

### Integrating the Marginalized Population into Rural Development Projects

By Dr. Mahmoud F. El-Kordi and Mr. Ashraf Abdel Lahi

#### **Problem Statement**

The transformation of Egyptian society in the 1990s has been associated with significant changes in the national development strategy. The government has relinquished its leading role in the development process, and new actors are now participating in policy making and implementation. An important social change has been the deteriorating economic position of the middle class, and the expanding proportion of the population who are becoming poor and marginalized, especially in rural Egypt. This study is concerned with the socially and economically marginalized rural poor in Egypt, and their development needs.

#### **Objectives**

The primary objective of this study is to delineate some of the mechanisms that are needed to enable the marginalized to participate in the development process and thus to improve their economic and social position. It will identify the characteristics of the marginalized population in rural areas, and the factors that have contributed to their marginal status. The study will examine the main features underlying the process of rural development and its relation to rural marginalized groups.

#### **Methodology**

The study assesses the past and the present situation of the marginalized population. Data were collected through a literature review, and case studies based on in-depth questionnaires and focus group discussions. The study was conducted in Bani A'amer village, Markaz El Adowa, in Minia Governorate. Based on the available indicators of development and poverty, Bani A'amer was identified as among the least developed villages in Egypt. The study sample consisted of 100 marginalized households.



## **Study Results**

### **A. Economic conditions of the marginalized**

1. 69% of the sample work in agriculture, and some are seasonally unemployed. Others work in construction, and other unskilled jobs.
2. The situation of the women is the worst in the family; they carry out unskilled jobs in addition to their household activities.

### **B. Social conditions and level of awareness**

1. Perception of social condition: 97% of the sample perceived themselves as poor, while 3% perceive themselves as middle income people. 75% believe that any improvement in their economic condition is out of their hands.
2. Social mobility: Overall, those interviewed consider that their economic standard has been deteriorating, and they do not see any chances of upward social mobility given the current social circumstances in the community.
3. Accommodating to deteriorating living standards: There are three ways in which those interviewed accommodated to their deteriorating position; some passively accept the situation as it is; others try to adapt to their new living conditions and a third group actively tries to improve their position by getting extra jobs.
4. Social and political participation: The level of social participation inside the family and among neighbors is high, with 84% taking an active part in family events. On the community level, the level of participation is very low; none of those interviewed were members of a community organization. As for political participation, it is non-existent.

Social safety nets: Those interviewed lack proper social safety nets; 28% are entitled to some governmental aid and 7% reported getting financial help from neighbors. Most of the help received is seasonal, 82% receive financial help from neighbors during feasts and other special occasions.

### **C. Impact of Social and Economic Changes on the Marginalized**

Recent economic changes have had a negative impact on the sample. 92% reported that the new law concerning landlords and tenants has had a negative impact, with only 2% of the sample expressing satisfaction with the new law. The new law was associated with other changes, such as the elimination of subsidies and fixed prices for crops, which has also made life more difficult for them. As for the social changes, they have not gained any benefits from changes in the service sectors such as education and health.

#### D. Perceptions of Future Development in the Village

Those interviewed did not see any potential for development in the village as long as unemployment persists. Sixty four percent considered agricultural projects an important way to create jobs, and 44% advocate the creation of more projects to provide employment for the unemployed. The people believe that development is the responsibility of the government, rather than the private sector; 76% said that it is the government's role to plan development projects; 77% stressed the importance of the government in following up, and 89% emphasized its role in funding development projects.

#### E. Mechanisms for Integrating the Marginalized Rural Population in Development

Those interviewed suggested a number of mechanisms for integrating the marginalized into development. Negotiation is the primary mechanism suggested; negotiation links the following three mechanisms together so that they operate simultaneously.

1. Negotiation is necessary between the three parties involved in the development process: the state, the private sector and the village residents.
2. Resource creation: Given the limited resources within the village, development requires creating new resources and projects.
3. Creating opportunities: The third mechanism suggested is to create equal opportunities for the marginalized in terms of access to jobs, education, health services etc.

#### Summary:

According to the findings of the study, the poor villagers are being marginalized, excluded from access to jobs, services and full participation in the community. It is deemed necessary to seek appropriate mechanisms that would integrate them into the development process.

#### Conclusion and Recommendations

- **The government needs to participate in development in cooperation with the private sector and the civil society.** Together they should develop projects based on the available resources that contribute to reducing unemployment. Development efforts should give priority to the marginalized population.
- **The government should be responsible for** the rural infrastructure such as electricity, sewage system and potable water; and for supporting the rural health units, and the community development associations. The government needs to provide relevant information to the poor and the marginalized to help them to utilize these services.
- **Development negotiators** should be identified who would be trained to act as negotiators and intermediaries between the marginalized rural poor and the government, private sector, and more powerful local residents. They would assist the marginalized people to participate more effectively in development and overcome their low social and economic status.

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