

Youth Exclusion in Egypt: In Search of “Second Chances”

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THE MIDDLE EAST YOUTH INITIATIVE
WORKING PAPER



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WOLFENSOHN CENTER FOR DEVELOPMENT

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YOUTH EXCLUSION IN EGYPT

Egypt is at a stage in its demographic transition with a marked “youth bulge”, a period in which the proportion of youth in the population increases significantly compared to other age groups. The objective of this paper is to look closely at youth in Egypt with the lens of exclusion as a guiding conceptual framework.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Egypt is at a stage in its demographic transition with a marked “youth bulge”, a period in which the proportion of youth in the population increases significantly compared to other age groups. The objective of this paper is to look closely at youth in Egypt with the lens of exclusion as a guiding conceptual framework. The crux of the exclusion framework is that while some experience a successful transition to jobs, financial stability and personal independence with the ability to form families of their own; others experience unemployment; end up with dead-end low-paying jobs, and defer forming families due to the high financial costs of this important life transition in Egypt.

With Egypt’s economic revival, which began in 2004, there has been a notable improvement in labor market conditions. However, the youth continue to be a most disadvantaged group in terms of higher rates of unemployment, lower earnings, and limited job security and stability, with the majority of new entrants finding jobs within the informal economy. The youth also experience a virtual devaluation of their education credentials compared

to earlier cohort. Work opportunities are inter-related with the other dimensions of youth exclusion that we address in this paper: education and learning; potentials for forming families and channels for exercising citizenship. Exclusion is a cumulative process, with each of these life transitions having an overlapping impact on the others.

This paper shows that youth exclusion is highly gendered. While female school enrollment rates have significantly increased in the past few decades; there remains a significant minority of girls deprived of schooling particularly in rural Upper Egypt. Similarly, while labor market conditions have improved for most groups, recent analysis shows some alarming trends in female employment, with many out-of-school young women aged 15-29 being economically inactive; and with a significant proportion of those who are economically active being unpaid family workers. Young women are also four times as likely to be unemployed as young men.

In our research, we focus on four dimensions of exclusion:

1. Education and learning

Accessibility and quality of education are key determinants of opportunities for social advancement. Evaluating educational quality is central to understanding exclusion in the educational system. “Equality in quality education provision” has been a major goal of educational reform in Egypt. Currently, the Egyptian educational system is challenged to provide some of the basic skills to students. While educational enrollment has increased dramatically in recent years, educational quality has not improved. Early school dropout and non-enrollment persist for certain groups in certain parts of the country, particularly for girls in rural Upper Egypt. Further, a significant proportion of students have been tracked to technical secondary education, despite its limited labor market outcomes and its poor education quality.

2. Work opportunities

Between the late 1970s and early 2000s, the number of new entrants to the labor market more than doubled, to about 850,000. Currently, they constitute the greatest percentage of the unemployed. While the transition from school to work has been shortened since 1998, this has only affected young men. In 2006, 75 percent of young men reported finding their first job within five years, whereas it would have taken eight years for the same proportion of young men to find employment in 1998. In the same period, however, this figure did not change for women; on average, fewer than 25 percent were employed within five years of graduation. Compared to 63 percent of young men, 22 percent of young women fifteen to twenty-nine were economically active in 2006. This gender gap in labor participation is among the highest in the region, if not the world.

Young people are among the lowest-paid workers, often taking poor quality jobs in which they receive few benefits, such as medical insurance, union representation, and paid vacations, and do not earn enough to start families and complete their transitions to adulthood. Although the percentage of

young workers entering the workforce with higher educational levels has increased drastically since 1980, the quality of jobs available to them has not; by 2005, 72 percent of labor market entrants were employed in the informal and low wage sectors. Egyptian youths face a virtual devaluation of their educational credentials because the educational system is geared toward conferring on students the credentials needed to qualify them for jobs in state-owned enterprises and bureaucracies rather than provide the skills they need to succeed in a globalizing, private-sector led economy.

3. Opportunities to form families

The scope of youth exclusion is enhanced by both the persistence of adolescent marriage and the postponement of marriage by young adults. Adolescent marriage is chiefly a rural phenomenon, however, and there are promising signs that it is declining.

The rising costs of family formation increasingly causing young men and women to delay marriage and family formation. In 2006, 57 percent of men in urban areas were not married by the age of twenty-nine and 22 percent were unmarried by thirty-four. Delayed marriage functions as a form of social exclusion because it prevents young people from leading independent adult lives and, thus, completing their transitions to adulthood. Generally, unmarried females live with their parents and are considered the responsibility of their male family members, who exercise a significant amount of control over them. In 1997, 59 percent of parents identified the cost of housing for a married couple as one of the main problems facing youths.

4. Channels for exercising citizenship

Citizenship is an all-encompassing term, and youth participation in civic activity is integral to their inclusion in society. Evidence suggests that civic participation yields positive developmental outcomes: facilitating collective action, yielding more effective and better-targeted services, and reducing corruption by allowing for channels of accountability. By contrast, civic inactivity may contribute to socially deviant behavior such as crime and religious militancy. Currently, opportunities for Egyptian youths to participate in civic life are very scarce, as evi-

The dimensions of youth exclusion are closely related. Poor learning leads to poor job prospects. The ability to form families and achieve personal independence is closely linked to the ability to find productive employment and earn an adequate income. Civic participation is essential to successfully transitioning to meaningful adult roles in which people can participate fully in society and contribute to community development.

denced by university policies toward student activism. Generally, student activism is permitted only at elite universities, where it is less likely to be viewed as a proxy for violent behavior or a vehicle for spreading radical religious beliefs.

Directions for future policy and research

Scant research has been conducted on how to better understand the transitions of young people and on the effectiveness of policies and programs addressing youth. Greater investment is needed to examine the exact nature and causes of how young people are being excluded from attaining quality jobs, forming their own families, and coping with generational changes in types and levels of education and employment. The current volume of research

does not definitively suggest whether existing programs are failing or succeeding. But it is clear that they are severely limited in scope, outreach and sustainability.

The dimensions of youth exclusion are closely related. Poor learning leads to poor job prospects. The ability to form families and achieve personal independence is closely linked to the ability to find productive employment and earn an adequate income. Civic participation is essential to successfully transitioning to meaningful adult roles in which people can participate fully in society and contribute to community development. Tapping into a demographic windfall requires researchers and policymakers to work together in understanding and tackling exclusion's multiple dimensions.

I. GROWING UP IN EGYPT

Egypt, in company with most countries in the Middle East, is going through a period in which the numbers of youth in its population is increasing significantly compared to other age groups, a so-called “youth bulge.” In the coming decade, these youths will mark the biggest group in Egypt’s long history that made its way to adulthood. This demographic transition represents both an opportunity and a challenge. Once this youth population reaches working age, its ratio to the older and younger non-working populations will shrink, potentially constituting a “demographic gift.” Until then, these youths will put enormous pressures on the educational system and the labor and housing markets.

The objective of this paper is to look closely at youth in Egypt with the lens of exclusion as a guiding conceptual framework.¹ Youth is a crucial stage in a person’s life, a time when important decisions about work and family are made. The crux of the exclusion framework is that while some youths in Egypt successfully transition to jobs, financial stability, and personal independence with the ability to form families of their own, others experience unemployment, end up with dead-end low-paying jobs, and defer forming families because of the high financial cost of this important stage in life.

There are a number of conceptual issues that are relevant to understanding why youths are left behind. First, their exclusion is a multidimensional process. Taking a life-course perspective, we chose to focus on four important dimensions: education and learning; work opportunities; potentials for forming families; and channels for exercising citizenship.² Each of them represents an important stage in life that is pivotal for including youths in society and is primarily context specific.

The four dimensions are closely related. Poor learning leads to poor job prospects. Forming families and achieving personal independence are closely linked to productive employment and adequate earnings. The unemployed and those trapped in low-paying jobs face insurmountable challenges in forming families because of the high costs involved. Civic participation is essential for making a successful transition to meaningful adult roles. This latter stage refers to the ability to participate fully in soci-

ety and the different channels available for participation. Youth’s civic participation feeds into the availability of successful youth-related policies and programs and issues of community development.

Second, while we look at each of these stages separately for purposes of analysis, we note that exclusion is a cumulative process, with each of these transitions in life having an overlapping impact on the others.

Third, exclusion is a multi-layered process. Exclusion is a relational mechanism— by definition, the exclusion of a certain group is based on the inclusion of other groups, and this is true in every society. While poverty and exclusion are not interchangeable, we argue that poverty constitutes the root of exclusion in Egypt. The children of the poor, as we note, are the group most likely to drop out of school or fail to enroll in school. Because education is closely connected to the labor market, they end up in low-paying, low-skilled jobs.

Yet, exclusion is also global. For example, only 10 percent of the world’s population has access to computing technology. This digital divide is most detrimental to youth exclusion worldwide. Youth in advanced countries make substantive use of technology at a time when access to technology is only available to privileged elite in less-developed countries. In a globalized economy, those left out are the less educated, both male and female, and include those such as street children who live in precarious conditions. These groups deserve second chances, as we note when we discuss policies and programs addressing excluded youth.

Finally, while youth exclusion has deep class and global manifestations, we show that gender has much to do with being left behind. Female school enrollment rates have increased a great deal in the past few decades, but there remains a significant minority of girls deprived of schooling, particularly in rural Upper Egypt. Moreover, according to the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics in Egypt, (CAPMAS, 2004), while female school enrollment through secondary school exceeds 40 percent, a study on school-to-work transition shows that only 4 percent of females make the transition from school to career jobs as opposed to 30 percent of males in the same age group (ILO, 2006).³

Our study of youth exclusion should be viewed from the perspective of the overall Egyptian economy. Egypt's economic revival began in 2004 with an annual economic growth of 5 percent. Assaad and Roushdy (2007) note that there has been a marked improvement in labor market conditions between 1998 and 2006, both in terms of access to employment and higher earnings. Labor force participation and employment rates increased while unemployment decreased. They also note that earnings increased across the board as the proportion of low-wage workers fell from 62 percent in 1998 to 45 percent in 2006. But they note that these trends have not resulted in a noticeable reduction of poverty because of the rapid growth of low productivity, non-wage employment and the powerful impact of the 2003 devaluation on the price of food and other necessities that the poor depend on disproportionately. The same study shows that young workers have the lowest earnings in the Egyptian labor market and have experienced the slowest increase in real earnings.

We highlight the important role of education in social and economic exclusion. We discuss issues of equal access to education and the quality of education in Egypt. Education is central to the exclusion of marginalized groups. Those who get less out of school perform poorly in the job market, thereby

starting a chain reaction of cumulative exclusion. We discuss work opportunities for youth and the challenges facing them.

Unemployment is one manifestation of youth exclusion that has received much attention. Youth make up more than 80 percent of the unemployed. Moreover, many of those who do work are trapped in bad jobs that are low paying and provide limited or no stability, benefits, social insurance, or potentials for career development. We discuss family formation as being closely connected to economic integration and employment possibilities in the face of high costs and deteriorating economic prospects for young men. In civic participation, we focus on outlets for youth participation on university campuses and their limitations.

We conclude with an overview of policies and programs addressing youth, whether directly or indirectly. Because youth exclusion is multi-dimensional, programs addressing youth should tackle the different stages of life. We focus on policies that target youth employment and education as the two areas most related to their economic exclusion. We also focus on reforms in the housing sector because of its direct relation to the high cost of housing that has a direct impact on forming families.

