

## The Role of the Institutions in the Formation of Informal Settlements in Egypt

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**Abstract:** There have been many efforts to investigate the problematic of informal settlement in Egypt and there are many suggested solutions. However, none of these have addressed the complexity of the process of formation of informal settlement in Egypt. There are many drivers and catalysts that facilitates spreading unofficial housing. This study studies the phenomenon of the formation of informal settlements in Egypt and the complexities behind its bureaucratic procedure. It aims to identify the unannounced motives and catalysts behind these informal settlements as well as examining the role of institutions whether they help in any way in facilitating the formation and spread of the phenomenon of informal settlements in Egypt. One of the main drivers of the formation of the informal settlements in Egypt is the “informal system” that allows government officials to use their positions and connections to increase their income. They boost their symbolic power system by benefitting from the illegal situation of the settlements and turn it to their advantage for financial profit. This research acts as a guideline and addresses decision makers and urban planners to propose solutions for reforming the bureaucratic and governmental systems regarding these settlements as they tend to act as a hidden resisting force against any proposed urban solutions.

**Key words:** Informal settlement, slum areas, urban studies, urban pattern, bureaucratic, settlements

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### INTRODUCTION

Oldham *et al.* (1987) defined the unofficial settlements in Egypt as areas that are largely populated by migrants from the countryside that settled in cities looking for job opportunities to increase their income. These communities are in violation of multiple laws concerning agricultural land use and expropriation of government land. For this reason, they have been identified as part of the informal housing sector. In these areas, setbacks from the street and other building regulations are not observed which leads to high density buildings that leave no space to establish basic services such as schools, health clinics, playgrounds or green areas (Alsayyad, 1993). Informal settlements are mostly found in developing nations or partially developed nations with an unequal distribution of wealth or developed countries in a severe recession (Oldham *et al.*, 1987).

There have been many efforts to investigate the problematic of informal settlement in Egypt and there are many suggested solutions. However, none of these have addressed the complexity of the process of formation of informal settlement in Egypt. There are many drivers and catalysts that facilitates spreading unofficial housing.

This study will focus only on the process of formation of informal settlements and it will study the

role of institutions in this process. It will examine whether the public institutions facilitate the formation process and increasing the phenomena of informal settlements in Egypt or not. According to the records of ministry of state for Environmental Affairs, that informal settlement in Egypt is 30% of residential areas. Figure 1 presents the percentage of informal settlement of residential areas in Egypt. The population of Egypt 75 million according to the last census in 2006 and expected to be 96 million in 2020. There are total of 1105 areas all over Egypt with population 16 million (Fig. 1).

The city of Cairo has 44.7% of total areas of the informal settlements and 46% of total population of informal settlements in Egypt (El-Batran and Arandel, 1998). Figure 2 presents percentage of informal settlement of in Cairo.

There are many arguments around the reason for informal settlement in Egypt; Sioufi (1981) mentioned in his book “Urbanization of Agricultural Land: Slum areas in Cairo” that despite the laws regulating settlements, many Slum areas are sprouting and expanding all around Cairo informally for three reasons. First, the high standards, set by law, make formal housing inaccessible to lower income groups. The second is that the legalization of slum areas, built before 1966, by a law passed that year perpetuated these settlements. Finally,

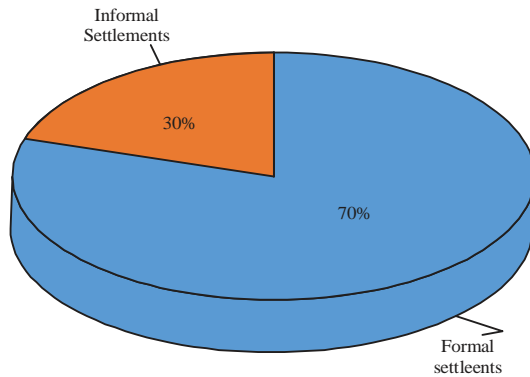


Fig. 1: Chart showing percentage of informal settlement of residential areas in Egypt

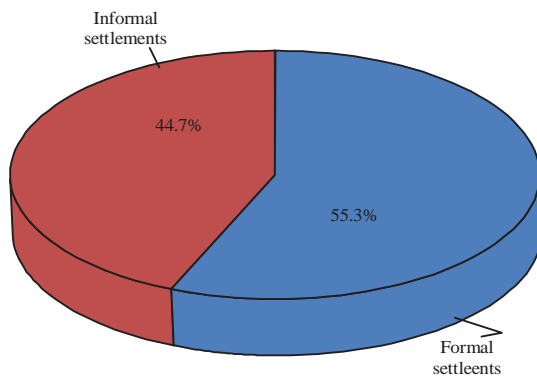


Fig. 2: Chart showing percentage of informal settlement of in Cairo

the leniency in dealing with violators, as a result of the in availability of formal, feasible alternatives (Sioufi, 1981). Most of the informal settlements spread easier on agricultural land rather than on desert land because usually the land ownership is a source of security, owing a dwelling is a cultural tradition in Egyptian villages. The agricultural areas are located usually near employment opportunities and it is more advantageous in agricultural land. Also the availability of water is a key factor, it is easily obtained by hand pumps and is required for construction, washing and bathing. In early stages of settlements subterranean water was used for drinking until it became polluted (Hofmann, 1986).

