



Three Major Aspects of Underdevelopment: Poverty, Poor Environmental Conditions, and Childhood Deprivation. A Case Study of Al-Salam District – Cairo.

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Problem Statement

Studies of development have typically focused on a single challenge and have been conducted along disciplinary lines. For instance, economists single out economic concerns as the core of development challenges while psychologists and sociologists highlight social issues such as childhood deprivation in health and services. Moreover, very few analysts take into consideration the synergistic linkages between the many dimensions of development.

In the study district of Al-Salam in Cairo, three major challenges to development are ubiquitous: poverty, poor environmental conditions, and child deprivation. This study demonstrates the interrelated character of these issues and the need to address them in an integrated fashion. The conclusions of this study provide the foundation for an integrated approach to development of Al-Salam district, in an upgrading project of the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood (NCCM).

Objectives

The study aims to identify the main parameters of poverty, poor environmental conditions, and child deprivation in the area, such as the poor housing conditions and the relevant health, environmental, and educational problems facing its population. It places special emphasis on children's withdrawal from the education system and their joining the labor force to provide economic assistance to their families, as well as on the sources, types and forms of pollution affecting the health of children in the area.

Methodology

The main methods of this research are desk research and fieldwork, i.e. secondary data from previous studies and primary data from fieldwork. The desk research includes a review and analysis of the current NCCM project in the area, existing literature on similar topics, and a review of Child Law No. 12 of 1996 and its executive regulations concerning the means to protect children. It also includes a review of the roles of the concerned Egyptian governmental bodies.

The field study includes the administration of a structured questionnaire to three random samples drawn from the area. The first sample of 100 families represents the population of families living in Al-Salam district. The second sample of 25 children represents the population of children working in the workshops. The third sample of 25 owners represents the population of workshop owners.

An observation list supplements the data from the structured questionnaire.

Its main goal was to gather data about the environmental impact of the various types of workshops in the area, such as car repair shops, casting workshops, and poultry farms. The list also includes information on the available health and security services in the area.

Key Results

Population, Health & other facilities in Al-Salam District

Al-Salam district is a densely crowded area. The district has four sub-districts, three of which are residential, Al-Obour, Al-Salam and Al-Nahda. The fourth sub-district is called Craftsman City. Craftsman City hosts all the workshops and a poultry farm, as well as residential apartments located above the workshops. The total population of the district is 366,565, with an annual growth rate of 2.8%. Data from secondary sources as well as field observations indicated a relatively inadequate provision of health services and utilities to the area. There is only one hospital with a total of 350 beds. There are also fourteen service units, four ambulances and three fire engines. The numbers are clearly disproportionate to the size of the population. With regard to educational services, the district has 142 schools with 1,962 classes. As for the sports facilities, there are three youth centers that provide sports facilities and one cinema. The housing conditions in the area are such that the majority of families occupy housing that has three rooms and 83 square meters, with an average family size of the largest sample group (30% of the 100 families) of seven people. The lighting, ventilation, and cleanliness levels were observed to be 'acceptable' in 90%, 87% and 48% of cases, respectively. The district is connected to the central sewer, water, and electricity networks. There are also 13,268 telephone lines in the area.

Dire Economic Situation of the Families

Typically the main provider for the family in Al-Salam district is the father, either solely or jointly with the mother or a son. Sons contribute solely or jointly to family income in 20% of the sample. Moreover, 69% of the families fall in the low-income category with an average monthly income of LE 338 (less than US\$100). The dire economic situation of these families is compounded by the fact that 88% of the sample do not receive subsidies of any sort, and 97% possess no income-generating assets.

Environmental Degradation

The environmental conditions are unsatisfactory. The residential areas suffer from pollution because of the workshops, the poultry farms, and local garbage. The poultry farms in particular burn animal residues that produce hot steam exhaust, in addition to attracting insects and flies.

Inefficiency of garbage collection services causes piling of garbage, which attracts mosquitoes. Forty-four percent of the families said that garbage is left for a long time after being collected in plots in the streets. Most residents (85%) suffer from infectious diseases carried by mosquitoes.

Surprisingly, all of the families said there are no problems with sewage.

Health Deterioration

Of the 100 families in the sample, twelve cases suffering from health problems were reported, including allergy, dental problems, kidney and orthopedic ailments. People's reluctance to use the limited health facilities in the area compounds the problem of health deterioration. The majority of the population prefer private clinics since the public hospital does not offer the specializations needed. This in turn affects the desire to seek medical advice or treatment because of the costs and the limited income of the families in the area.

Child Deprivation

With respect to education, most of children in the area (84%) are both enrolled in the formal education system and working outside the house.

All school dropouts in the family sample work, both boys and girls working inside and outside of the district, support their families. Twenty-nine of the 100 families have working children who were withdrawn from the education system. Twenty of those families have children working inside the district. Among the nine families whose children work outside, six have girls employed outside the area.

In addition to children who work and live in the district, the study looked at children who work in the district but reside elsewhere. A sample of 25 cases were selected using a multi-stage sampling method to be interviewed and observed. These children range from 12 to 14 years old. The majority of them joined the labor force at the age of 10. Twenty-eight percent work as car painting technicians; 24% work as car repair technicians.

The situation of children in Al-Salam district was strongly indicative of deprivation. All working children are subject to severe noise pollution which carry the risks of deafness and nerve problems. They are subject to air pollution from auto exhaust and from paint chemicals, which are expected to cause adverse effects on the respiratory system.

The need to work in support of their families deprives children of the essential need for education. The study indicates that 20% of the working children in the sample are illiterate, and 40% withdrew from the primary education stage. The rest withdrew from the preparatory stage. None of the children finished the compulsory preparatory stage of education in accordance with the requirements of Article No. 59 of the Egyptian Child Law No. 12 of 1996.

The work conditions are neither favorable nor conducive to a healthy existence. Children work between 10 to 15 hours a day, with excess hours reported in 48% of the cases. This is compounded by the hazardous nature of their jobs and work places. Workshops are not equipped with basic safety measures. For instance, 36% of the workshops had no fire systems and 56% had no toilets.

Besides environmental and educational deprivation, children are also deprived economically. The minimal daily or monthly wages they receive and retain for themselves after contributing to family income is very small. The average monthly income of the working child is LE 194 per month of which LE 89.5 goes to the family.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Al-Salam district provides a strong case of the interrelationship between poverty, poor environmental conditions, and childhood deprivation, and the need for an integrated approach to addressing all three problems in the developmental efforts made by NCCM. It warrants intervention along the following lines:

- ◆ The provision of adult men and women with basic education and technical training to enable them to join the labor force and provide adequate family income, so that their children have ample space and time to pursue their education.
- ◆ The provision of funds and loans to support local income-generating activities is critical in alleviating the dire economic, environmental and educational conditions of the people in the area.
- ◆ Efforts targeted at increasing levels of public awareness about the importance of environmentally-friendly habits and attitudes are of prime importance. This requires launching organized campaigns and providing the population access to basic knowledge and information resources.
- ◆ Training should be offered for the working population, including workshop owners, about industrial safety, especially fire-extinguishing systems.
- ◆ Health services suitable for the needs of a poor urban district should be introduced, as well as industrial safety measures such as masks for those working with paints.
- ◆ Efforts must be made to ensure the effective application of Child Law No. 12 in order to stop the early withdrawal of children from the educational system and to provide working children with suitable working conditions.

The NCCM needs to have a well-integrated plan addressing environmental issues and poverty alleviation in order to affect the problems of child labor in Craftsmen City.

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