II. EDUCATION AND YOUTH EXCLUSION

Access to quality education leads to a smooth and successful transition to the labor market with life-long benefits. Limited access to education and training, or access to poor quality education, perpetuates a vicious cycle of limited job prospects and low-tier employment opportunities.

In Egypt, it is the poor who mostly drop out of school or do not enroll. And because of the poor quality of education, those who make it to school achieve much less in terms of literacy and cognitive skills than children in higher income classes. The poor also tend to be channeled to schools that are not prestigious and have low standings, hampering their future employment potential. Barsoum (2004) shows that when education is a less traveled journey in a family, as is the case with most poor youth, parents are unable to provide the support their children need to help them study and to give the right advice about pursuing the best education tracks. This places them at a disadvantage and perpetuates the cycle of poverty within a household.

The role of education in social inequality operates through two axes: accessibility and quality. There have been major strides in increasing school enrollment in Egypt, but early school dropout and non-enrollment continue to be problems for certain groups and in certain parts of the country. This process is gender and class based and reflects important regional disparities, with females in Upper Egypt being the most disadvantaged.⁴

The quality of education is central to the understanding of exclusion in the educational system. Many studies have expressed serious concerns about the quality of education in Egypt, particularly in low-income areas. Low pass rates, poor acquisition of the basic skills of literacy and arithmetic, and the spread of private tutoring continue to plague the educational system. Similarly, schools in poor and rural communities are deprived of some basic resources. School cleanliness, the availability of usable seats and desks, and functioning sanitary facilities often are not available in many poorer areas, specifically in rural regions. While more advantaged families are able to compensate for these deficiencies by sending their children to private schools and getting private tutoring for their children, the poor are trapped by the deficiencies of the system, which perpetuates their exclusion.

DROPPING OUT

There has been a dramatic expansion in the education system. More children get to school and more children stay in school for longer periods. According to the World Bank (2006a), the net enrollment rate in primary education increased from 83.7 percent in 1985 to 98.3 percent in 2003. Gross enrollment rates in secondary school were 61.4 percent in 1985 and rose to 87.1 percent and higher education enrollment from 18.1 percent to 32.6 percent in the same period.

While the figures show rapid growth in school enrollment at all education levels and near-universal enrollment in primary schooling, there are still those who are excluded. Mandatory basic education in Egypt covers the primary education stage (six years) and the preparatory stage (three years). Afterward, students can choose between vocational and general (standard) secondary education, with the latter offering them limited opportunities to enroll in the higher education system. The mandatory stage, in its current form, is relatively recent because it was limited to the primary stage until 1991. But the law mandating schooling up to the preparatory stage is not strictly enforced. While universal enrollment in primary education is the norm in metropolitan areas, there are serious regional disparities. The following table shows that a significant proportion of boys and girls in the four Upper Egyptian governorates are deprived of schooling. The figures for girls are even more alarming, with nearly one-quarter of girls in the four governorates being excluded.

Quitting school too early is another detrimental factor in youth exclusion. The following table shows the gross enrollment ratio in preparatory education based on Ministry of Education data for all governorates. Upper Egyptian governorates, highlighted in the same table, continue to rank lowest in school enrollment. Attrition among girls is also highest in the four governorates highlighted in the table. For example, in Minya, while 72 percent of girls enroll in primary schooling as shown in Table 1-1, only 57 percent continue on to preparatory education and complete the mandatory education phase.

The regional disparity in primary school enrollment corresponds with the prevalence of poverty across

governorates in Egypt, according to the Human Development Index (UNDP, 2005). Governorates with the highest proportion of school dropout rates are the poorest in Egypt. This reflects the strong connection between poverty and exclusion. This also highlights the regional underpinnings of exclusion, with those living in poorer areas being the group most likely to drop out of school early or never enrolling.

Data from national surveys provide a more accurate estimation of school dropout rates across the country. In the following table, Egyptian Labor Market Panel Survey 2006 data shows that nationwide school enrollment rate for girls aged 6-14 is 93 percent. But the data highlights the great regional disparities, with the highest incidence of school dropouts and non-enrollment among girls and boys in rural Upper Egypt.

Girls in rural Upper Egypt make up the largest group of those left behind in education. An analysis of their situation emphasizes that they face major mobility constraints for cultural reasons related to norms of gender propriety (Brady et al, 2007). Limited accessibility to nearby schools in rural areas, combined with girls' household responsibilities and

household poverty in general, push girls out of the educational system. El-Badawy et al. (2004) show that girls are 2.3 times more likely not to have ever been to school than boys. But Lloyd et al. (2001) show that once in school, the probability of dropping out is the same for girls and boys. Where the gender gap exists is in initial school enrollment. They also note that the school dropout rate rises at the end of the primary stage and again by the end of preparatory stage.

POOR QUALITY PUBLIC EDUCATION

In a global economy, quality education is the only way to ensure that children learn adequately. The Egypt Human Development Report (UNDP, 2006: 62) concludes that the quality of education in Egypt is a major challenge. While the report stressed the need to go beyond the acquisition of basic learning and the need to address issues of "excellence," it still emphasized that schooling in Egypt is challenged even at providing basic skills. Similarly, a 2005 Ministry of Education Strategic Direction Paper highlights "equality in quality education provision" as a major strategic goal for education reforms.

Table 1-1: Gross Enrollment Ratio in Four Upper Egyptian Governorates in 2000 (Primary Education)

	Boys	Girls	Total
Menya	90%	72%	81%
Asyut	85%	71%	78%
Souhag	82%	74%	79%
Qena	83%	79%	81%

Source: World Bank (2002:12)

Table 1-2: School Enrollments in Egypt by Region

	Male	Female	Total
Alexandria, Suez Canal Cities			
Never been to school	1%	2%	2%
Dropped out of school	1%	0%	1%
Currently in school	97%	97%	97%
Greater Cairo			
Never been to school	1%	0%	1%
Dropped out of school	1%	1%	1%
Currently in school	97%	99%	98%
Urban Lower Egypt			
Never been to school	3%	2%	2%
Dropped out of school	4%	2%	3%
Currently in school	93%	96%	95%
Urban Upper Egypt			
Never been to school	3%	5%	4%
Dropped out of school	2%	1%	2%
Currently in school	95%	94%	94%
Rural Lower Egypt			
Never been to school	2%	3%	2%
Dropped out of school	2%	1%	2%
Currently in school	96%	96%	96%
Rural Upper Egypt			
Never been to school	5%	12%	8%
Dropped out of school	3%	3%	3%
Currently in school	92%	85%	89%
Total			
Never been to school	3%	5%	4%
Dropped out of school	2%	2%	2%
Currently in school	95%	93%	94%

Source: *ELMPS06*

In 2004, Egypt participated for the first time in the Trends in Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) for eighth grade, providing an opportunity to view the quality of educational achievement in Egypt compared with other countries. Egypt scored 406 in Math and 421 in Science. This placed the country's eighth graders below the international averages of 467 and 474, respectively.

A national survey of adolescents in 1997 concluded that issues of quality remain a major concern for education in Egypt (El-Tawila et al, 2000a).⁵ The study shows that pass rates, poor acquisition of basic literacy and arithmetic, and the phenomenal spread of private tutoring are serious indicators of an education crisis. Other problems revealed by the study were the high density of pupils in classes and multiple school shifts. Although class size is limited officially to thirty-six, only 20 percent of the schools nationally comply with this law, with one-third of the schools having class sizes of forty-five or more. To tackle this issue, 30 percent of the surveyed schools implemented double shifts. The adverse consequence of this was a shorter school day, which negatively affects the education of students in these schools. Moreover, 66 percent of the surveyed schools had a shortage of teachers, a problem that was more pronounced in rural areas in both Lower and Upper Egypt than in metropolitan areas.

Lloyd et al. (2001) show that poor school quality has a detrimental impact on dropout rates. They measure school quality based on the length of day (whether the school works in shifts and how many a day); the amount of school materials (books, desks, quality and quantity of teachers, science laboratories); and cleanliness, teacher attitudes, and policies. The study shows that the odds for girls to drop out were five to six times greater in schools with multiple shifts than in schools with one shift (ibid.:23).

The socio-economic underpinnings of school performance are well documented in educational lit-

erature worldwide: the poor tend to perform poorly in education. The same results are documented in Egypt. El-Tawila et al. (2000a:xv) show that low-performing students are from schools in poor communities where the schools are of poor quality and where many of the students have to combine study and work.

Surveys that analyze levels of literacy show some alarming results on the quality of education in Egypt. A study of adolescents (ten to seventeen) who attended school in three governorates in Egypt showed some alarming results in their literacy skill levels (UNICEF, 1994). The competency in arithmetic of those tested was one-third of the expected mastery level. In reading and writing, the average score fell below the 50 percent threshold (ibid.:53). Similarly, based on self-reporting, another 1997 survey showed that 20 percent of those who attended schools for five years considered themselves illiterate (Lindgren, 2005:89).⁶

The Egyptian Demographic and Health Survey of 2005 (EDHS, 2006:30) shows that the literacy level among girls who attended preparatory school or higher was 49.7 percent. This means that half of those who leave school by the end of the mandatory stage remain illiterate. The EDHS 2006 also shows great regional disparities. Only 38 percent of the girls in rural areas have achieved literacy. The figure for urban areas, still alarming, was 65 percent. Upper Egyptian governorates had a literacy level of 37 percent among those who attended preparatory school and higher as opposed to 68 percent in ur-

ban governorates. Despite decades of literacy campaigns, Egypt is one of nine countries with the highest illiteracy level in the world, with an overall rate of 34 percent (EDHS, 2006:27).

In 2004, Egypt participated for the first time in the Trends in Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) for eighth grade, providing an opportunity to view the quality of educational achievement in Egypt compared with other countries. Egypt scored 406 in Math and 421 in Science. This placed the country's eighth graders below the international averages of 467 and 474, respectively. TIMSS breaks down the mean scores by defining four benchmarks for grouping student performance: Low, 400; Intermediate, 475; High, 525; and Advanced, 600. Among Egyptian students, only 6 percent were high performers in math and 10 percent in science and over 40 percent failed to achieve even the low benchmark (TIMSS & PIRLS International Study Center, 2007).

Less tangible skills, such as problem solving and the ability to apply knowledge to real problems, were pointed out by other studies (World Bank 2002, cited in Lindgren, 2005). Rote learning has been the most common method of teaching in Egypt, even at the

university level (ibid.). Such an approach provides limited opportunities for graduates to compete in a global economy. It manifests itself in complaints by employers about the inability to find skilled laborers in a market that has a surplus of workers.

Households try to compensate for the limitations of public education through private tutoring. El-Badawy et al. (2004) note that 40 percent of students receive private tutoring. The prevalence is higher among secondary school students, at 60 percent. The same study concluded that there is no gender bias in a decision by a family to provide private tutoring for boys and girls. An earlier study, the Adolescence and Social Change in Egypt (ASCE) survey, showed an even higher rate: 67 percent were taught privately.

Access to private tutoring is a privilege and reflects some major regional disparities. Private tutoring is more prevalent in urban areas (44 percent) compared to rural areas (35 percent). Prevalence is also highest in Greater Cairo (El Badawy et al., 2004).