The arial pattern of this type of settlements is very unique. Sioufi (1981) explained that the configuration of the layout of informal settlements situated on agriculture land is dedicated by the original agricultural land subdivision. By comparing the locality plans and the original subdivisions, the location of public streets follow the existing pattern of the agricultural public roads. Agricultural land subdivision is a product of inheritance.

According to Islamic law, all heirs get a share of the heritage, a son inherits a share of the land equal to double that of a daughter. This resulted in unequal divisions. The whole process of subdivision is dynamic and does not occur simultaneously all over the locality. Another reason for difference in sizes is that each new lot subdivision had access to an irrigation canal and a pubic road, both of which are usually contiguous. This produces linear plots of land, up to 400 m long. Generation after generation, they were further subdivided into narrower ones. Some became as narrow as 15 m. As the locality became urbanized, some canals dried up. This added to the width of the roads contiguous to them (Feiler, 1992). As a result, in these settlements the streets are too narrow and no public spaces; buildings are back to back and side to side for kilometers, broken only by streets.

The settlements buildings are built from sturdy brick structures and their height are either five or six stories. The mutual characteristics of the informal settlements that are located in Cairo are that they are progressive and incremental type of construction that is built by small contractors or owners themselves without any architects. They all lack any facilities, infrastructure and amenities. Socially, the inhabitants of these settlements come from lower-income social levels of that suffer from ignorance and lack of education, unemployment and lack of any professional skills. However, as mentioned by El-Batran and Arandel (1998) in their book “A shelter of their own” that the inhabitants of such informal areas are economically and socially heterogeneous and being able to live in these settlements cannot not be equated with living in poverty (Fahmy, 2004).

There are two types of land of the informal settings: informal settlements on public land and informal settlements on private land which is usually an agricultural land that is legally owned. Informal areas are more frequent on agricultural land more than public land that are mostly desert land as stated by El-Batran and Arandel (1998). The process of development of such areas happens frequently on scarce and valuable agricultural land than large areas of desert lands that are controlled by government authorities. Also agricultural lands are located close to urban centers which are generally, undeveloped because the owners of agricultural land responds better to the demand of the market than the desert land. In addition, no informal settlement has ever been removed that are located on private agriculture land. Moreover, inhabitants of several informal settlements on private land obtained government services and infrastructure. Besides, the rising costs of agricultural land have raised the illegal occupation of government land. Houses that are built on desert land are maximum two storey high and of lower quality in comparison to three to five storeys for houses on private land. Inhabitants of

informal areas that are built on agricultural land are from a wider socio-economic range than inhabitants living on desert land as they usually belong to the lowest-income levels. In addition, they cannot afford to buy legal lands from the owners. Inhabitants living on desert land are “prepared” to risk being expelled from their homes. In contrast, houses on agriculture private land meets the needs of a clients of the lower and upper-middle class that do not have access to a rented apartment and they do not afford to buy an apartment developed by private sector developers. The redevelopment of informal settlements can be noticed to occur in areas nearest to the city center as the government provide them with services and infrastructure.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

**The process of transformation of agriculture land and ownership of the informal settlement:** El Sayyad mentioned that the general process of the informal settlement can be broken down into four basic phases. Land invasion, social formation, physical consolidation and urban maturity (Portes, 1979) In the process of change of the land use from agriculture to residential Sioufi (1981) explained that it takes place in three phases: first, the subdivision of land for constructing residences without planning authority approval. Second is selling the new sub-divisions without registration of transaction. And last is the construction of residences without building license (Pino, 1997).

According to El-Batran and Arandel (1998), in the process of transformation of agricultural land, there are three main players that act as major key persons in this process: the owner/sub-divider, sub-divider and the company that specializes in dividing the lands. The small farmer is usually the owner/sub-divider who possesses a small piece of land. He often subdivides this piece and sells it all except a small parcel to keep it for himself. On the other hand, the owner who owns a small land and subdivides part of his land to sell it and uses the profit to buy new land to subdivide it furtherly is called the sub-divider. Sub-dividers usually keep their overall costs low through selling the lands with no site preparation and they depend on the word of mouth to search for their customers.

