



Poverty and developmental practices in the rural areas: An exploratory study in Sohag and Kafr El Sheikh

By: Mohamed Ibrahim Antar Khamis

Introduction and Research Problem:

Since the beginning of the 1970s, sociologists, planners and economists have given the concept of 'development' increasing attention. Development plans and policies during this period have focused on three main areas. The first area is the mobilization and employment of available resources to raise the income of individuals in the rural areas, to develop their social environments, and to enhance their productive capacities and consequently their standard of living. The second area is the recognition of the importance of public participation in developmental activities and of ensuring the continuous momentum of development efforts to create a more just distribution of income. The third area is the continuation of development efforts, which requires the development of trained and executive capacities capable of exploiting resources in an ideal manner.

Despite the numerous efforts at the level of developmental policies to satisfy the needs of individuals, these policies have often been associated with the deterioration of standard of living for low-income groups and an ultimate increase in the number of poor individuals, particularly in the rural areas. This situation makes clear the need to plan developmental programs that focus mainly on creating job opportunities and capital formation in the rural areas, in addition to the need to integrate the poor fully in the development process and to offer them the opportunity to participate in social, economic and political life.

Objectives of the Study:

The objectives of the study can be summarized as follows:

To identify the characteristics of the poor and non-poor in the Egyptian rural areas, to determine the differences between them and the means of enhancing their conditions.

Several sub-objectives are therefore delineated as follows:

1. Identify the level of poverty in Upper and Lower Egypt.
2. Determine the social and economic characteristics of the poor and non-poor in Upper and Lower Egypt.
3. Study differences between the poor and non-poor in Upper and Lower Egypt with regard to professional status, standard of living and educational and health status, particularly reproductive health and community participation.
4. Identify the problems that face the poor from their own perspectives.

5. Identify mechanisms for enhancing the conditions of the poor and non-poor in the rural areas of Upper and Lower Egypt.

6. Suggest means of overcoming poverty in the rural areas of Upper and Lower Egypt.

Methodology:

The study was carried out in the two governorates, Sohag in Upper Egypt and Kafr El Sheikh in Lower Egypt. The two governorates were selected because of their similarity on the scale of human development (1998/1999), with Sohag occupying the 17th position and Kafr El Sheikh the 14th.

This pilot case study was grounded in poverty-related theories to explain the phenomenon of poverty. Field work took place in eight villages, four villages in Sohag (Gaziret Mahrous, Aal Ezba wal Arab, Kom Badr and Sawalem) and four in Kafr El Sheikh (Eryan village, Al Monshaa, Abu Raia, Monshaat Salama). Researchers interviewed 561 heads of families in the villages of Sohag and 272 in Kafr El Sheikh. Data was collected between October and December 2000 using several tools, most important among which are interviews and questionnaires that were pre-tested to verify their validity as data collection tools

Findings:

- The study based its identification of the poor in the two governorates upon the food expenditure poverty line study. Despite the similarity between the two governorates, findings indicated that there are larger numbers of poor people in Sohag compared to Kafr El Sheikh. Respondents who fell under the poverty line accounted for 28.4% in Sohag and 27.6% in Kafr El Sheikh. The absence of major differences between the two governorates is attributed to the fact that the government has started to pay attention to Upper Egypt in recent years in order to make up for many years of deprivation and negligence. It is expected that upon the completion of the national projects in the southern parts of the country major improvements will occur and these regions will be able to attract more people and to offer a variety of economic and social activities, thereby causing a decline in the percentage of poor people in the effected regions.

- In order to determine the characteristics of the poor and non-poor and the differences between them, the following indicators were used:

-Professional status: Respondents were classified according to their main profession. The first was agriculture: 68.29% among the poor and 45.41% among the non-poor in Sohag as compared to 81.34% among the poor and 63.45% among the non-poor in Kafr El Sheikh. Public employment came next: 12.20% among the poor and 30.44% among the non-poor in Sohag compared to 4% among the poor and 14.49% among the non-poor in Kafr El Sheikh. Respondents who had more than one job accounted for 37.71% of the poor and 3.96% of the non-poor in Sohag as compared to 17.33% of the poor and 20.81% of the non-poor in Kafr El Sheikh.