Also relevant to the quality of education is access to information technology, which starts both at

Table 1-3: Distribution of Secondary School Students by School Type

		1980/1981	1984/1985	1994/1995	2001/2002	2004/2005
Technical	Students	621,366	702,847	1,797,308	2,149,408	2,090,008
	%'	50%	53%	64%	60%	57%
General Secondary	Students	485,867	563,792	844,358	1,162,879	1,299,233
	%'	39%	42%	30%	32%	35%
Al-Azhar (religious academy)	Students	124,865	63,069	168,830	279,969	272,169
	%'	10%	5%	6%	8%	7%
Total		1,232,098	1,329,708	2,810,496	3,592,256	3,661,410

Source: Compiled from CAPMAS (different years)

school and in the home. One of the most striking examples of global youth exclusion is access to technology. It is common knowledge that only 10 percent of the world's population has access to information and communication technologies (ICTs); Bill Gates' slogan of "the next 10 percent" refers to this figure.

In Egypt, the ELMPS06 data show that 73 percent of those in school had no access to computers. It also shows that only 20 percent of those who were unemployed used computer technology to search for jobs and only 11.5 percent of those who were working used computers on the job. Similarly, a recent survey of youth shows that only 10 percent of those interviewed in six governorates had access to computer technology (Abdel Kader et al., 2006). The World Development Report (World Bank, 2006) shows a higher prevalence of computer use in Egypt, at 15 percent. Interviews illustrate that more young people have access to the Internet through cyber cafes that are in Cairo and other urban centers like Minia.⁷ But technology use among youth is limited to chatting, downloading songs, and access to religious sites. While less highlighted in interviews, Internet use for pornography is common. According to the World Development Report (ibid.:207), one of the three most searched topics on the Internet was sexual in nature. Interviews in Egypt show that youth using the Internet do not have a substantive use of information technology that can add to their knowledge base or career potentials.

SKILLS MISMATCH

Despite its proven limited labor market results, technical education continues to cater to a significant proportion of secondary school students. Research long has documented that these schools provide insufficient and often irrelevant training (for example, Antoninis, 2001 and El-Hamidi, 2006). Limited public spending on this essentially expensive type of edu-

cation, lack of qualified teachers, outdated curricula, and a lack of interaction between firms and those setting the curricula lead to poor skill acquisition and a mismatch between what these schools provide and the needs of the labor market.

The following table shows the distribution of secondary school students among the different types of schools. The table shows that technical schooling is slowly declining after having peaked in the mid-1990s. Antoninis (2001) argues that the expansion of technical education is a result of bad political decisions initiated by Gamal Abdel Nasser's government and perpetuated with the support of donor agencies in the 1980s. He further notes that despite the demise of Nasserite industrialization, the policy guidelines until the mid-1990s were to send 70 percent of all students to technical secondary schools.

Assaad (2006) argues that the longstanding policy of the Egyptian government to guarantee government employment to upper secondary and university graduates has given households distorted signals from the labor market. These shaped the educational decisions of households and encouraged them to invest heavily in forms of education, such as technical secondary and higher technical institute education that have very low returns in the private sector. Faced with strong demand for such education from the public, the government supplies it at the expense of being able to guarantee basic quality education to all of those who are eligible for it. The government also used technical schooling as a way of limiting university enrollment since technical schooling was considered an end game. Assaad (ibid.) notes that this is an example of how a combination of educational and hiring policies, when applied over a long period, result in the distortion of household decisions and the misallocation of human resources to unproductive activities, leading to the observed low productivity of those resources in the economy.

III. YOUTH AND THE WORKPLACE

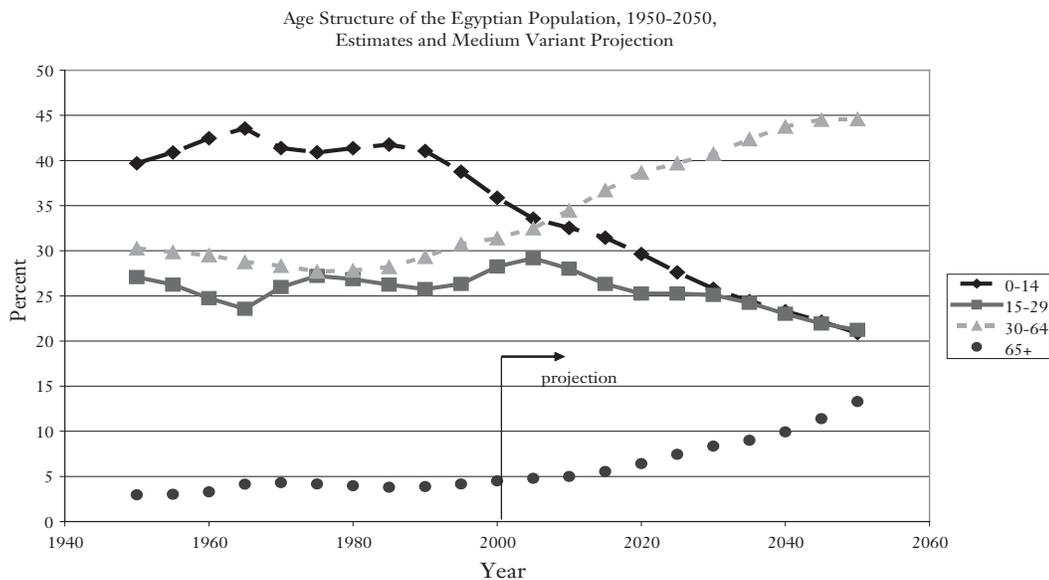
The World Bank (2006) identifies three main challenges facing youth in the worldwide labor market: high unemployment, child labor and low productivity. Similar challenges face youth in Egypt. Having presented the demographic setting, characterized by the youth bulge phenomenon, we examine in this section two of these challenges, high unemployment and low productivity, as they apply to the Egyptian situation. Given the considerable gender gap in the structure of unemployment in Egypt, we pay special attention to the gender dimensions of these challenges and broaden our discussion of job quality by addressing issues related to informality and lack of social protection in addition to low productivity.

Participation in the job market increases with the cyclical improvement of Egypt's economy. But youths face many barriers to getting jobs. New entrants to the labor market make up the largest group among the unemployed. When they do get job, a large proportion of young people are among the lowest paid workers. Such employment is often of poor quality, so that young people do not earn enough to enable them to start a family and com-

plete their transition to adulthood. Moreover, the gender gap in unemployment is among the highest in the region, if not the world. Women are four times as likely to be unemployed as men. A significant proportion of working women are unpaid family workers.

Like much of the Middle East and North Africa, Egypt is at a stage in its demographic transition characterized by a pronounced youth bulge, a period in which the proportion of youth in the population increases significantly compared to other age groups, both older and younger. According to population estimates prepared by CAPMAS in early 2007, 28 percent of the Egyptian population was between the ages of fifteen and twenty-nine. These estimates are in line with UN estimates and projections of the age structure in Egypt, which shows that the proportion of youth to the general population peaked at 29 percent in 2005 and is expected to decline from that high point. The proportion of children under fifteen already has declined significantly from just over 40 percent in 1990 to 34 percent in 2005. These declines are now reflected in the proportion of youth in the population.

Figure 2-1: Age Structure of the Egyptian Population



Source: Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, *World Population Prospects: The 2004 Revision*.

The evolution of the proportion of youth to the general population in Egypt is nearly identical to that of the entire region.

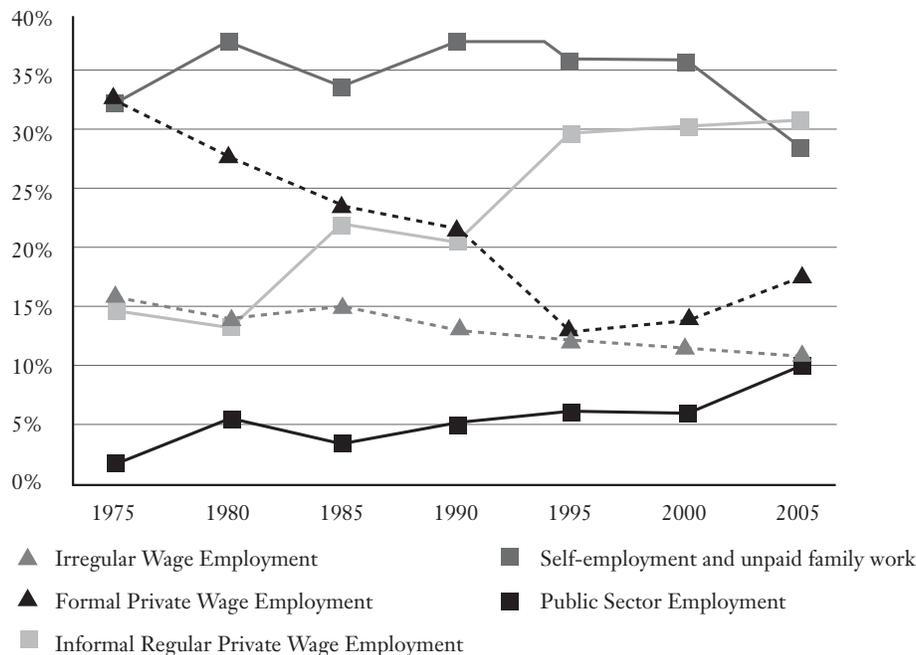
The youth bulge translates into the largest group of youths ever making its way into the labor market, both in absolute and relative terms. Data from an Egypt Labor Market Panel Survey indicate that the number of new entrants to the workforce has more than doubled, from about 400,000 a year in the late 1970s to about 850,000 in the early 2000s, a period when the total population increased by about 70 percent (Assaad 2007). Currently, about one in two people of working age (47 percent) is from the youth sector, underscoring the young age of the labor force and the fierce competition among young people for a limited number of good jobs. The result of these intense labor supply pressures is a process of exclusion, in which a growing number of youths are relegated to marginal sources of livelihood or to the ranks of

the unemployed. Recent labor force projections show that, despite the slowing growth of the youth population, increasing female participation rates, driven by rising educational attainment, will continue to exert significant pressure on the labor market until about 2010, when the growth of the labor force is expected to moderate (ERF 2004, pp.).

FIRST JOBS

The significant growth in educational attainment, recognizing the exclusion of certain groups, dramatically has shifted the composition of new entrants to the labor market in the past three decades. In about 1980, 40 percent of those entering the market had not achieved a primary level of education. By 2005, 70 percent had received a secondary education or more (Assaad 2007). But this dramatic change has not been accompanied by a commensurate shift in the quality of jobs that new entrants are

Figure 2-2: Egypt's Distribution of New Entrants in Egypt by Type of First Job



Source: Author

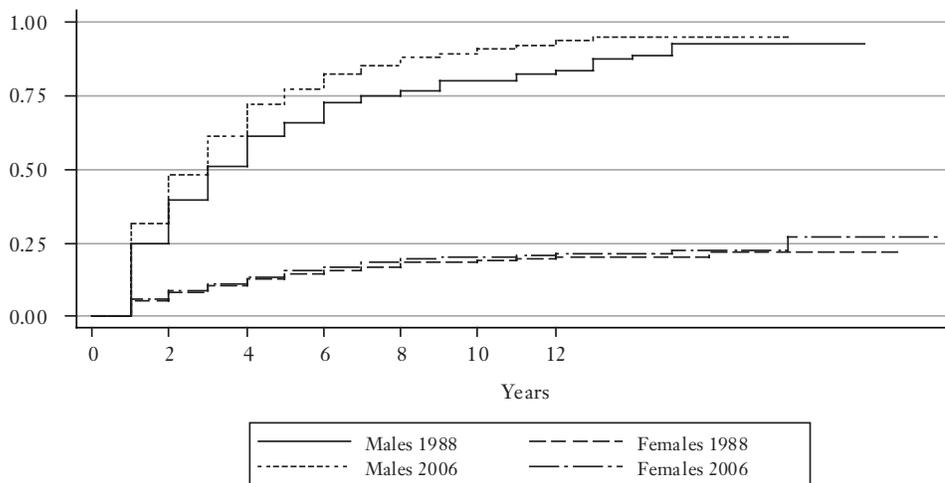
able to get. In the late 1970s, about one-third of jobs for the newly employed were in the public sector and about 5 percent were in the private sector, with the rest distributed between informal wage employment and non-wage employment. By 2005, the proportion of formal jobs for new entrants had dropped to 28 percent (18 percent public and 10 percent private) and the share of informal employment soared to 72 percent (See Figure 2-2).