Companies that specializes in buying the land buy huge parts of agriculture land that are usually situated on the borders of the city. These lands are divided into smaller parcels afterwards with no infrastructure or services provided. They depend on middle-income inhabitants in selling them the land who are usually migrant workers from rural areas. These companies rely on advertising in newspapers offering benefits with credit conditions. The main players in this process are the owners or sub-dividers who offers the cheapest and the best pieces with good credit conditions and the process

become more commercial by time. Residents of the informal settlements are unable to get building permits for construction of the house. The settlements as whole are in principle ineligible in perpetuity for infra structural facilities including paved roads, piped water, sewers and solid waste collection service. The process of legal ownership of these settlements is implemented after the construction of the dwelling. Most of the resident of the informal settlements do not have an ownership contract of the land. Buying and selling of these lands are completed through an informal agreement between the owner and buyer using primary contracts which are not registered in the city where the land is located. After the construction of the dwelling, usually the resident tries to legitimate this contract through court to be able to obtain the infrastructure for the house. The state court acknowledges this type of primary contracts, known as “validity of selling and implementing” if both the buyer and seller are present witnessing on the contract. Through this acknowledgment, the resident can then place the basic infrastructure, water and electricity, legally (Ozler, 2002).

**Cultural aspects of informal settlements:** Culture is seen as a broad system of values and norms of behavior that mediates relations among the urban poor and between the urban poor and the state. Culture plays a mediating role between the structure of urban society and the physical needs of a city’s inhabitants (Erman, 2001).

Oldham *et al.* (1987) in their study mentioned that the significance of traditional forms of social organization for the formation of leadership within a community and the processes by which community problems are handled. They state that in the informal communities where the dwellers have strong connections with their villages of origin, the community problems are handled by a village-based leadership. However, they found that in communities with a heterogeneous urban population where leadership is not king-based or village-based, the form of social organization remains traditional, based on the influence of the elderly. Several other studies have also underlined the continuous importance of kinship as a system of social organization and family as an institution of social control, in the Egypt, these have affected various aspects of urban and rural life in the region (Karn *et al.*, 2003).

Despite their need to be represented to the local authorities, informal communities often try to avoid drawing the attention of authorities by seeking official resolution of their problems because they are illegal. This is one reason why informal communities in Egypt try to keep their demands to a minimum. Consequently, the Egyptian government’s reaction to the squatting process has in general been official ignorance. This is true despite the fact that the informal development process is today

responsible for some 75% of all housing construction in Cairo. Their political organizations, when they exist, often emerge from traditional forms of social organization based on kinship, geographic ties or the influence of elderly figures in the community, rather than political affiliations. In the Egypt gradual land acquisition is followed by a process of development which maintains the relatively depoliticized and unobtrusive character of the settlement throughout the course of its development (Singh and Das, 1995).

El Sayyad mentions that the respond of the urban poor to the situation of informal settlements is defined by their cultural specificities. The processes of informal developments refer to their distinct cultural contexts which embrace as well the distinct political cultures of those societies. These cultural contexts are constantly shaped by such factors as systems of ownership, systems of social organization, legal norms, religion, kin systems, ethnic relations, gender relations and in sum a broad system of values and norms that govern individual and collective conduct within the community and toward the state. And therefore, the survival net cast by the poor to acquire shelter often goes beyond political relations. The differential behavior of the urban poor for housing acquisition reflects the range of alternatives available to them through the cultural codes specific to each society (Musgrove and Ferber, 1979).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**The role of governmental systems in the formation of informal settlements:** There are many drivers contributed to the formation of informal settlements in Egypt. The most important of these drivers is that there is no future planning to the increase of population and urban expansion in Egypt and especially in Cairo, also the neglect in updating the housing policies that could be suitable in implementation and considers the needs of the community to benefit from more than key persons who have the power and control.

