



### The Situation of Egyptian Women Farmers in Rural Areas Since the Enforcement of Law 96 of 1992.

By: Hisham Fuad

#### **Introduction and Research Problem:**

During the past decades, the Egyptian countryside has been suffering low living conditions and lack of utilities, in addition to the inability of citizens to meet basic needs such as education and health and other necessary services. This adverse situation has reflected in particular on the rural women who carry the larger burden of bringing up children and managing their houses, in addition to their participation in agricultural work. In fact, women in the rural areas play an active and essential role in agricultural development.

In the past, farmers had occupancy or rental cards whereby they received loans, using their agricultural crops as collateral. However, with the application of law 96 of 1992, the use of these cards was restricted to owners only, and it was no longer the right of new tenants or those who were expelled from their land, to obtain the cards which were once very significant in their lives particularly since they enabled them to obtain credit facilities. The new law affected the income of around 904 tenants and their families. Their income was reduced by 2 billion pounds, being the difference between the rental value which in the past did not exceed EP 600 per feddan, and EP 1500 and 2000 per feddan after the law. Thus, the incomes of farmers, particularly women farmers, were affected and so was the pattern of food and production.

Hence, this study is important because it examines the situation of women farmers, in order to show the changes introduced by the new law, with the aim of creating new policies that respond to the current needs of this group, improve their situation, enhance their capacities and improve the administration of agricultural land in Egypt.

#### **Objectives of the Study:**

The study seeks to identify the volume of changes that occurred in the lives of women farmers in the rural areas, delineate obstacles facing them, suggest ways to solve their problems in order to improve their life situation, and enable them to obtain land and improve the way they manage it.

#### **Methodology:**

This is a descriptive study, that focuses on certain phenomena and estimates their relative weight. It also seeks to link these different phenomena and the relations between their various parts, with changes and factors influencing them. A questionnaire was designed to find out how women manage their land and the problems they face. The sample included women from Al Amaria Al Sharkia village, *Markaz* Deir Mawas, Al Minya, to represent upper Egypt, and other woman

representing Ramzy al Sabil village of *Markaz* Fakous, Sharkia governorate, to represent lower Egypt. The sample included two different groups of women in the two villages: owners of land and tenants. Several case studies were selected. Field work ran for about two months, followed by review and analysis of data, and recording of observations during the study period which lasted a whole year.

### **Findings of Al Amaria Al Sharkia village, Deir Mawas, Al Minya governorate:**

It is known that upper Egypt have deep rooted customs and traditions; women's mobility is restricted and women do not go out of their homes to work. And so, in this village, women who did not own land, did not work outside their homes; the village had no women who worked for others, but there were some who helped their husbands and children on their land (66.6%) or women who had to run their own land (20%)

(33.3%) of the women did not go to school and the majority are well beyond their 40s. Women who own or rent land were either married (60.6%) or divorced or widowed (25.3%) and were at least 40 years old.

Most of the women who own the land, or whose husbands own land, have animals engaged in the agricultural activities. Women who own land have animals because they could afford to feed them unlike women who do not own the land or who work on the land of others; those do not raise animals because they don't have much to feed them and cannot afford to buy food for them.

Most of the women said that they went out to work because of the death of their husbands i.e. having to look after inherited land (18%); or because of the inability of the husband to work, or because of divorce, in order to maintain the family and secure a source of income. They asserted that their community still did not respect working women, and as long as there are other male members of the family, women are not expected to work. The respondents said that the attitude of society was the main block before their management of their land; people underestimated and tried to manipulate them. This is all in addition to the family problems they faced because they did not ask for the help of their male members of the family.

The main problem most of the women face is the Bank of Development and Credit. They had found out that they owed the bank money they claim they did not borrow, and so were threatened by imprisonment.

Many women wished they did not have to work on the land alone because their work affected their families; they said they were busy most of the time with the land, and felt guilty about leaving their home and children alone.

Women earned their land either through purchasing it or through inheritance or rental; none of them was given the land as a replacement for another piece of land they had rented.

Thirty percent of the women said that loans for women have increased after the issuance of the law, but since this particular village has problems with the Bank, this figure may not be accurate.

Although women's occupancy increased after the law by 33% because of inheritance and by 18% because of the fragmentation of ownership, women who manage their own land accounted for 11.3% i.e. less than women who run the land through their children or husbands who accounted for 88.6%.

### **Findings on Ezbet al Sabil, Markaz Fakous, Al Sharkia governorate:**

-Delta differs from Upper Egypt in that more women are engaged in agriculture because of the more flexible customs and traditions, which allow women direct involvement in work. Some women farmer head their households and are responsible for them. Nonetheless, they still earn less than men, although they work on full time basis since childhood.

- The large prevalence of illiteracy among women farmers hinders their ability to develop their lives and their children's. Also they find it hard to advance with their agricultural work particularly with regard to marketing, negotiations with owners and in making use of loans through the Agricultural Credit Bank.
- Only 4% of the women own land in the village. This reflects the village's poor material condition, since most of the women either totally or partially support their families.
- The living conditions have also deteriorated since many villagers have given up raising animals, as they can no longer afford them, especially after the application of the law.
- Bad relations with land owners who control the lives of people led to large suffering among farmers which has negatively reflected on the agricultural process.
- Services such as electricity, sewage, clean water, transportation to and from the *Markaz* are severely lacking. The village is totally isolated from the surroundings, which has affected the rate of education among villagers, reduced services and clean water which has in turn led to the spread of TB, renal failure, and other contagious diseases. Farmers cannot introduce water and electricity into their homes because they do not own the land and feel insecure because the land owner may one day turn them out.
- There is no trace of development in the village and villagers cannot borrow money from the Development Bank or make use of the services offered by the agricultural cooperative because they do not have land deeds that prove the rental relationship between farmers and owners.

### **Recommendations:**

#### **Recommendations of Al Amaria Al Sharkia village, Deir Mawas, Al Minya governorate:**

- Release women in prison or suspend sentences against them because of the money they own the banks at least until the public prosecution completes its investigations with the bank official.
- Build a secondary school on the eastern bank of the Tal al Amarna so the girls would complete their education, because of the difficulty of going to Deir Mawas.
- Extend the health insurance umbrella to women in the village, prepare health units and provide them with manpower and physicians in order to ensure the rights of women and families to proper health insurance.
- Provide women who wish to have agricultural land with some reclamation land in Tal al Amarna after supplying the land with the necessary infrastructure, in order to allow women to live and cultivate land there.

#### **Recommendations Ezbet al Sabil, Markaz Fakous, Al Sharkia governorate:**

- Implement Article 5 of Law no. 96 of 1992, offering indemnities to villagers by providing them with alternative pieces of land to help them face life
- Reactivate the role of agricultural cooperatives, motivate the formation of associations and reinforce new links to offer services that ultimately lead to the development of agriculture and improve the situation of farmers. Farmers must have the right to deal with cooperatives so they will not have to go to the black market in order to obtain chemicals and seeds at double the prices. In addition, they would also benefit from the guidance services offered by agricultural cooperatives; obstacles hindering farmers from owning their houses should also be lifted.
- Provide transportation to carry children from the village to their school in the main village until a primary school is built; introduce electricity and potable water into houses in order to protect villagers from diseases.

### **About the Author**

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