Egyptian youths face a virtual devaluation of their educational credentials in comparison to the groups that preceded them. With over three decades of guaranteed public employment for secondary school and university graduates, the education system became geared to producing credentials to qualify its alumni for jobs in the bureaucracy or in state-owned enterprises rather than train them for productive employment in a market economy. The result: significant increases in the quantity of education achieved over the past three decades translated into very little in terms of increased productivity. Returns in the form of higher wages have dropped significantly as youths find themselves facing an increasingly privatized labor market that is not willing

to provide premiums for educational credentials if such credentials do not translate into increased productivity (see Assaad 2006).

Assaad and Roudi-Fahimi (forthcoming) note that the slowness of the educational systems in the region, including Egypt, to respond to increasingly market-oriented and open economies has resulted in significant mismatches between the skills demanded in the job market and those available to new entrants. This mismatch, combined with the rapidly growing number of entrants, leads to a protracted transition from school to work. A recent International Labor Organization study in Egypt that examined school-to-work transition found that Egyptian young people, especially women, face serious difficulties and challenges in finding a career job after leaving school. The study shows that only 17 percent of respondents (those between the ages of fifteen and twenty-nine) had completed the transition from school to a career job, which is defined as a regular job that the worker has no immediate plans to change. One-quarter still was in transition – that is, either unemployed or not yet in a career job – and the rest had not begun their transition

Figure 2-3: Duration of Failure to Obtain First Job by Gender and Age



Source: Amer, 2006

because they were still in school or not planning to seek work (ILO, 2006).

Besides fierce competition from their peers and a severe shortage of opportunities, young job seekers also are faced with a serious lack of access to information about available job opportunities, the skills that are in demand, and training opportunities. Programs that seek to address this issue are less than adequate in Egypt and reach only a fraction of young job seekers. Those who come from low-income households are particularly disadvantaged because they have limited guidance from members of their families and few social networks to rely upon (Barsoum, 2004).

School-to-work transition largely depends on gender. The ILO study (Ibid.) shows that 30 percent of male respondents had completed their transition to a career job and 35 percent still were in transition. In the case of females, only 4 percent had completed their transition, 18 percent still were in transition and the majority (78 percent) still were inactive. An analysis of the ELMPS data for 2006 also highlights the gendered nature of school-to-work transition. Figure 2-3 shows the cumulative probability of having obtained a first job by year since the individual left school for the years 1998 and 2006. The results indicate that young men entered their first job earlier in 2006 than in 1998 but that young women entered at the same rate as before. In 2006, 50 percent of male graduates had found their first job within two years of leaving school, down from three years in 1998. Seventy-five percent found jobs within five years of leaving school in 2006, whereas in 1998 it would have taken nearly eight years for that number to find jobs. The female rates of transition from school to work are much lower and do not exceed 25 percent even after 15 years. There is no perceptible improvement for women in the transition time from 1998 to 2006 (See Amer 2006 and Assaad 2006).

UNEMPLOYMENT

Assaad (2007) notes that, overall, the unemployment rate declined from 11.7 percent in 1998 to 8.3 percent in 2006. Unemployment chiefly affects youths entering the job market. Eighty-two percent of the unemployed were entrants to the labor

market in 2006 compared to 74 percent in 1998 (Ibid.). Eighty-three percent of the unemployed were in the age group of 15-29 and 47 percent were between the ages of 20-24 (Amer, 2006). Although declining, the unemployment rate among those fifteen to twenty-nine is still much higher than the overall rate at 16.9 percent in 2006, down from 25.6 percent in 1998. The total number of unemployed youth in Egypt in 2006 was about 1.6 million, divided almost equally between urban and rural areas.

Unemployment in Egypt is primarily a problem of educated youth. This is not new. As early as during the British mandate, a concern about unemployment among the educated was central to political debates about civil unrest (Williamson, 1987). Youth with a secondary education or above made up 95 percent of youth unemployment in 2006, up from 87 percent in 1998. As shown in Figure 2-4, unemployment rates at the end of the 1990s were highest for those with a technical secondary education, followed by post-secondary institute graduates, then by university graduates. This pattern changed by 2006, with university graduates having the highest unemployment rates among young men and post-secondary institute graduates having the highest rates among young women. In fact, university graduates are the only educational group whose unemployment rates increased since 1998.

The gender gap in unemployment is among the highest in the region, if not the world. Overall, women are four times as likely to be unemployed as men and young women 3.8 times as likely to be unemployed as young men. The very high unemployment rates for educated women are obvious from Figure 2-4. Although unemployment rates for young women with technical secondary degrees have declined, those for women with post-secondary institute degrees and university degrees have increased since 1998. The decline in unemployment for women technical secondary graduates results from increased discouragement and, therefore, increased inactivity. Assaad (2007) argues that the dramatic contraction in government hiring from 1998 to 2006 led to fewer applications for government jobs among these young women. Since for many among them the going wage in the private

sector was below their reservation wage, they simply stopped seeking employment and were counted among the unemployed. Assaad showed that reduced employment rates in government during this period were counteracted by reductions in labor force participation for educated women in general and for technical secondary graduates in particular

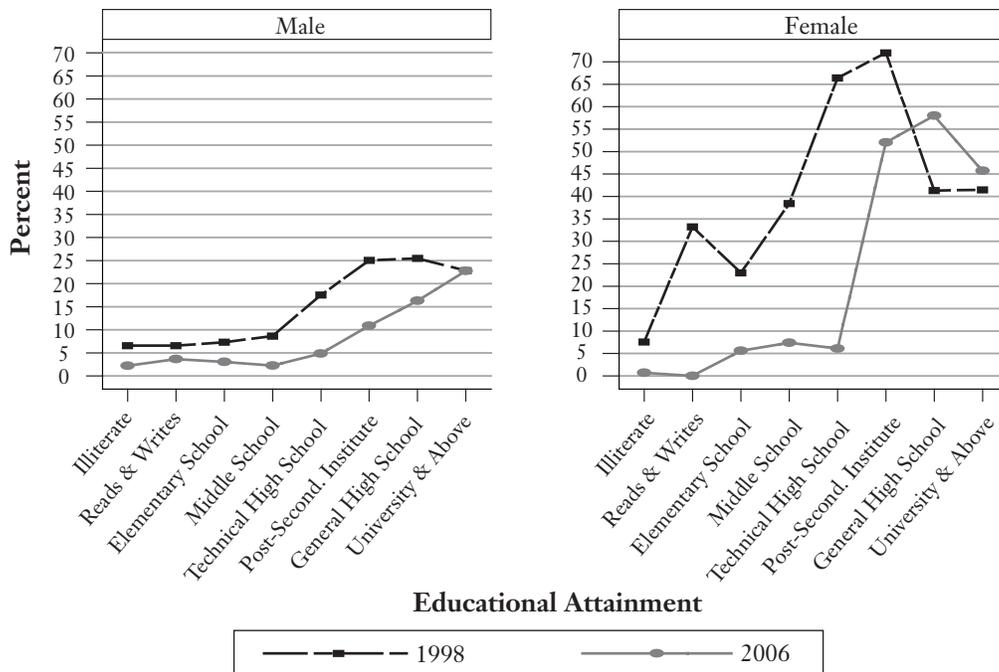
Assaad (2007) shows that the unemployment rate in urban areas was 10 percent compared to 7 percent in rural areas in 2006. It also declined much more in rural areas from 1998 to 2006 than in urban areas. Greater Cairo is the only region in which there was no appreciable decline in unemployment for that period, with the unemployment rate for men in Greater Cairo increasing – one of the very few exceptions to the generally declining trend. Surprisingly, unemployment in Upper Egypt is lower than it is in Lower Egypt.

The dramatic concentration of unemployment among youths is only one manifestation of the difficult labor market they face in their attempt to negotiate their transition to adulthood. For educated youths, these poor job prospects collide with higher expectations about the need for independent living arrangements when they marry, especially for young men; they result in a significant delay in the age of marriage.

LOW QUALITY EMPLOYMENT

The good news about the decline in unemployment is marred by the growth in what the World Bank terms to be “bad jobs.” These are essentially low-paying jobs that provide little in terms of social insurance, stability, and potential for advancement. Since work is such a major part of life in terms of securing a livelihood, social integration, and individual self-esteem, obtaining decent

Figure 2-4: Unemployment Rates by Educational Attainment and Sex
Age 15-29. Standard Unemployment Definition and Market Labor Force Definition



Source: Author

work is clearly fundamental to improving the quality of life. The ILO has adopted the “decent work” objective, which is similar to the World Bank’s “good jobs” notion, as an organizing framework since 1999.

The ELMPS of 2006 shows that only 33 percent of employed youths who received wages had a legal contract with their employers. Only 30 percent had social insurance coverage, 21 percent had medical insurance, and only 15 percent were members of a labor syndicate or a union. Moreover, only a fraction of youths received the basic package of non-wage benefits such as paid vacations (23 percent) and sick leave (22 percent). In terms of earnings, Assaad and Roushdy (2007) show that 69 percent of working youths in 2006 could be classified as low earners, based on a low earning threshold that uses the national poverty line as a basis. Thus, the majority of those who obtain paid employment are in a poor quality job that does not allow them to start a family and complete their transition to adulthood and independence.

Many young people begin their working lives as self-employed workers or unpaid family workers. As

shown in Figure 2-4, the share of entrants in non-wage employment has fluctuated between 27 percent and 33 percent since 1975 and shows no overall trend over time. The majority of them work without pay on their families’ farms or small enterprises.

Although less is known about earnings in these family-owned enterprises, there is enough information to suggest that productivity tends to be very low. Their limited access to information, networks, training, finance, clients, suppliers, and skilled workers hampers the potential for success for these enterprises. Moreover, when the young person is the entrepreneur, there is a lack of experience, market knowledge, and the absence of collateral to secure loans. The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor indicates that only a very small share of these enterprises is able to succeed (cited in World Bank, 2006:114).

A Latin American study (cited in World Bank, 2006:114) shows that successful entrepreneurs tend to come from middle- or upper-middle-class families and from families with entrepreneurial parents. El-Leithy documents a similar pattern linking higher educational levels with increases in the rate at which companies are formed.

Table 2-1: Employment Status of Employed Youth (15-29) by Education Level, 2006.

