those who missed the opportunity of education or did not complete their basic education - should be made available for acquisition of basic literacy and life skills to live with dignity. Provision of quality literacy programmes as an integral part of national plans and budget should be increased.

The effective use of modern technology should be explored to enhance learning of new knowledge and skills. Video recordings, radio broadcasting and television programmes can be used to train small-scale farmers on skills associated with agriculture. As the most prevalent technology, mobile phones can be used for sending tips on farming, pests combating in a particular season, and poultry stock. Internet can also be an effective tool to increase youth's access to relevant knowledge and skills and to discuss and share information.

Farmers' unions to enhance their skills in marketing and negotiation should be established, considering potential resources or crop storage areas and behaviours of large merchants which tend to monopolize the market. Enhanced agriculture cooperatives and extension centres can also be effective for expanding the range of young farmers' business skills and strengthening their capacities in managing environmental challenges such as deteriorating soil and lack of irrigation water and increasing productivity through introduction of new crop patterns.

Opportunities for non-farming business should be promoted through training on financial skills, small-projects management in rural areas, and provision of more accessible soft loans to youth.

Capacities of service providers, such as officers at the agriculture cooperatives, village banks, local NGO's and the local councils, should be enhanced in order to activate their roles in enhancing knowledge and skills among young farmers.

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