- Wife's work: In the two governorates, a very limited proportion of non-poor wives work: 5.8% in Sohag compared to 5.08% in Kafr El Sheikh. Almost none of the wives of the poor respondents reported that they work.

-Family conditions: Findings indicated a low proportion of families who own small enterprises: 2.5% among poor respondents compared to 4.7% among the non-poor.

-Living conditions: Findings indicated lower living standards among the poor respondents compared to the non-poor in terms of ownership of house appliances, with an average of 4.37% among the poor compared to 7.60% among the non poor, and housing conditions, with an average of 20.38% for the poor and 22.90% for the non poor.

- Poverty and agricultural assets: The proportion of poor people who own agricultural assets is lower compared to proportion of non-poor who do so. Ownership of one feddan of agricultural land or more (30.5% in Sohag), ownership of animal wealth (26.7% of the poor in Kafr El Sheikh); and ownership of agricultural equipment (4.9% among the poor in sohag).

-Poverty and education: Poor respondents had the lowest proportion of families with members who had high education (6.7% in Kafr El Sheikh); the highest proportion of families with one or two illiterate parents (90.7% in Kafr El Sheikh); the highest proportion of families with illiterate children (51.2% in Sohag); and the highest proportion of children who drop out of school (59.7% in Sohag).

-Poverty and health: Child mortality reaches 61% in Sohag. 37.3% of families have chronic diseases in Kafr El Sheikh.

Reasons behind the prevalence of poverty: 100% of the poor and non-poor in Sohag and 84% of the poor and 100% of the non-poor in Kafr El Sheikh reported material reasons for poverty, including poor financial resources, followed by health reasons, including large number of children (70.33% of the poor and 80.68% of the non-poor in Sohag, compared to 48% of the poor and 36.4% of the non-poor in Kafr El Sheikh). To overcome poverty, some respondents mentioned the need to give more attention to youth (indicated by the responses of 58.54% of the poor and 66.67% of the non-poor in Sohag and Kafr El Sheikh respectively), followed by the need to pay more attention to agriculture, the need to reinforce infrastructure, and the need for training and awareness raising and increased assistance to the poor. Moreover, 28% of the poor and non-poor in Sohag reported the need to reduce interests on agricultural loans.

Recommendations:

Several recommendations were made: To encourage employment among graduates, to make use of the creative abilities of dwellers of the rural areas (men and women), to encourage them to join the labor market, and to integrate them socially. Specifically, the recommendations included: participation of members of NGOs and local and executive leaders in promoting activities on the level of the local community, such as organizing training programs to raise the awareness of the poor and enhance their skills, knowledge and behavior; to develop their resources through a system of loans thus enabling them to embark on small projects; to enhance the skills of rural women by promoting environment-based crafts, establishing an effective marketing system for their products and activating the role of local services in the villages.

About the Author

Dr. Mohamed Ibrahim Antar Khamis: Researcher, Institute of Agricultural Extension and Rural Development, Sakha Station, Kafr El Sheikh.

About the Program

The Egyptian Partnership in Development Research Program aims to inform development policies and strategies by linking those who conduct research with those who can utilize its findings to promote development in local communities. It promotes a research agenda which is responsive to the needs and priorities of local communities. The program is characterized by a multi-disciplinary, demand-driven, and participatory approach. The program began in Egypt in 1999. The program is directed by an Advisory Board of prominent members who are concerned with development issues.

About the Series

The PDR Policy Brief Series disseminates the results of research conducted under the auspices of the Partnership in Development Research Program funded by the Netherland Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Development Cooperation. It is currently operative in nine countries, Bangladesh, Bolivia, Egypt, Kerala-India, Mali, Nicaragua, Tanzania, Uganda and Vietnam.

The authors are solely responsible for the content of the Policy Briefs.

Copies of the Briefs can be ordered from the Secretariat of the Program or through the Program's web site.

Partnership in Development Research
American University in Cairo
Social Research Center
11th Floor ,Cairo Center
106Kasr Al-Aini Street
Cairo-Egypt
Tel: 00202-797-6959
Fax: 00202-795-7298
Email: pdr@aucegypt.edu
Website: www.aucegypt.edu/pdr

P
D
R