Education Status	Wage earners	Employers	Self- employed	Unpaid family workers
Illiterate	34.47	5.49	6.52	53.52
Reads & Writes	57.59	5.36	7.59	29.46
Less than Intermediate	46.94	5.57	6	41.74
Intermediate	56.16	4.82	6.75	32.27
Above Intermediate	74.85	7.02	2.92	15.2
University & Higher	82.07	4.73	2.87	10.33
Total	54.35	5.18	5.88	34.58

Source: ELMPS06

The following table, based on data from the ELMPS of 2006, shows that while self-employment is not strongly associated with education level, unpaid family work tends to be more concentrated among the lesser educated. Such work is especially prevalent in rural areas. Nearly half of unpaid family employment in 2006 was in agriculture, so that its increasing share among entrants since 2000 is probably a sign of recovering employment in that sector. This may explain the large declines observed in rural unemployment rates.

MEN DOMINATE JOB MARKET

A recent labor market analysis reveals two major job characteristics for young women: Many aged 15 to 29 are economically inactive – and their rates of inactivity are rising – and a significant proportion of those who are economically active are unpaid family workers. As shown in Table 2-2 below, only 22

percent of young women 15 to 29 were economically active in 2006 compared to 63 percent of males. While the share of those currently studying is about the same for young men and young women, the share of those who are inactive and not in school is very different.

Among employed females, nearly 37 percent are unpaid family workers compared with 25 percent for males. The second highest form of employment is as government workers, a status that young women are three times as likely as young men to achieve. Given the slow rate of growth in government employment, this underscores the fragility of employment opportunities for young women in the foreseeable future. The biggest source of employment for young men is informal, regular wage employment in the private sector, which constitutes nearly one-third of young male employment but less than one-fifth of young female employ-

Table 2-2: Gender Disparity in Labor Market Participation for Youth 15-29, 2006

Employment Status	Total Population		Employed	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Government Employee	4.3	3.2	7.6	22.8
State-Owned Enterprise Worker	1.7	0.3	3.0	1.9
Formal Private. Wage Worker	6.9	1.4	12.1	9.9
Inform Private Reg. Wage Worker	18.1	2.7	31.8	19.3
Irregular Wage Worker	8.0	0.4	14.0	2.8
Unpaid Family worker	14.1	5.2	24.8	36.6
Self-employed	3.9	0.9	6.8	6.7
Total Employed	57.0	14.1	100.0	100.0
Unemployed	6.1	8.2		
Economically Active	63.1	22.3		
Student	27.6	24.0		
Inactive	8.6	53.5		
Disabled	0.7	0.2		
Total	100.0	100.0		

Source: ELMPS06

ment. Many more young men are irregular wage employees than young women. Generally, this is because of the low social acceptability of such employment for women in Egypt.

Marriage and education are two major reasons for a woman's decision to enter the labor market. Married women are less likely to enter the labor market compared to their single counterparts. In fact, the probability of employment among single women is about twice that of married women (Amer, 2006).

Education plays a dichotomous role in a woman's entry to the labor market. Study results show that the more education a woman has, the more likely is she to enter the labor market. In 2006, for example, by age twenty-nine, nearly half of those women with a university degree will have entered the labor market compared to only one-third of those with a post-secondary education and only one-quarter of those with a basic or technical secondary education (Amer, 2006). But because of the prevalence of unpaid family work among women, a recent analysis shows that those with primary and preparatory education enter the labor market at higher rates than educated women.

Analysis of a woman's age when she enters the job market and her level of education shows an alarming trend. Comparing results of the ELMPS for 1998 and 2006, Amer (2006) shows that the proportion of women post-secondary and university graduates entering the labor market decreased dramatically from 1998 to 2006. Amer also notes that a large proportion of young women never enter the labor market. Indeed, as shown in Table 2-2, the highest cumulative probability of entering the job market among young women is about 25 percent, a proportion that has not budged since 1998. In contrast, employment is almost universal among males by age twenty-nine (Amer, 2006).

The drop in participation of young women in the job market from 1998 to 2006 was not limited to a particular age group. Amer (2006) shows that the proportion of unemployed women increased among all age groups, in particular among those 20-24. The decline in the number of young women in the job market probably can be attributed to the dearth of employment opportunities in the government,

where most of these young women would have taken jobs in the past.

BARRIERS TO WOMEN

If it is true that young women are withdrawing from the labor force because of the absence of government employment opportunities, the question is why they are unable to find appropriate jobs in the private sector. Even if private sector work is known to be inhospitable to married women in Egypt, the rates of employment and economic activity are falling even among single women.

There are a number of globally recognized norms about women in the workforce. First, women work mostly both when they are single and highly productive and when they get older, after their children are older. Second, women work more in rural areas and in trading activities, where it is easier to combine mothering and work by bringing children to work (Deranti and Oppong, 1994). Third, women work in less affluent countries, where child rearing is more cheaply and easily delegated, mainly through extended family support and relatively inexpensive day care. Fourth, in less affluent societies, the low level of male income spurs wives to work to earn money for the family (ibid.).

In Egypt, the focus has been on accounting for the low number of young women in the labor force, particularly in the private sector. Many have highlighted religious and cultural reasons as having a significant impact. Abu Nasr et al. (1985: 6, 31) give primary attention to the value system of honor in explaining limited female participation in the workforce in the Arab world. They argue that family honor depends on the conformity of females to "modesty codes" of sex segregation, parental surveillance, early marriage, and rigid female sex roles. Such codes restrict the activities of women to the home. A number of researchers have cited kin-ordered patriarchal and agrarian structures as reasons for restricting women from working (for example, Kandiyoti, 1991, Moghadam, 1993). The patriarchal family is defined as a kinship-based unit in which members have clearly defined roles arranged by age and gender. Within this setup, women depend on the men of the house to provide for them.

If it is true that young women are withdrawing from the labor force because of the absence of government employment opportunities, the question is why they are unable to find appropriate jobs in the private sector. Even if private sector work is known to be inhospitable to married women in Egypt, the rates of employment and economic activity are falling even among single women.

Hoodfar (1999:15) takes issues with this cultural approach, noting that the focus on gender ideology within Islam reflects an unrealistic vision of the Middle East and Muslims as bound by ideology and religion while the rest of the world lives within a secular economic structure. Instead, she calls for a household based analysis that examines individual economic behavior in the context of the family. Because of the complex roles and responsibilities of women as mothers and wives, the supply of female labor cannot be explained solely in terms of individual strategies. Moreover, many women, though they contribute many hours of work to support their households, do not consider this as real work.

Other researchers reverse the causal relationship of the cultural argument, highlighting the role of the economic structure on culture; specifically the oil boom period of the late 1970s and early 1980s, on reinforcing patriarchal rule. According to Moghadam (2001), the relatively high income levels for men that resulted from the oil boom windfall, particularly as remittances from workers in the Persian Gulf area, made it unnecessary for women to work outside the house, restricting the supply of their labor. This reinforced patriarchal notions of man as the only breadwinner and woman as domestic caregiver. Karshenas and Moghadam (2001) further argue that the oil boom interrupted the transformation of the Egyptian economy from an agrarian one to a large-scale urban one.

Assaad (2002b) had a different view of the oil boom's impact on women in the workforce. He notes that

the oil boom did not affect the supply side of female labor as much as it affected the demand for their labor. Oil-related revenues distorted the structure of the economy by increasing jobs in sectors that are traditionally male dominated, such as construction and services. These revenues also reduced the international competitiveness of industries that have higher rates of female employment, such as textiles, clothing, and food processing. There is evidence that the recent devaluations of the Egyptian pound and the liberalization of trade have, at least temporarily, reversed the decline of women working in the private sector, with significant female employment growth in textiles, clothing, and food processing (Assaad 2006).

On the supply side, evidence shows that more women seek to participate in paid work. Barsoum (2004b), building on research conducted in Cairo in 2004, argues that many women, even mothers, generally want to work if given the opportunity. Her research shows that women would want to work if combining childcare and work is doable and if the job is sufficiently rewarding to cover the many expenses a working mother incurs, plus allowing for a surplus. But they continue to face barriers in the labor market.

Among these barriers, as Moghadam (1998:110) highlights, is employer discrimination in Egypt, particularly against married women. Moghadam argues that this is one of the major factors limiting participation by women in the workforce. She notes that employers widely believe that the productivity

of women declines after marriage and childbearing and that their absenteeism is higher than men's, especially when they have children. Women, therefore, are preferred only in occupations that are not intensive and where there are high turnovers. She notes further that protective legislation for women contributes to such attitudes by turning women into expensive labor.

Another obstacle to women working is the cultural norms of the workplace, where women carry the brunt of a growing informality, including the risk of sexual harassment. Al-Bassusi (2002) has described working conditions in some parts of the private sector as "unsuitable and hard." Such working conditions discourage women from pursuing jobs in the private sector, where establishments are increasingly small. A survey of 1,700 Egyptian establishments in three governorates showed that small companies—those with less than ten workers—account for up to half of the total employment opportunities in Egypt (ILO, 1997). Barsoum (2004) argues that these firms do not give women the sense of security that they would have if they worked in a larger, more populated workplace. She highlights the fear of sexual harassment in smaller work settings as one of the major reasons why many women graduates decide to "respect themselves and stay at home" instead of exposing themselves to precarious working conditions. In a society that regards a girl's virginity as sacred (Khattab, 1996), a threat of sexu-

al harassment, even if it may never take place, is very serious. This is another reason to make public rather than private sector employment more appealing to women.

Assaad and Arntz (2005) attribute the limited participation of women in the workforce to their restricted geographical mobility. Analyzing the 1998 Egyptian labor survey data, they note that working women commuted significantly less than men at a time when private sector employment required men to commute more.

While the prospects of women working for the government are very limited because of structural adjustment policies and the retrenchment of that job market, opportunities outside the government are highly segmented across gender lines. Assaad and Arntz (2005:441) identify only nine job types capturing 95 percent of female nongovernmental paid work. Clerical work, teaching, and domestic service were the three major occupational fields for women. Comparing survey data of 1988 and 1998, they show that fewer women are working in these limited fields.

The overcrowding of women in a limited number of jobs places downward pressure on their wages. Women in the private sector are paid significantly less than men. Said (2002) shows that gender wage inequalities increased for women between 1988 and 1998. This marks another barrier to women's work since their earnings are often well below the cost of their time, especially after marriage.

IV. FORMING FAMILIES

There are two issues in forming families that are central to youth exclusion in Egypt. First, there is the persistence of underage marriage. Young women get fewer, if any, years of schooling, which has detrimental repercussions on their economic and social participation in society. Second, there is a trend toward delaying marriage, both for men and women, and, therefore, an increasing number of singles, particularly among men. Researchers attribute this phenomenon to the increased cost of marriage that, in turn, is connected to the increase in access to education. Delayed marriage is a form of exclusion because these young people cannot form families and lead independent adult lives. Delayed marriage also is connected to the emergence of non-traditional forms of marriage, which subsume women's legal rights as wives.

Adolescent marriage is chiefly a rural phenomenon in Egypt. A study in the early 1990s found that in two villages in Upper Egypt, 44 percent of girls married before the legal marriage age of sixteen, 68 percent before eighteen, and 81 percent before twenty (Hamamsy 1994, quoted in Shepard and DeJong, 2005). National figures from the EDHS

(2005:93) show that 8.8 percent of women are married by age fifteen and 29.7 percent are married by eighteen. Lying about age is how this practice continues.

