

Insecure women

"The Reality of Women Living East of the Nile in the Minya Governorate"

Better Life Association for Comprehensive Development

Introduction

In the last century, Egypt has accomplished a lot to achieve equity between men and women. This started in May 1904 when Egypt signed the international agreement for preventing the trade of slaves. From this agreement of that issue which the general association of US had approved and authorized in 1949. Egypt joined that lately through a republican statement no. 884 for year 1959.

Egypt's efforts to create equality continued and in 1967, two covenants were signed with respects to economical, social, cultural, civil, and political rights. In 1981 Egypt established Republican Statement No. 434 which agreed to eradicate all forms of discrimination against women.

During and after this period, the Egyptian legislative structure went through numerous modifications, especially in the realm of families and children, in order to guarantee that Egyptian women would receive equality in their rights.

For this purpose, the National Women's Committee was formed in 1987, and reformed in 1994, in order to protect the local and international interests of Egyptian women. In 1988 the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood was established to be the official organization responsible for caring for mothers and children.

Many organizations and specialized institutions were establishing for Egyptian women after the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood was formed. On February 8, 2000, a republican statement was issued to establish the National Council for Women, which would replace the National Committee for Women. The mandate of the National Council for Women is to deepen women's participation in all aspects of the community and to find appropriate solutions for the obstacles that women face, especially in rural areas.

In spite of all the efforts to improve the situation of women in Egypt, they are still not represented in many areas of communal life, extending from economical sectors to the popular council and parliament.

To exemplify this, in everyday life women only make up 22% of Egypt's work force¹. Women's participation in politics and representation in Egypt's Parliament Council was 2.6%

¹ Central Institution for General Mobilization and Statistics, working search through samples year- 2002.

in 2000, and 1.8% in the local popular councils in 2002². These percentages decrease as we review women's participation in institutional administration or the labor force.

This is not the only issue, women have a higher illiteracy rate than men and they suffer from many forms of violence.

Unfortunately, the picture in the Egyptian countryside is worse. Women, especially those who work in agriculture, about four million, lack all forms of legal protection³. Not to mention women working in unofficial sectors; these jobs, along with bad social habits, undervalue and put down women, increasing the fragility of her situation and leading to even greater exclusion and absence from social and political life. At the same time, women are encouraged to vote and elect officials because participation asserts their importance, especially in the Egyptian countryside.

Aim of the study:

From here on, this study probes the situation of women living in villages east of the Nile in the Minya governorate, located in the middle of Upper Egypt, without neglecting women's general situation in Egypt.

Within this setting, we try to learn the unique problems that women face in these village in order to determine the obstacles that prevent women in these villages from realizing their right to development and a secure living.

We would like to assure that this study is a practical study which tries to learn more about the daily lives of women who live east of the Nile. Though each problem needs a detailed study, this study will attempt to present the problems that women suffer from without going into great detail.

With that said, most of the results were aimed at being applicable.

Study approach:

Because there are no previous studies in this field, we tried to explore and scout the problems that women face and what they need to overcome them whenever it was possible.

² Local administration ministry, councils and official affairs' sector for year 2002 -

³ The seventh agricultural statistics, agriculture and land reclamation ministry 2000 -

Study questionings:

The study tries to discuss the lives of women who live east of the Nile within the Minya district, south of Cairo. This reality includes everyday life, health conditions, and the violence practiced against them.

Within that context we try to the nature of all aspects, good and bad, of these women's lives. What are the causes for its weakness or strength? Are the reasons for this reality simply due to being a women, or are there other factors?

We also address the relation between a woman's ability and the method to empower her. Further, this study evaluates if developing skills will empower women; if these women's capabilities are developed will they be allowed to use them?

At the same time, the social capital plays a pressing role in developing the capabilities of women. Are the women who live east of the Nile included within these social structures? Would exclusion from this structure increase her fragility and weaken her capability?

Study sample: -

This study is of women who are between the ages of 15 and 45 and live in the villages east of the Nile. The size of the sample is 1600 and was conducted on a regular and random sample within these aforementioned boundaries.

Study tools: -

Many tools were used in studying women's reality and needs in Minya.

- A questionnaire was prepared, tested in the field, and was modified to best obtain the information for this study.
- Open discussion meetings were held with more than one community east of the Nile.
- A number of discussion meetings were held with doctors and nurses who work in the health clinics or have strong relation with these communities.

Study site:

El Hawarta, Tehna Elgabal, Nazlet Hussen, Eldawadia, Zawiet Saultan, Sawada, , El Shiekh Mohamed, and Manshiet Sawada were the villages chosen to conduct the study.

