



Problems facing young graduates and their impact on settlement and development in the new lands

By: Dr. Mounir Fouada

Introduction and research problem:

For a long time, the state has adopted developmental socio economic policies. In the area of agriculture, it has sought an agricultural development policy to reclaim new lands, cultivate desert lands and build new urban communities to lessen the pressure on the old valley land. In addition, it has attempted to increase production and create new job opportunities to contribute to solving the problem of unemployment, thus the decision of the state to distribute new land to young people. Land reclamation and the setting up of new communities require large financial resources. Therefore the success of this process, (the settlement of individuals and sustainability of development) became a national goal and a requirement in the socio economic development plan.

Success in this domain depends on the ability to address problems and obstacles facing settlers in these areas, and avoid the negative impact of these obstacles on socio economic development.

Objectives:

- Identify problems facing young people in the study areas and their impact
- Identify means of solving the problems and test their success
- Learn about suggested and feasible solutions which new graduates propose.
- identify possibilities to redistribute roles to solve the problem and involve different parties to contribute to the solutions.

Methodology:

This is a descriptive study. Some new settlements were chosen in central Egypt, particularly Kibli Haroun (Fayoum governorate) and west of Fishn (Bani Suif governorates) to implement the study since no previous work has been done in these areas and most of the new studies focus on settlements in new areas. The study focuses on young graduates in order to identify their solutions for the problem of unemployment and income generation activities and test the effectiveness of these solutions. One hundred and fifty graduates were located in the study sites: 123 in Gharb Al Fishn and 27 in Kibli Haroun. Women graduates were not adequately represented. They numbered 33 women i.e. 2.4% of the graduates. Settlement duration ranged between 13 years for most of the graduates in Gharb El Fishn and 7 years in Kibli Haroun. A questionnaire was distributed during the interview, in addition to focus groups with young graduates. Personal interviews were undertaken with key individuals such as decision makers in the agencies that guide and supervise services for young graduates in the study sites.

Findings:

-Most of the respondents (74%) cultivated the land directly after they received it. In particular, the percentage rises in Gharb Al Fishn to reach 77% compared to 61% in Karoun. Findings also point to the decline in the level of family participation in agricultural activities. The percentage of respondents who did not receive help from family members amounted to 80%. This is because these are young graduates who have recently formed families and their children are still young.

-Productivity per feddan is an important economic indicator of achievement in the new land. The study sample pointed to an increase in the productivity of the feddan of wheat, rising to 18% if we compare the averages of the first two years of agriculture with the average of the last two years. (2000-2001)

-The diversity of income sources is an important indicator of the availability of opportunities for settlers to raise their income from different sources. Findings have indicated that despite the passage of a relatively long period since the settlement of graduates (13 years in Al Fishn and 7 years in Karoun), the main income is from agricultural crops and that other sources of income are still limited. Income from crops amounts to 88% of the average income of graduates, while other animal related activities generate only 4.5% of the income; working for wages 2.7%. Twenty two percent of the sample earn less than 1000 EP annually; 34% earn between EP 1000 and EP 2000 ie less than EP 5 every day and that is a negative indicator, while 66% of the sample earn less than EP 7000 annually.

-In the beginning, new services were presented and problems were solved through various agencies to encourage new graduates to settle in the new land including: electricity, road lighting, potable water, bakeries in the villages, new schools, a new telephone exchange, paving the main roads, setting up new houses, and a sewage system in the Fishn. In Karoun, one of the villages was transformed into an administrative center for service provision, in addition to solving the problem of electric currents, operating the new health center, opening a preparatory school, opening a storehouse for flour, establishing a unit for the environment, focusing on cleanliness and offering land to individuals who left the land they had rented.

Problems faced by young graduates in the study sites mainly relate to agricultural activities. They differ between Karoun and El Fishn and are related to the lack of water, poor sewage system, lack of financial resources and loans, difficulty of marketing agricultural products, problems of infrastructure, such as lack of potable water and drainage, and lack of means of transportation. Problems related to health services are represented in the lack of health services in the villages particularly al Fishn, and shortage of physicians and ambulance. Educational problems are related to the lack of teachers, and shortage of primary, preparatory and secondary schools, particularly in al Fishn, in addition to environmental problems and the lack of basic consumption commodities and security problems.

Reasons behind these problems and solutions include:

-Irrigation problems in Karoun are related to the low ejection power of the irrigation stations, which has in turn reduced the productivity of crops and revenues. Efforts are underway to undertake the necessary maintenance for these stations. In Al Fishn, the problem of irrigation differs from one village to the other,. In some villages some investors have taken over the water allocated by the reclamation authorities which has resulted in draught and the destruction of some crops. In order to solve these problems, graduates have cooperated with settlement control units to monitor the distribution of water from an operation room, in addition to addressing the problem of investors, coordinating with the departments of irrigation and electricity, and allocating new budgets for operating wells and renovating stations.

-The problem of agricultural waste and the high costs of electricity in Karoun, has had negative impact on the soil and consequently on productivity and it is therefore suggested to undertake regular maintenance and cleanliness. To address the problem of high costs of electricity, it is proposed to install a meter to measure actual consumption for each person.

-Marketing crops in the study sites is a major problem particularly for tomatoes, and onions. It is therefore important to open new channels for exporting these crops, increase the role of cooperatives, encourage investment in agricultural manufacture of tomatoes and onions and other vegetables.

-Problem of funding and agricultural credit weakens the ability to fund activities individually because of the low income they generate and lack of loan sources. This has resulted in inappropriate terms when transactions were concluded with merchants, and cutting down on the necessary quantities of production ingredients, which has been negatively reflected on productivity and revenues. In addition, poor investments have translated into lower incomes for graduates. As a solution to this problem, it is suggested that the Bank of Development and Agricultural Credit plays a bigger role in providing graduates with loans. Also, the state must provide easy credit lines funded by foreign grants and external aid

-Findings pointed out that 60% of the sample prefer to stay in their new homes. This was particularly pronounced in Karoun compared to West of Fishn. It was also found out that the level of adaptation with the new environment was higher among 41% of the sample; 53% adapted moderately and 3% adapted very well.

-The level of development, was found weak among 44% of the sample and moderate among 52%. Economic development was weak among 46% and moderate among 49%. Social development was weak among 39% and moderate among 59%. Political development was moderate among 61% and high among 32%. Findings indicated strong positive and statistically significant correlation between the level of development and the degree of settlement and economic and agricultural stability, resulting in more development in the new areas.

Recommendations:

In light of the above, the following recommendations were reached:

- Plan and execute properly the plan for the infra structure of the new land.
- Establish cooperation and coordination between the different agencies, and integrate the new land into the activities of the community as a whole
- Carefully select new graduates before handing the land, and offer them the required training and assistance
- Encourage development activities and diversity the sources of income for graduates, and offer the necessary financing for their activities
- Benefit from the high level of awareness among graduates and officials about the problems and their reasons; suggest solutions and design programs for their implementation
- Enhance the participation of other parties, competent authorities and graduates in finding radical and effective solutions for the problems faced by graduates

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