Early marriage is central to the exclusion of young women in rural Egypt. It is closely related to limited or lack of education, limited potentials for labor market participation, and early childbearing. The latter poses severe health risks to women in the form of maternal mortality and morbidity. Pregnancy-related deaths are the leading cause of mortality for girls aged 15-19 (married and unmarried) worldwide (UNICEF 2001).

But the problem of early marriage seems to be declining. The 2005 EDHS documents an increasing delay in marriage for women. Data shows that the percentage of women married by the age of fifteen has dropped from 13 percent among women aged 45-49 to 3 percent among women aged 20-24. This is a significant drop. A more recent and striking phenomenon is the growing group of young women who remain unmarried until the ages of 30-39. According to EDHS 2005, these make up more than 9 percent of women in Egypt.

Table 3-1: Percentage of Men and Women Never Married

Females	1988			1998			2006		
	Urban	Rural	Total	Urban	Rural	Total	Urban	Rural	Total
20-24	56%	20%	37%	67%	41%	53%	55%	32%	41%
25-29	26%	5%	15%	28%	14%	20%	22%	13%	17%
30-34	10%	3%	6%	11%	10%	11%	12%	7%	9%
Males									
20-24	90%	73%	80%	95%	88%	91%	91%	83%	86%
25-29	62%	29%	46%	76%	53%	63%	57%	36%	45%
30-34	26%	7%	17%	33%	14%	22%	22%	9%	15%

Source: ELMPS06, ELMPS1998, and the Labor Force Sample Survey 1988.

Comparing survey data from 1988, 1998, and 2006, the following table shows an interesting trend in the distribution of women who never married. The table shows that the number of single women peaked in 1998 and nearly returned in 2006 to where it was in 1988. Still, more than 9 percent of women were not married by age thirty-four in 2006.

The table also shows that the situation is much more pronounced in the case of males. Men experience the same pattern of delayed marriage as women, with the peak of this phenomenon occurring in 1998. In urban areas, 57 percent of men were not married by age twenty-nine and 22 percent were unmarried by thirty-four.

Delayed marriage is primarily an urban phenomenon. The following table shows the difference between urban and rural areas by focusing on living arrangements for newly married couples. More rural women reported living with the families of their husbands upon marriage. This arrangement significantly decreases the cost of marriage; high cost is a reason for delaying marriage.

In a society that frowns upon pre-marital sexual relations and ostracizes children born out of the wed-

lock, delayed marriage is a serious form of youth exclusion. Delayed marriage, as rightfully described by Singerman (this volume), is a form of delayed adulthood or “wait adulthood.” Marriage marks an important transition to adulthood in the Middle East generally. It is the stage at which young men and women are considered adults since the unmarried generally continue to live with their parents. When unmarried, women are viewed as the responsibility of the men in the family, who generally constrain their mobility because of issues related to propriety.

Singerman and Ibrahim (2001) rightfully attribute marriage delay among men to the decline in male economic opportunities. Our earlier analysis of the problem of high unemployment among young people and the lack of decent jobs for youth confirms this notion.

Additionally, couples are more likely to aspire to live in their own household after marriage and to have access to more durable goods than couples in the past, which is a radical change from even their parents’ generation (Singerman and Hoodfar 1996; Hoodfar 1997). This means marriage in Egypt is

Table 3-2: Living Arrangements in Marriage

	Urban	Rural	Total
Living with the woman’s family	2.5%	2.6%	2.6%
Living with the man’s family	24.0%	60.2%	45.2%
Living with someone else	0.4%	0.1%	0.2%
Living separately	73.1%	37.1%	52.0%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: *ELMPS06*

very costly. Singerman (this volume) shows that marriage costs in 1999 were four and half times higher than the gross national product per capita and eleven times annual household expenditures. Singerman and Ibrahim (2001) argue that marriage is the largest intergenerational transfer of wealth for Egyptians, often larger than that which follows the death of a parent. In establishing a new household for a newlywed couple, the bride, groom, and their families invest significant resources. Celebrations of marriage serve as a public display of the upward mobility of both the couple and their families, and the purchase of modern amenities at marriage creates a healthier environment suitable for reproduction and childrearing. A survey of youth in Egypt shows that saving for marriage is a major component of the budgets of working youth, particularly for women (Abdel Kader, 2006:19).

The rising cost of housing is a direct reason for the delay in marriage. The 1997 ASCE survey shows that when parents were asked about the main problems facing youth, 59 percent identified the cost of housing for a married couple (Singerman and Ibrahim 2003, quoted in Sheppard and DeJong, 2005). Table 3-2 shows that in rural areas, where delayed

marriage is less prevalent, newly married couples tend to live with the man's family, thereby eliminating, or substantively decreasing, housing costs.

Finally, the resurgence of non-traditional forms of marriage often is described as a way for young people to cope with the high costs of marriage. There is no evidence-based research on the prevalence of *'urfi* marriage in Egypt. But newspaper articles and television programs often mention it. The practice is based on drawing on the minimum Islamic requirements for only two witnesses for a marriage to be consummated. This type of marriage is usually secret and carried out without informing parents. Consequently, women's legal rights as wives are subsumed within this arrangement. Another form of wedlock is what has been termed to be "summer marriages," whereby Arab tourists marry young Egyptian girls over the summer in return for a significant price. Most of these unions end in divorce at summer's end. Aside from the potential danger of sexually transmitted diseases, children born of these marriages, until recently, have not been entitled to Egyptian citizenship or to the associated benefits of free government education and health care (Sheppard and DeJong, 2005).

V. EXERCISING CITIZENSHIP

Civic participation is integral to youth inclusion. Active civic participation by youth has positive developmental outcomes. It facilitates collective action, which can yield more effective and better-targeted youth services. It also reduces corruption by allowing for channels of accountability (World Bank, 2006a:161). Conversely, poor civic participation by youths can lead them to choose negative social roles, including crime and religious militancy. Citizenship is an all-encompassing term.

Outlets for civic participation by youths are very scarce in Egypt. A striking example is on-campus student activities. Interviews with the very few activists in universities show that outlets for activism are only permitted at elite universities because their campuses are considered to be less violent and fundamentalist religious groups have not penetrated them in a major way. For the majority of university campuses, the same security mechanisms that seek to curtail the activism of fundamentalist religious groups are applied to all groups. For instance, interviews show that it could take six months for a youth group on campus to distribute newsletters in the university. Campus security officials impose strict censorship rules on the contents of these newsletters to avoid unrest. A campus play has to be approved by the dean and can be canceled without prior notice. It is worth noting that female students constitute a small minority of activist youth for reasons related to the proper role of women and to the limitations of these outlets for participation generally.

Consequently, many youths become cynical and unwilling to participate in what they perceive to be a closed system. Social disparities, widening gaps between rich and poor, a sense of limited future prospects given high unemployment rates among graduates, and the difficulties in forming families create a general sense that the system is corrupt and caters only to privileged elite. Besides, for many youths, the main contact with the state is through the police, who are widely considered to be hostile and needlessly violent.

A recent survey of youths revealed some alarming notions that can be closely tied to their limited outlets for civic participation (UNDP, 2007). The

study documents a prevailing apathy and lack of initiative. Youths reported having “little faith that their own voices (and that their) efforts might be appreciated, heard or considered” (ibid., 5). The nationally representative sample of 2,400 Egyptian youths showed that 67 percent never were involved in any school activities. Only 13 percent of the respondents did some kind of volunteer work. While youths reported having a reasonable amount of leisure time, watching television was the most frequently performed activity followed by listening to music and spending time with friends and family. Only 1 percent of the sample chose voluntary work as a preferred activity. The survey also demonstrated low levels of tolerance and acceptance of the “other,” particularly those of a lower socio-economic background and of different belief systems or dogmas.

While the study did not include data on voting practices and participation in elections, it highlighted a stark ignorance about the electoral system in Egypt, which can be taken as a proxy for their limited participation.

With the failure of secular channels to integrate youths as active civic participants, Bayat (1998:165) argues that the Islamist movement provided an “alternative social, cultural, and moral community” for alienated groups, including youths. Weekly religious meetings provided a sense of affiliation for youths who are otherwise alienated. Bayat describes the role of these religious meetings as providing “a Durkheimian social solidarity, security, and moral integration” (ibid.). Religious organizations provided space for volunteers, to the extent that the survey documents that volunteerism among youths was undertaken only “for religious reasons.” Ibrahim (2007) reports similar results from a study on youth volunteerism in Egypt, noting that religion was a strong and central motivator among the volunteers.

Islamist social organizations also provided youth-specific services unavailable to young people from a lower socio-economic background through other channels. These include libraries, sport facilities, language and computer classes, video and television sessions, lectures, tours, and holidays.

Programs that provide labor market information and employment services are very limited. Youths lack information about where to find jobs, where to get training, and even what type of training would be needed in the labor market. No programs specifically address these needs.

For many of the youths who participate in these activities, the religious social organization is the only avenue open to them for expanding their constrained environments. “Islamic weddings,” highlighted by Bayat (ibid.), are very relevant examples of how these organizations cater to the needs of youth.

The religious alternative provided space for another socially alienated group, women. Bayat (ibid.) documents that urban neighborhood weekly gatherings *halaqat* grouped together women from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, not only to learn about Islamic precepts but also to gain a sense of belonging to a moral community and to share experiences.

VI. POLICIES PROMOTING YOUTH INCLUSION

“Putting our Youth to Work” *Shababna Ya'mal* is a program recently launched by the National Democratic Party to create 4.5 million jobs in industry, agriculture, and tourism between 2005 and 2011. There is much evidence that employment creation, particularly for youth, is at the top of the national agenda. In 2003, Egypt became a lead country in the Youth Employment Network (YEN), which was instituted by the United Nations to address the global political commitment to develop and implement strategies that address youth employment (Kamel, 2006:1). The Egyptian national action plan is being formulated following YEN's four top priorities for all such plans: employability, equal opportunities between men and women, entrepreneurship, and employment generation.

Successful policies and interventions that address youth should be multi-sectoral and have a broad – not piecemeal – approach (World Bank, 2006a). We include in this section policy reforms that have a direct impact on youth. Other than employment generation policies, these are education reform and housing sector policies. As noted earlier, education plays an important role in the process of youth inclusion/exclusion. Housing reform policies are directly connected to issues of delayed marriage and the potentials of young people to forming families of their own.

We divide policies related to youth into (a) indirect policies that have an impact on youth by enhancing the economic environment and leading to job creation through investment incentives to labor intensive projects, trade policies, and fiscal and monetary policies; and (b) direct youth-related policies, including active labor market policies, education reforms, and housing sector reforms.

Indirect Policies

Macroeconomic policies that seek to improve the investment climate, expand the private sector and help trade to flourish by attracting foreign direct investment can have an indirect impact on youth through job creation. These include trade liberalization, tariff reductions, international trade agreements, investment laws, and fiscal and monetary policies.

Trade liberalization policies such as tariff reduction and the elimination of service fees and import sur-

charges have been in effect in Egypt since 2004. The average tariff was dropped from 14.6 percent to 9 percent, the number of tariff brackets decreased from twenty-seven to six, and the list of products subject to tariffs was shortened from 13,000 to 6,000 (Kamel, 2006:3). Moreover, Egypt signed a number of free trade agreements to boost exports and attract investment, the most prominent of them the European Union Partnership Agreement in 2004 and the Qualified Industrial Zones Protocol in 2005.