Some of the study concepts:

- The living family: one or more persons who share in food, housing, and life.
- Official labor: in this study official labor does not refer to work in the general sector, government, or private sectors; rather, it describes the work that is stable due to official contracts and included health and social insurance (social security), no matter if their contracts are limited in time or not.
- Unofficial labor: is work that does not have official conditions – such as contracts and health or social insurance (social security) – between workers and owner, no matter if their working period is seasonal, limited, or unlimited.
- Official and semi-official credit sources: official credit sources are those which are represented by commercial and specified banks whether private or general. Semi-official sources are represented by cooperatives, whether in the agricultural, or fishing sectors. In this study local development societies are also considered semi-official because their work is subjected greatly by governmental officials. Local development societies become more like governmental organizations than nongovernmental organizations.
- Agricultural possession: is the land that a farmer cultivates whether it belongs to him or is rented. This means that the renting farmer is the holder and owner of the land on the condition that he cultivates the land by himself.
- Poor farmers: in general, researchers considered poor farmers to be those who cultivate two feddans or less of agricultural land, the feddans may be rented or owned. This definition is based on Dr. Mohamed Abo-Mandor's study on trends of agricultural relationships.
- Violence against women: according to the international announcement for confronting violence against women, issued in December 1993 by the General Assembly of the United Nations, "violence against women" is any kind of violent act motivated by difference of gender and followed by or might be followed by harm or any kind of suffering, whether physical, sexual, psychological, or any threats of such harms or deprivation of liberty in general or private life.
- The second article expands the meaning of violence against women to include:
 - Physical, sexual, and psychological violence which takes place within the family (violence related to dowries in some countries but not in Egypt) wife rape, female genital mutilation, and other harmful traditional practice against women.

Violence within marriage and outside marriage and the violence of exploiting women as well.

- Physical, sexual, and psychological violence which takes place within the general community including: rape, sexual aggression, sexual abusiveness, intimidation, threats at work, in educational institutions, or any other place, trading women, and forcing them into prostitution.
- Physical, sexual, and psychological violence which governments commit or overlook when it takes place.

Study divisions:

Study was divided into six major axis. Each axis is divided into a number of sub-axis. The first axis deals with the practical status, or reality, of women who live east of the Nile.

This axis attempts to demonstrate women's capability to reach credit markets within the study area.

The second axis deals with the condition of women's health in the study area and its relationship with health services and variations of these services between rural and urban areas.

The third axis of the study deals with the violence that women are exposed to. This brought some of the violence that women east of the Nile are exposed to into view.

Fourth axis addresses how much education affects the empowerment of women, and the reflection of such empowerment on women's representation in social institutions.

Fifth axis tries to understand and explain the primary needs of women as expressed themselves.

The sixth axis presents results and recommendations which came from the different axis of the study.

The seventh section is specified for attachments and tables.

First: - the practical status:

1-1 Practical status of Women in the Minya governorate:

Looking at the make up of families in the Minya governorates, we will find that there are 541,917 families living in the Minya governorate; of these families, 8% are female headed

families in which women are the family providers. There are 3,034,094 people in these families and 46% are women.⁴

On the other hand, there is some dissimilarity within the villages surrounding Minya. There are 78,037 families with 418,319 members and more than 45% of them are female. However, 14.6% of the families in villages surrounding Minya are headed by females⁵. It is almost the same percentage in the study area.

At the same time, women's participation is decreasing in Egypt's work force. Less than 22% of women over 15 work⁶. The percent decreases much more in Malawy, 1.8% according to the human development report, which attributes this decrease to women's lack of education, the necessity of working in irregular sectors, and to women working in their families without honorarium⁷.

Women also work outside the home, most prominently in the governmental sector, 26.3%. While women compose 11.9% of the business sector, 15.8% in the private sector, and 21.5% in the unofficial sector⁸.

According to official statistics, there are 1,169,438 people in the workforce of the Minya governorate. Fifteen percent of those who are above 15 years old and less than 60 years old. Twenty-seven percent of the 15% are female and they only make up 3% of the total number of women within the age range of 15 to 60..

At the same time, these statistics only show unemployment at 9%, while among women, unemployment is 44.5%⁹.

In the villages and districts of Minya, the workforce is 135,134 and unemployment is 14% while 41% of the unemployed are female.

⁴ -Working power in Minia governorate, agriculture and land reclamation,2002

⁵ -Central Institution for General Mobilization and Statistics, working search through samples year- 2002.