According to the global report on UN-Habitat (2003), the increase of informal settlements and the decrease in the financial situation of the poor inhabitants in developing countries is not mainly due to the increase of population or the global forces but it is mostly as a consequence of the housing policies, bureaucratic procedures as well as urban policies. The most influential aspect that restrict any development in housing improvement and the financial situations of the low-income communities in slum areas is the absence of honest political power or interest in discussing and solving the problem of housing in an essential broad, sustainable and significant way. The report divided the type of policies into three categories: first is the global category, second is the national category and the final is

the local category. In the global category, it addresses the policies that deteriorate any national regimes with nodominantand vital control. In the national category, it addresses the analytical, sectoral division of policies and organizations structures that did not succeed to help the rural and sectoral dynamic forces which is important to the growth of sustainable economy as well as the distribution of its chances. The final category is the local category that addresses, the astonishing absence of capability to handle the condition or the circumstances which led the insecurity, no ownership, no legal situation and poverty of the informal inhabitants in a no-man's land of illegality, insecurity and environmental degradation. The main problem of the low income people of informal settlements is the absence of the interest and attention of the governmental and political institutions which leads to the increase of unequal opportunities, differences in the distribution of resources and corruption which leads to the benefits of powerful governmental bodies (Stokes, 1991). The governmental organizations that are responsible for housing usually or in most cases rejects to providing the informal settlements inhabitants with the needed services and infrastructure claiming that these areas are illegal, even if there are cases are situated for more than 50 years and over 50 years and embrace a large number of the population. Governmental bodies prevent and restrict the people from any trials to gain shelter or normal conditions of living instead of supporting them and finding legal solutions to fulfil their basic needs. This finally leave, these communities with a state of illegal and insecure permanent situations. The available government housing units or houses which are usually high in quality are also expensive and targeting the high income social levels of the community leaving the low income in need people without any shelter or housing. They solve their housing problems by building informal illegal housing that are high in density, unhealthy situation but affordable to them (Andrews and Philips, 1970).

El-Batran and Arandel (1998) in their study "A Place of their own" mentioned that in Egypt's case, there are three main reasons for this role of government approaches to housing and spatial planning policies. First reason is the firm rent control law, this law rejects the formal private investor from this segment. Second reason is that the public segment failed to provide adequate housing affordable to the poor to fill the gap. The last reason is that the government withdrew from the market of rental housing (UN-Habitat, 2003).

Several laws were approved in 1952 to decrease and control the renting of all housing apartments built after 1944. Afterwards, the government withdrew from rental housing in 1975 and only kept the rent control policy with some small modifications (Kramer, 2006). Serageldin cited in El-Batran and Arandel (1998) explained that there were several researches in the years 1976 and 1977 that

proved that policies such as housing rent control and maximum price ceiling for housing repressed housing production according to the United States Agency for International Development (Mukhija, 2003). El-Batran and Arandel (1998) stated that government officials who have high income took the benefits from the policy of rent control as they could occupy the accommodation wherever it applied.

Ghannam (2002), focused on the corruption system which lies between the government officials. She showed some quotes of the residents of squatters, during her interviews, regarding the role of the government in providing and limiting their access to services and resources. She quoted "The government does not care for us because we are poor." Or "The government targets us just because we are young men and walk in the city center." Ghannam (2002) referred to the corruption between government officials as "informal system" that allows government officials to use their positions and connections to increase their income and boost their symbolic power beyond the boundaries of their schools, offices and police stations. A state bureaucrat may prefer to take some money rather than to charge a family for the unauthorized use of government electric connections. According to Ghannam (2002), this system indicates to residents of informal settlements that the government's apparatus is unjust and is not geared toward protecting their rights. She further explained that the ability to manipulate government officials is highly regarded positively to get what one views as his or her right and turning the situation to one's advantage.

In the issue of institutional role and corruption, the role of governments in the development of the cities, Amera. Moustafa quotes, "From Pakistan to Iraq, Egypt to Iran, these countries suffer from big bureaucracies, inefficient administration and unstable political regimes-conditions that are hardly conducive of any effective development, let alone prosperity for all".

Ibrahim mentions in his book "Egypt: an economic Geography" that casualties in such settlements occur because of "construction faults made possible by the fact that the housing authorities are bribed."

In the study of Ninette S. Fahmy in the Middle East Journal, she argues that government response towards squatters takes the following forms: negligence, demolition, relocation and exploitation. This exploitation serves the state's public officials in lining their own pockets and provides a rich source of votes for the state political apparatus which guarantee the continuity of the regime leading to more exploitation, corruption and further weakening of the state. Fahmy further explains the bribe process between the government officials and the settlers quoting.

"The settlers are visited, from time to time, by civil servants working in the municipality who threaten them

with eviction if these officials decide to report them. Of course each time they decide not to do so, after being paid whatever each household can afford to pay. The same situation recurs with officials at the district level. Corrupt police officers represent another element of manipulation for the poor settlers. Visiting the area from time to time, they pretend that they are checking for stolen electric power through illegal hookups. Of course they know quite well that these illegal hookups are the only source of electricity in the area. They threaten to file an official complaint and knowing that the fine for such a crime may reach 250 LE, each of the settler's households are pleased to bribe those police officers with small amounts of money in order that they turn a blind eye to what is happening."