The floating of the Egyptian pound and the elimination of parallel currency markets in 2004 remain the major exchange rate policy changes. Similarly, the tax law of July 2005 has been described as enhancing economic growth by leading to a more conducive investment environment. Still, the deficiency in the quality of the business environment, in terms of bureaucratic barriers and the process of settling disputes, has been identified in a number of reports as major barriers to investment (El Megharbel, 2007).

The impact of these policies has yet to be seen. But Assaad (2007) notes that evidence of growth in private sector employment, particularly in textiles and clothing, can be attributed to some of these macroeconomic policies.

Direct Policies and Programs

Labor Market Policies

The major structural change in labor market policy in recent years was the 2003 labor law. The law allows a clear tilt toward employers and significantly enhances their flexibility (Assaad, 2003). Under the old law, workers' contracts of indefinite duration essentially meant lifetime job security, unless the workers committed a “grave error” that would result in their dismissal for cause. Under the new law, contracts for a defined period are permitted, can be renewed, and are not necessarily transformed to indefinite contracts. Moreover, the conditions under which employers can terminate an indefinite contract have been loosened significantly. Given the widespread evasion of labor regulations that occurred before the new law, the likelihood is that the 2003 law merely will formalize employment rather

than create new jobs. The old law was not necessarily a constraint on employment but led chiefly to informal employment relations.

Active labor market policies include employment services and job search assistance, training programs for the unemployed and youths, and job creation through wage/employment subsidies, public works, self-employment and micro-finance services. These policies include a number of programs on the ministerial and local government levels. They include:

- Employment generation through the Public Works Program of the Social Fund for Development.⁸
- The National Program for Integrated Rural Development through the Ministry of Local Development,
- Small and micro-enterprise development programs through the Social Fund for Development.
- Technical and Vocational Training Program (TVET) through the Ministry of Trade and Industry, with finances from the European Union.
- Employment services through the Ministry of Manpower and Migration.

El Megharbel (2006) notes that these programs failed to meet their target. For example, the impact of the public works program is limited to alleviating poverty during its implementation, with no sustainable outcomes. Similarly, the majority of jobs created by the rural development program, *Shorouk*, were temporary.

Small and micro-enterprise programs primarily provide credit. El-Megharbel (2006) notes that these programs lack follow-up and evaluation and are not successful because they require a certain level of formality and are therefore inaccessible to the sea of firms in the informal economy. Barsoum (2006) documents similar results, noting that despite the plethora of microfinance programs there remains an unmet need because of the restrictive requirements of many of the programs that provide credit.

Providing credit in Egypt long has operated within two major models: business enhancement and eco-

nomics survival, also known as poverty alleviation. The business enhancement and growth model seeks to create employment by providing credit to existing businesses that are relatively capital intensive. Credit chiefly is provided by the Social Fund for Development through its Enterprise Development Program, the National Bank for Development, and business associations established as part of a US Agency for International Development initiative that started in 1988. But research shows no evidence that there has been a significant growth of new jobs because of this program.

The economic survival model primarily deals with providing credit to home-based, small-scale economic activities. It is the only mechanism for credit available to those in the informal economy. But this model only provides credit to women within a more development-oriented agenda through nongovernmental organizations and with substantial donor support. These programs have no clear focus on youth because the majority of their recipients are less educated older women. Barsoum (2006) shows there is a deficiency in the microfinance programs because there are hardly any lending mechanisms for poorer men.

The Technical and Vocational Training program (TVET) has been criticized for its inability to compensate for trainees' limited education, its poorly equipped and outdated facilities, unqualified teachers, and obsolete curricula. TVET involves twenty-two agencies and ministries, and a national strategy recently has been finalized to redesign it and upgrade its operation (El-Megharbel, 2006). Many government training programs are initiated without proper outreach and therefore have limited coverage. The majority also are short-term and, therefore, do not completely allow for apprenticeship and adequate training.

A more successful vocational training model has been the Mubarak-Kohl Initiative, which established a system of dual vocational education with support from the German government. The program started in 1994 and is to continue until 2008. It targets students who successfully have completed their basic education. Students attend school two days a week and undergo practical training for the

rest of the week. Upon successful completion of studies, a Ministry of Education diploma is granted together with a certificate from the Business Association.

Implementation depends on the active involvement and participation of the business community, where businesses contribute training opportunities and pay a stipend to apprentices during their training period. An evaluation of the first phase of the program showed that 60 percent of the graduates decided to pursue higher education after receiving their diplomas instead of working as technicians. This is atypical in Egypt, signifying that the program is succeeding by targeting the most academically promising students. But the limited participation of the business community remains one of the major obstacles facing this program. Also, since it is provided with German financial support, there are questions about its sustainability without donor backing.

There is an abundance of assistance programs that address vocational training and are operated by nongovernmental organizations such as the Centre for Development Services and the Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services. These NGOs provide training by using existing workshops, both in the informal and the formal sector. To encourage workshops to provide training, NGOs provide financial support to cover costs (Kamel, 2006). Some evaluations show a high rate of post-training employment (from 60 to 70 percent), indicating the success of this type of training. But as with most NGO aid programs, the training assistance has a limited outreach and is operated on a very low scale. The NGOs are also donor-dependent, an issue that has a detrimental impact on the sustainability of these programs. Kamel (2006) also notes that the lack of coordination among these many programs further limits their impact.

Programs that provide labor market information and employment services are very limited. Only since January 2006 did the Ministry of Manpower and Migration start issuing bulletins with job announcements (Kamel, 2006:39). Youths lack information about where to find jobs, where to get training, and even what type of training would be needed

in the labor market. No programs specifically address these needs. Barsoum (2004) illustrates the case of women graduates seeking clerical jobs who fail to choose appropriate computer training courses and end up taking irrelevant classes. The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) is implementing a program that seeks to provide counseling services and job-related databases for use by job seekers, employers, trainers, and government agencies. These employment centers also provide job-matching services for both employers and employees. A similar program currently underway is the establishment of employment and career development service offices at Cairo University and Ain Shams University to help students and recent graduates. The program is implemented by NGOs with support from USAID.

The common denominator of most active labor market programs is that they are primarily provided through governmental or quasi-governmental bodies and suffer from limited efficiency, skewed targeting, and a heavy reliance on international donor support. The landscape, therefore, is littered with defunct programs. They fail either because they came from the top down, were bad ideas, or were implemented badly. Many programs are initiated and supported through foreign donor support and are insufficiently institutionalized or integrated into a policy framework. Despite the success of some NGOs, these programs remain limited in scale and depend heavily on grants and, therefore, are not sustainable over the long term.

Finally, there have been no systematic evaluations of most of the programs and policies addressing youth employment in Egypt. Studies with pre- and post-intervention designs involving control and intervention groups are very rare. This creates a huge knowledge gap that hinders the learning of lessons and the building of new projects.

Education Reform

A recent strategy paper by the Ministry of Education highlights two areas as central to education reform:

- Equality of quality education, which primarily addresses issues of class size, teacher qualifications, curriculum development, and teaching

methods. The strategy paper notes that “a system that serves a small minority with a ‘high standard,’ but serves a large majority poorly, cannot be considered equitable, and such a system would produce lowered rates of return to education investment.” (2005:3)

- Efficiency of education expenditures, which relates to issues of access to schooling and school construction targeting and implementation. This objective also addresses textbook costs, which accounted for 6 percent of overall pre-university expenditures in 2003-04 (World Bank, 2005).

A number of initiatives have begun. They rely heavily on donor support, and most of them have yet been evaluated. They include:

- Community schools: A UNICEF initiative that seeks to provide girl-friendly schools. The program was offered to the National Council for Children and Motherhood and adopted by the Ministry of Education.
- The Egypt Education Reform Program (ERP) is a bilateral agreement between the Ministry of Education and USAID. It seeks to replicate in seven governorates a pilot program introduced in Alexandria to decentralize education, increase community participation through boards of trustees, and improve teacher training.
- The World Bank Skill Development Project was initiated last year to help employers at small and medium-sized firms identify their human resource and skill training needs. Among the project’s objectives is to link trainers and employers and to stimulate private sector demand for training.

Housing Reform

A recent World Bank report (2006b:89) argues that the urban housing crisis is the result of distortions in the housing market caused by an “accumulation of ill-conceived and inadequate policies that led over time to creating a mismatch between supply and demand and to severely curtailing private sector investment in housing supply.” These policies include major government involvement in construction activities and a history of rent control legislation and rigid tenant protection practices that inhibited

private sector investment in housing. As a result, the major recommendation of the report is to devise affordable housing policies and strategies that address the distortions that prevent the housing market from functioning efficiently.

Recent policy reforms were two-pronged. The new housing law (Law 4 of 1996) sought to remove rent control legislation. Existing contracts were grandfathered to avoid political unrest. The new law sought to encourage private owners of vacant units and investors to return to the rental market on a free market basis without government restriction on rates or length of a lease. While the new law provides a solution for a large number of newly formed families and middle- and upper-middle income groups, private owners remain wary of whether courts will enforce tenant eviction (ibid.:7). This issue limits the impact of the new law and its potentials in achieving its goal.

The second approach was to increase the public supply of affordable housing, which was criticized for its high cost and inefficiencies. Moreover, problems related to nepotism and the fair distribution of housing units provided at affordable costs plagued the program.

Recommended reforms primarily include transforming the role of the government from being a direct supplier to an enabler of the private sector to deliver housing. The recommendations also include addressing problems with the land and property registration system in urban areas, which hamper access to mortgage and housing finance. Although the government developed a regulatory framework for housing mortgage finance in 2001, it has had a very limited impact. Weak property rights because of the limited registration of property in urban areas continue to have little impact on the potential of these regulations.

Providing Second Chances

Among the most vulnerable groups are those that never attended school, failed to become literate, and never made it to the workforce. Programs addressing these groups are very limited. *Isbraq* is a pilot program that seeks to integrate out-of-school adolescent girls in rural Upper Egypt by providing “safe spaces” for them for literacy classes, life skills

training, community engagement, and sports. By the end of the program, girls take the national literacy exam and, if successful, can mainstream into the education system. The program is implemented by four NGOs: Caritas, the Center for Development and Population Activities, the Population Council, and Save the Children. The program started in four villages in Minia and is being expanded in Minia and Beni Suef. The pilot program showed a clear positive impact on the lives of participating girls (Bradey et al., 2007).

Street children are another group most in need of a second chance. Aside from the hazards of living on the street, this group is identified as being most at risk for substance abuse. Sedik (1995, quoted in UNODCCP, 2007) estimates that the number of street children in Egypt, boys and girls, is 93,000. A report by the UN Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention shows that two-thirds of street children surveyed in Cairo and Alexandria regularly abused drugs or solvents, particularly by sniffing glue. The report also shows that 80 percent of the street children are exposed to real or a constant

threat of violence from employers, community members, and their peers. Street children also are deprived of information about health, hygiene, nutrition, and of protective services.

There is an abundance of programs that address this group, albeit with a very limited outreach and efficacy. The Ministry of Social Affairs and its General Social Defense Department are responsible for these programs. Unfortunately, government services are provided within a “delinquency” framework and are resisted by street children as a form of institutionalization. A growing number of NGOs has been addressing street children. Their intervention, however, is chiefly donor-dependent, lacks rigorous evaluation and is limited in scale because of limited resources (UNODCCP, 2006). One model that stands out is *Al-Amal* village, which provides reception centers, permanent and temporary shelters, social work support on the street, mobile units, and vocational training. According to UNODCCP, many NGOs replicate this model, though it has not been evaluated rigorously.