⁶ -Central Institution for General Mobilization and Statistics, working search through samples year 2002.

⁷ -Human development report (Cairo: national planning institution, 2003) page 37.

⁸ Human development, 2003 page 69

⁹ Working power in Minia governorate, agriculture and reclamation ministry, previous reference.

Table No.1 Levels of Employed and unemployment in governorate districts.

Governorate districts	Employed	Unemployment
Abo Korkas	119292	12398
El-Edwa	60927	5144
Minya	135134	18872
Beni-Mazaar	140027	12054
Der-Mawass	116820	11803
Samalot	180138	16503
Mattay	77838	7957
Maghagha	98034	10215
Malawy	241228	14800
Total	1169438	109746

1-2 Practical Status of Women in the Study Area:

The economical status of women living east of the Nile is low. Most of them would like to work but there are very few job opportunities. The type of work that is available to them is helping their husbands in the field, preparing butter and cheese to sell in the market, or working in the agricultural field for "peasants" wages.

Through the study it was determined that 86.2% of women work as housewives (Table No. 2). Women who work as housewives are generally excluded from employment statistics, especially official statistics, in order to reduce the rate of unemployment and make it appear as though unemployment is not a problem. However, 96% of housewives wish to work. Therefore it is important to review the terminology and concepts on which employment statistics are built.

Table No. 2 The Practical Status of Women who Live East of the Nile:

Occupation	Number	Percentage
Housewife	1379	86.1875
Helper of the husband	245	15.3
Working at field	336	21.0
Selling cheese and butter	126	7.9
Trading and grocery	54	3.4
Live on agricultural work	44	2.8

More than half of these women, 50.3%, are doing extra work besides their roles as housewives.

The additional work that women do varies from: working in the field (21%), helping their husbands prepare tools, such as repairing fishing nets if he is a fisherman, for their work (15.3%), 11% work selling the goods that their family produces (cheese, butter, and fish for example), and almost 3% of the sampled women work in others' fields as agricultural workers.

In general, women do not earn wages for the work they do; 77% of women sampled do not receive wages, less than 18% receive wage, and 5% get cash and benefits wages.

Table No.3 Practical Status of Women's Husbands:

Kind of work	Number	%
Quarry workers	494	30.9
Farmer	401	25.1
Fishermen	114	7.1
Employees	220	13.8
Agricultural Peasants	70	4.4
Other	42	2.4
Unemployed	259	16.2
Total	1600	100

Unemployment is also a problem for these women's husbands too; they work in temporary professions which, under these circumstances, are a great opportunity. Even those who work as employers have temporary contracts which do not provide social insurances or rights.

If we look closer at the nature of the samples' husbands, we will find them at great risks. These men do not have contracts for their work, they are not included under any form of official umbrella or insurance; thus, whoever is injured or partial or total disabled – which takes place frequently – does not have support and awaits death.

Because of this insecurity, the majority of the families encourage their children to work in order to have an alternative in case the family provider is handicapped or killed at work¹⁰.

Thirty-one percent of these women's husbands work in quarries. While 25%, the next largest category, of husbands are farmers. Half of those who work in farming are peasants. This is a big burden for the families who live east of the Nile in the Minya district because the price of renting has increased to approximately 150 LE per Kirat, making the cost of renting a Fadden about 3600 LE per year.

Review children at risk study, Better Life Association in cooperation with Wadi El-Nile association for protecting quarry ¹⁰ workers.

Table No. 4 Amount of Agricultural Land Owned by the Sample's Members:

Ownership category	Replicates	%
Less than one Feddan	338	73.8
One feddan and less	85	12.7
Less than two feddans	62	13.5
Total number of the owners	485	100

Farmers own very small plots of land. The majority of farmers, 73.8%, own less than one fadden while we find that 12.7% of the sample's members own one fadden and less, while the rest own between one and two faddens, 13.5% (Table No. 4).

That means that the majority of farmers who live east of the Nile in the Minya governorate are poor farmers. At the same time the agricultural land is rarely registered in the wives' or widows' name. Most of the time land is registered in the male's name; whether the father 36.3%, or the husband 46.0% or brothers 11.8 % while only 6.0% of the time the land is registered in the woman's name (Table No. 5).