The main cause for the institutional role in developing the informal settlements in Egypt is attaining priority of individual interests over public interests. This role can be broken down into three categories. First is the leadership role which emerges from the lack of planning for developing these settlements as well as the undirected strategies. This type of role addresses the government leaders and authorities who lack any leadership vision and national goal which acts as a main catalyst for the urban development of cities. Second is the political role which addresses the political leaders and municipal that rely on the settlers to provide them with a rich source of votes for the state political apparatus which guarantee the continuity of the regime. The third type is the bureaucratic role which addresses the government and bureaucratic officials civil workers and police officers. This type of role exploits the illegal situation of the dwellers of the informal settlements to their advantage in making more money in the form of bribes. As Soliman explains, "Private developers in agricultural areas contributed to changing land use patterns through their strong connection with responsible people in the municipality (Ghannam, 2002). Meaning that being well connected to government officials through bribes or performing favors to them in exchange, allow the dwellers to build their houses on the agricultural land illegally.

The process of building on agricultural land is done through the agricultural inspector for the area who makes the arrangement to carry out the process of construction which usually takes place in the weekends or during holidays or at nights. To carry out this process the owner pays a bribe to the inspector to make sure that no officials will stop the process. As mentioned by Soliman that in many areas, the responsible district engineers involve ordinary residents, local contractors and even shop owners to obtain a share of the bribe that has to be paid (Alexander, 1988).

In the category of leadership role, a good example of lack of planning and undirected strategies is mentioned by Soliman in which the public sector develops some

agricultural land in defiance of its own policy and then provided services to areas later developed by private proprietors. In the Seigar village in the city of Tanta, the process of informal settlement began after the government illegally developed land in the area for two factories plus a military training center. This was seen by property owners as a green light to convert their own land holdings into urban use, both for their own use and rental income (Vittrup, 1982). This example reflects the individuality in decision making of the authorities over the public interest. Housing Policy in Egypt mentions that 1500 acres (600 ha) are annually lost due to the informal spatial growth on prime agricultural land in Cairo (Soliman, 2004).

Official statistics say that the election season has seen nearly new 25000 of construction on agricultural land which gives a dangerous sign of what might happen during the season from the abuses of the parliamentary elections. Informal settlers and land brokers take advantage of executive and security systems being busy in the presidential election, to build their houses on more than a thousand acres of valuable agricultural land to the extent that this season is known as “The season of Encroachment on agricultural land.”

However, there were several trials from the government as a response of the problem of informal settlement. El-Batran and Arandel (1998) explained that, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the government authorities, finally, started to answer the needs of inhabitants of informal areas mainly because of the international supporters and contributors stress that resulted of first trials to improve the informal settlements and the acceptance of the government and public institutions to control the flow of informal areas in many cities specifically the greater Cairo region.

According to El-Batran and Arandel (1998), first attempts to improve and upgrade informal areas took place at the end of the seventies by the government through several pilot projects funded by the World Bank international grant organizations. These projects met with various levels of success in many aspects but codes and regulations of informal settlements were first acknowledged officially in 1980. Afterwards many laws and regulations were released to organize the process of improvements of informal settlements. There were great discrepancies in the law's implementation between government orators. But the main role of these laws was for the higher prices of the lands bought from the government. The methodology of improvement and upgrading of informal areas became systematic and ordered in 1993.

## CONCLUSION

Finally, one can say that there is an “informal system” as mentioned by Ghannam (2002) in the process of the formation of the informal settlements that acts a

main driver that facilitates the informal housing, especially on agriculture land. This system gives the chance or allows a mutual benefit between government officials, small contractors and the inhabitants of the informal areas. Some of the government officials use their positions and connections to increase their income and boost their symbolic power system by benefitting from the illegal situation of the settlements and turn it to their advantage for financial profit. Small contractors increase their work and profits by building informal housings. While low income immigrant inhabitants satisfy their needs in building cheap houses with near the city centers. This parallel system facilitates the formation as well as spreading the informal settlement, especially, in agricultural land by the transforming them into residential areas gradually. This results of the formation of informal housing as well as decreasing the areas of agricultural lands, especially, around big cities in Egypt.

Accordingly, this study sheds the light on the negative role of public institutions on the formation of informal settlements in Egypt and that there is an informal system in process of buying and selling as well as ownership of agricultural lands. It is very important that to be able to control the process of formation of informal settlement, it is a priority to propose solutions for reforming the bureaucratic and governmental systems from its informalities regarding these settlements as they tend to act as an accelerator of building these settlements as well as a hidden resisting force against any proposed urban solutions for such settlements.

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