VII. FURTHER RESEARCH

The Egypt Labor Market Panel Survey 2006 collected a wealth of information about employment and unemployment, allowing for in-depth analysis of both the structure of the labor market and its trends. It was a follow-up survey to the Egypt Labor Market Survey of 1998 and tracked the same households and individuals interviewed in 1998, new households that might have formed as a result of splits from households interviewed in 1998, and a refresher sample of households to ensure that the data continues to be nationally representative. Fieldwork for ELMPS06 was conducted from January to March 2006.

We perceive a number of knowledge gaps that can be addressed using the ELMPS06 data set. These are:

1. Patterns and causes of delayed marriage among young men.

The UN database indicates that among 20-24 year olds in the 1990s, only 17 percent were married compared to 25 percent in earlier periods. Among those 25-29, the comparable percentages are 53 percent and 63 percent, respectively. While economic constraints and the high cost of marriage have been highlighted as the direct cause for this phenomenon, research is lagging in deeply understanding its underpinnings.

The study should address the role of prolonged schooling, employment constraints, migration, marriage arrangement expectations, and housing issues as reasons for delayed marriage among young men. Data from ELMPS06 includes the cost of marriage and can be used to analyze how it affects marriage delay. Data from different age groups will show generational differences in the cost of marriage. Information about individuals who split into new households primarily because of marriage should give insights on the dynamics of forming new families and its relationship to issues of earnings and employment. Data on household wealth can be used to analyze how it affects marriage prospects of both male and female children.

2. Job quality for new entrants

New entrants to the labor market usually get jobs within the informal economy. Many of these jobs

provide no stability, social security, or regularity. A new study should seek to address the labor market dynamics that define this process. The analysis should address how employment is secured, earnings, and job quality for youths. Such an analysis would tap into issues such as the impact of global integration, production patterns, and differences in the various sectors of the economy. Another component would address how youths perceive their working conditions, their aspirations, and coping strategies.

3. Gender-specific barriers to labor market entry and job segregation.

The exclusion of young women from the job market is a major phenomenon. The study would seek to address the barriers that face women, primarily young women, from entering the labor market. Statistical analysis would be supplemented by in-depth interviews with young women and employers. The study would address barriers related to cultural values, labor market structure, and the impact of trade agreements on job creation.

4. Generational changes.

ELMPS06 provides data on the education and work characteristics of the parents of all individuals in the sample. The design of this analysis makes it possible to track young people who form new families. The proposed study would examine how the education and work characteristics of the parents influence their children. Patterns of generational change regarding these variables are very relevant. This study also could include the marriage prospects of young people as they relate to parental wealth.

5. Migration as options for youth.

Migration broadens opportunities available to youths. ELMPS06 provides a wealth of information about geographic mobility. Statistics about current work characteristics, first jobs, and job mobility also include information about migration within Egypt. Survey data also includes information about absent household members who were migrants at the time of the visit and on remittances.

VIII. CONCLUSION

This analysis focused on four important areas of youth exclusion: education, work, forming families, and civic participation.

In looking at the education potential of young people, girls in Upper Egypt stand out as the group most at risk from being excluded. Among those who go to school, problems with the quality of education hamper their learning potential. While more advantaged young people have the option of getting into private schools and receiving private tutoring, the poor tend to get less out of the educational experience and carry the brunt of the limitations of the education system.

In the labor market, the youth bulge places enormous pressures on the workforce and results in fierce competition among young people for a limited number of good jobs. The result of these intense labor supply pressures is a process of exclusion in which a growing number of youths are relegated to marginal sources of livelihood or to the ranks of the unemployed. Young people are most likely to experience unemployment, to earn low wages and to get trapped in low-tier jobs. There is a prevalence of jobs that provide little or no social security or other benefits. Young women in particular face a number of barriers in the workforce that relate to cultural norms, the structure of the labor market and the economic environment in general, employers' discrimination, and workplace suitability.

When young men are unable to obtain productive employment, they also face significant barriers in forming families because of the high cost of marriage in Egypt. Two problems emerged as reasons for exclusion: adolescent marriage for girls in rural areas, which is closely tied to keeping them from education and work, and delayed marriage. Marriage in Middle Eastern culture is a pre-condition for transition to adulthood. Delayed marriage is delayed adulthood.

Civic participation for youth is very limited because there are few outlets. But religious organizations provide opportunities for many young people to be active members of their communities. Some of these organizations also provide much needed services, including group wedding ceremonies to help with the high cost of marriage.

Youth exclusion is a cumulative process. Poor learning leads to poor job prospects. The uneducated tend to

become unpaid family workers, while those with an education above the intermediate and university levels are more likely to be salaried workers. Forming families and achieving personal independence are closely linked to productive employment and adequate earnings. The unemployed and those trapped in low-paying jobs face insurmountable challenges in forming families because of the high costs of marriage. Finally, civic participation, or civic inclusion, is essential to an understanding of youth exclusion in Egypt and the Middle East generally because it refers to the ability to participate fully in society and the different channels available for such participation. Youth's civic participation feeds into having successful youth-related policies and programs and issues of community development.

In our discussion of policies promoting youth inclusion, we divided policies and programs into those that indirectly affect youth and those directly targeting them. Direct policies focused on three dimensions: employment, education, and housing. Our conclusions were mainly that many policies aimed at promoting youth inclusion are provided without any rigorous impact assessment. Many are provided with close donor support, which hampers their sustainability. Those provided through government or quasi-government bodies suffer from limited efficiency and skewed targeting. Few programs seek to provide "second chances" to young people and we found none that specifically targeted increasing youth's civic participation.

Our suggestions for further empirical research included a number of gaps identified in the research on young Egyptians. These relate to the patterns and causes of young men's delayed marriage and the issue of job quality and informality for new entrants to the labor market. We also proposed to focus on the gender specific barriers to labor market entry and gender segregation of jobs in order to gain a deeper understanding of the process of the exclusion of young females in the labor market. Because of our conclusions on the significant affect of poverty on educational outcomes, we propose further focus on inter-generational transmission of social and human capital. Finally, though we have not covered this in our analysis we propose further research on internal and external migration as options for youth and its role in broadening opportunities for youth.

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ENDNOTES

1. Brady, Martha, Ragui Assaad, Barbara Ibrahim, Rania Salem, Abeer Salem, and Nadia Zibani. Forthcoming. Providing new opportunities to adolescent girls in socially conservative settings: The Ishraq program in rural Upper Egypt. Cairo: Population Council. The study defines youth as those between the ages of 15 and 29
2. In choosing these four dimensions, we selectively build on the World Bank (2006).
3. El Zanaty et al. define those who are transited as those who are employed in a career or regular job with no immediate plan of changing their current job
4. Egypt has two major geographic regions: Upper Egypt and Lower Egypt. Geographically, Upper Egypt is a narrow strip of land that extends from the cataract boundaries of Aswan to the area south of Cairo. For the purpose of this analysis, Upper Egypt does not include Cairo. Lower Egypt is the northernmost section of the country, stretching from just south of Cairo to the Nile Delta at Alexandria on the Mediterranean. For purposes of this analysis, Lower Egypt does not include Alexandria.
5. The Adolescence and Social Change in Egypt (ASCE) survey was a collaborative project between the Population Council, the Social Research Center at the American University in Cairo, the University of Alexandria, and Assiut University
6. The 1997 Egypt Integrated Household Survey
7. Interview by Ghada Barsoum, January 2006
8. The Social Fund for Development is an independent semi-autonomous government agency

ABOUT THE MIDDLE EAST YOUTH INITIATIVE

Our Mission

To develop and implement a regional action plan for promoting the economic and social inclusion of young people in the Middle East.

Creating Alliances for Maximum Progress

The Middle East Youth Initiative's objective is to accelerate the international community's ability to better understand and respond to the changing needs of young people in the Middle East. By creating an international alliance of academics, policymakers, youth leaders and leading thinkers from the private sector and civil society, we aim to develop and promote a progressive agenda of youth inclusion.

The Middle East Youth Initiative was launched in July 2006 by the Wolfensohn Center for Development at the Brookings Institution in partnership with the Dubai School of Government.

Connecting Ideas with Action

The initiative blends activities in an attempt to bridge the divide between thinkers and practitioners and utilizes robust research as a foundation for effective policy and programs. The initiative has three complementary pillars:

Research and Policy: Pathways to Inclusion

With this initiative, cutting-edge research advances the understanding of economic and social issues affecting young people. The main target group is youth 15 to 29 years old, with a special focus on young men and women who live in urban areas and have secondary or post-secondary education. In addition to addressing needs of older youth, the initiative will also focus on strategies for promoting development of youth 15 years and under in areas such as primary education, skills development and community participation.

The research framework focuses on youth making two major transitions to adulthood: i) the transition from education to employment; and ii) the transition to household formation (marriage and family). Research will concentrate on strategies to achieve inclusion in:

- Quality education
- Quality employment

- Marriage
- Housing
- Civic participation

Our goal is to examine the relationship between economic and social policies and generate new recommendations that promote inclusion.

Advocacy and Networking: Creating Vital Connections

The initiative aspires to be a hub for knowledge and ideas, open to all stakeholders who can make change happen. Strong partnerships with policymakers, government officials, representatives from the private sector and civil society organizations, donors and the media will pioneer forms of dialogue that bridge the divide between ideas and action. By bringing in the voice and new perspectives of young people, the initiative will revitalize debate on development in the Middle East.

Practical Action: Life-Changing Impact

Outcomes matter. With a focus on areas with the greatest potential for innovation and impact, the initiative will mobilize partners for practical action that can improve young people's lives. The initiative will help develop policies and program interventions which provide youth with skills, expand opportunities for employment and facilitate access to credit, housing and civic participation.

ABOUT THE WOLFENSOHN CENTER FOR DEVELOPMENT

The Wolfensohn Center for Development at the Brookings Institution was founded in July 2006 by James D. Wolfensohn, former president of the World Bank and member of the Brookings Board of Trustees.

The Wolfensohn Center for Development analyzes how resources, knowledge and implementation capabilities can be combined toward broad-based economic and social change in a four-tier world.

The following principles guide the center's work:

- A focus on **impact, scaling-up and sustainability** of development interventions
- Bridging the gap between **development theory and practice** to bring about action
- Giving **voice** to developing countries, with high-level policy engagement and
- broad networking
- A **rigorous, independent research** approach that draws from multiple disciplines
- Working in **partnership** with others

ABOUT THE DUBAI SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT

The Dubai School of Government is a research and teaching institution focusing on public policy in the Arab world. Established in 2004 under the patronage of HH Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the United Arab Emirates and Ruler of Dubai, the school aims to promote good governance by enhancing the region's capacity for effective public policy.

Toward this goal, the Dubai School of Government collaborates with international institutions such as Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government and the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy in its research and training programs. In addition, the school organizes policy forums and international conferences to facilitate the exchange of ideas and promote critical debate on public policy in the Arab world.

The school is committed to the creation of knowledge, the dissemination of best practice and the training of policy makers in the Arab world. To achieve this mission, the school is developing strong capabilities to support research and teaching programs including:

- Applied research in public policy and management
- Masters degrees in public policy and public administration
- Executive education for senior officials and executives
- Knowledge forums for scholars and policy makers



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