Table No. 5 Portion of women who own agricultural land among the sample.

	number	Percentage of total numbers of owners
Father	156	36.3
Brothers	57	11.8
Husbands	223	46.0
Mother	29	6.0
Total numbers of owners	485	100

All land is rented with the father's or husband's knowledge. This is a strong indicator of how difficult it is for women to own agricultural land. In some cases women are not allowed to inherit land from their fathers or husbands. In the best scenario, women are compensated for the land; however, they are given much less than the land is worth.

1-3 Absence of security:

Credit sources in the study area are insufficient and difficult for the women and men who live in this area. This contributes to their fragile economic situation.

Thus, we found that 24.4% the women sampled were able to obtain credit while 75.1% were unable (Table No. 6).

No doubt these percentages are strong indicators of the fragility of the economic situation because the availability of credit is directly affects the economic situation.

Table No. 6 Women's ability to obtain credit.

The capability of reaching credit sources	Repetition	%
Women who are able to reach credit source	390	24.4
Women who are unable able to reach credit source	1201	75.1
Women do not respond	8	0.5
Total	1600	100

1-3-1 Credit sources for women

There are no banks east of the Nile for women or their husbands to get loans. Further, banks apply minimum conditions for obtaining loans that neither woman nor a member of her family can meet.

In addition to the difficulty using agricultural or fishing cooperatives as credit sources, women and their husbands are unable to use the Social fund for development as a credit source. Therefore all sources of getting loans for women come from two sources; governmental and nongovernmental. The latter, nongovernmental, are represented by organizations, family, and neighbors.

Around 13% of the women sampled are receiving loans from nongovernmental organizations, while the percentage of the beneficiaries from local development societies is almost 10.5% of the total number of the sample. Only 0.6% of the women sampled depend on family and neighbors for loans. (Table No. 7).

Table No. 7 Sources Available for Women to get Loans From:

Source of loans	Repetition	%
Governmental	168	10.5
Nongovernmental	207	13
Others	9	0.6

1-3-2 Reasons of weakness of the credit sources:

Some of the difficulties that women and their husbands face in receiving loans:

- Women and their husbands are poor candidates for loans.
- Women lack the official paper work.
- Are unaware that they may receive loans.

- Women have a wrong impression of loans.

Secondly: Health status.

2-1 Description of the health status in the community of the study:

Individuals who live east of the Nile in the Minya governorate have access to developed health clinics. There is almost a clinic in every village which provides family planning along with care for pregnant women, mothers, and children.

At the same time the number of special clinics varies in these villages. There are 14 private clinics in Nazlet Ebead, while none in Sawada.

Residents of Nazlet Ebead have access to many more private pharmacies than other villages east of the Nile in the Minya governorate. Nazlet Ebead has seven pharmacies, while there is only one pharmacy in Sawada.

The spread of disease among women in these villages is mostly related to a lack of nutrients or malnutrition. This is a result of families seeking out foods which are filling but generally not rich in nutritional value. More than 60% of the sample is anaemic (Table No. 8). Through a meeting with some doctors working in the area east of the Nile, we learnt the reasons behind these women's poor health. Doctors who treat women in these communities say that this is a result of frequent pregnancy, in addition to a poor economic position which results in a lack of satisfying appropriate foods that contain the nutrients necessary for the body. The families in this area used to eat incomprehensive meals.

Table No. 8 Diseases Women Have.

Disease	Infected	Percentage
Parasites	99	6.2
Varicose and hepatic diseases	62	3.9
Anemia	970	60.6
Venereal diseases	85	5.3
Gynecologic diseases	440	27.5
Bone diseases	670	41.9
Heart diseases	73	4.6
Renal diseases	101	6.3
Dermatological diseases	93	5.8
paediatric diseases	291	18.2
Diabetic mellitus	13	0.8
Others	108	6.8

Total	3005	
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Notice: there is more than one response of the members of the sample.

A female doctor, who works in a health clinic east of the Nile, attributes the increase of disease due to poor nutrition to families favoring men over women with a larger portion of food. Generally both parents tend to give their portion of food to their children, especially if it is protein, and, compared to girls, boys are given a larger portion. This kind of discrimination continues after marriage. Wives often take small portion of food in comparison to the men living in the house. Parents generally accept this because males exert more energy than females and, as is frequently repeated, because "men are the ones who are brining all the blessings into the house."

This is also the cause of anaemia and bone disease; which accompany frequent pregnancies because of a loss of calcium which is not replaced. More than 41% of the sample suffers from bone disease and 27.5% of the sample suffers from gynaecologic diseases which are increasing among them.

There is no doubt that the diseases, brought on by malnutrition, women suffer from have consequences for children. Eighteen percent of the mothers sampled mentioned that their children had been exposed to many different diseases. Further, children born to malnourished mothers are under developed: shorter, skinnier, and weaker than children born to well nourished mothers. These phenomena are common among the children.

There was noticed decrease in digestive, liver, and renal diseases. We speculate that this is due to the fact that the symptoms of hepatitis can appear a long time after the virus has infected an individual. The latent onset of symptoms would explain the low percentage, 6%, of people who are affected.

At the same time, many different diseases, such as respiratory, dermatological, and venereal diseases, occur among the sample. And it is also important to mention that these diseases, including digestive diseases, are not prevalent (Table No. 8).

2-1-1 Problems of Reproductive Health:

In general, women suffer from many problems related to reproductive health. Even though anaemia is a known health problem among the sample group – 63% have it – women continue to get pregnant frequently, which is a factor that leads to anaemia. This exemplifies the problems that are related to reproductive health.

Women are not educated about family planning and this results in frequent pregnancies; 24% of women who become pregnant frequently are ignorant of contraceptives (Table No. 9). It is evident that these women are in a bad social environment and do not have access to

media. At the same time, these women say that they do not use contraceptives because they are expensive; however, contraceptives are cheap.

Table No. 9 Reasons for Frequent Pregnancies among the Sample:

Reasons	Repetition	%
Lack of awareness of family planning	382	23.9
Desire of having more children	292	18.3
Having boys	283	14.9
Compulsion of husbands	100	6.3

Notice: Those percentages are linked with the total number of the sample.

Women become pregnant frequently for two reasons: the dominant social conception is that a large family “is more powerful” and, secondly, a desire to have boys. These two concepts cause families to try and increase their numbers. Almost 18% of the women sampled claim that they become pregnant often because they and their husbands want to have more children. For men and women, having many children divides the family's responsibilities and provides security when they grow old.

In the study it was found that the majority, 33%, of families who have five or more children suffer from unemployment or work on a seasonal or unofficial basis.

Fifteen percent of women who become pregnant frequently do so because of the social desire to have boys. The desire to have boys is one of the pressures that the sampled women face; usually the wife is blamed for an inability to have boys. Women get pregnant in an attempt to deny that belief and protect their marriage (some husbands marry another woman because they think that another woman may give them a boy) they get pregnant. One of the women mentioned that women get pregnant frequently to protect their house. In addition to that, husbands encourage their wives to have another child in an attempt to have a boy; 6% of women, who get pregnant frequently, reported that their husbands compel them to keep trying to have a boy, some even to the extent that they are beaten in order to comply.

In some cases, the frequent pregnancy phenomenon, linked to the desire to “be more powerful” by having a large family or having boys, leads to abuse.

For the women who live east of the Nile, the problem is not simply being pregnant often. Of the women who are pregnant in our sample, one-quarter do not go to hospitals or doctors when they encounter health problems related to maternity. Because of economic reasons, some women do not go to hospitals or midwives during delivery, but try to deliver with the help of their neighbors. Though only 4.5% of the women sampled reported doing this, it is extremely dangerous and should be mentioned as it is indicative of the horrible health conditions that are a part of our reality.

2-2 Reality of Health Services and Facilities:

The health of women is linked to many factors, one of which is that they do not receive good services from the health clinics. It is important to address the nature of the services introduced to those who are at risk; this is called preventative health and is supposed to be the job of health units. In addition, health units must retransfer individuals who have these diseases to a hospital and it is unlikely that they will go to the hospital.

Thus, in light of the health problems, we are taking on the role of those health units. Anemia is on the top of the list because it represents many health problems within our study area. At the same time, it is difficult for these health units to address such large problems, especially since it stems from social and economic problems. Still it is possible for health units to provide some assistance, iron pills for example. However, the problem is that health units do not have these medications to offer their patients. Therefore, only 8.8% of the women in our sample get medicine from health units and many people must buy their medications from private pharmacies.

The health unit has x-rays equipment, however, it is not working. Therefore, only 0.1% have received services from these units. This indicates that though the buildings and equipment is provided it is not enough to provide proper care.

Table No. 10 Services Provided to the Women in the Study Area

Services	Repetition	%
Examinations	671	41.9
Vaccinations	267	16.7
Family planning means	171	10.6
Medicine	140	8.8
Medical analysis	7	0.4
X-ray	1	0.1
Women did not respond	343	21.4
Total	1600	100.1

Further, health services related to medical analysis is similar to that of x-rays, 0.4% of the women sampled have received these services (Table No. 10).

In return, we have found that around 42% of the sample have received examinations (Table No. 10). At the same time, many women who received services say that the health units operate differently and the women do not receive equal treatment. Therefore 21% of the sample does not go to health units. Most of them points to the declining quality of health care services. Besides underestimating their sickness, this is the major reason why women do not go to the health units (Table No. 11).

Table No. 11 Reasons Why Women do not go to Health Units

Reasons	Percentage
Unavailability of the services	11.6
Underestimation of sickness	5.6
Long distances	1.4
Cost of the introduces services	0.8
Resistance of one of family members	0.6
Total	21

2-2-1 Health insurance:

There is no doubt that an inability to obtain health insurance increases health problems for the women who live east of the Nile. Because these women do not have health insurance, most of them do not go to the hospital or see a doctor when they have any problems worse than first aid which the health units in the villages can handle.

In spite of health units in every village¹¹ of the study, the majority of women are in extremely bad health. We imagine that this is because they do not have access to health insurance; the vast majority of women, more than 96%, do not have the security of health insurance (Table No. 13).

Inadequate jobs are the reason why so many women do not have health insurance. The majority of women do not work while those who do work are employed in seasonal or unofficial jobs that do not provide social insurance (one must be officially employed to receive social insurance) which is necessary to receive health insurance. Likewise, many men either do not have jobs or have marginalized jobs – such as in quarries or the agricultural sectors for example – which do not have legal protection even though these jobs are very dangerous. Thus, both the women sampled and their husbands lack social insurance, only 5% of the sample had health insurance.

Health and social situations are the same for men and women because they encounter the same economic and social difficulties. However, children who are in school are excluded

¹¹ - An official job opportunity doesn't mean that they have to work in a governmental or private sector, but that they are working according to a registered contract in the pension and insurance organization

because they receive health insurance. Among the sample, 68% of the children receive health insurance because they are in school. However, 32% of the children are not protected by this health insurance because they have dropped out of school or never went to school.

Third: violence against women

3-1 forms of violence against women:

3-1-1 The Phenomenon of Early Marriage:

Statistics on health demographics, which took place in year 2000, indicate that approximately 14% of girls still get married before they reach sixteenth. This percentage increases in rural areas to 18.7%. As one travels into the countryside of Upper Egypt, this phenomenon increases to the extent that almost one-quarter of women are married before they reach sixteenth.

Due to the early marriage phenomenon, many women do not have legal competency. Before this age, girls are not allowed to choose or refuse their partner; thus, when they are married, their parents or grandmothers represent them in the most vital decision in their life. Of the women sampled, 31.5% were married when they were fifteen years old or less; around 25% got married when they were sixteenth; 13.3% got married when they were seventeen; 11.6% got married when they were eighteen, and, finally, 17.5% of the women sampled got married when they were nineteen or older. This clearly shows that more than two-thirds of the women sampled were married before the age of legal competence.

3-1-2 Female circumcision habit:

Female circumcision is very common in Egypt, 2003¹² statistics purport that 97% of women are circumcised. It is almost the same percentage among the sample's members, 98.8%. This is in spite of a statement issued by the Minister of Health in 1996 that forbid the practice of female circumcision in hospitals or private clinics. According to this decision, female circumcision was only permitted in critical cases, with the permission of the director of the Gynecology department, and according to the suggestion of the doctor.

However, in spite of that decision, this habit is still widely practiced in Egypt. The question now is: is there a need to legislate a law that forbids female circumcision, or are the social customs and traditions stronger than any law or legislation?

Table No. 12 Age Which Circumcision is Practiced Among the Sample's Members.

Age	Number	Percentage
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The demographic statistic, 2003 ¹²

Less than ten years	752	47
From ten to fifteen	800	50
From fifteen to twenty	48	3

Similar to early marriage, we find that this operation does not take place with the consultation of the girl, 98.8% reported not being consulted beforehand. Rather, it usually occurs due to the mother, father, or grandmother's recommendation (Table No. 13). The greatest percentage of the girls are exposed to FGM before they are fifteen years old, 47% went through that operation when they were less than ten and 50% of the sample's members were circumcised between the ages of 10 and 15. At the same time only 3% were circumcised between the ages of 15 and 20 (Table No. 12).

Table No. 13 The Decision Maker for the FGM Operation.

Decision maker	Number	Percentage
Father	124	7.8
Mother	1358	84.9
Grandmother	118	7.3
Total	1600	100

From our point of view, the spread of this phenomenon in the rural and urban areas of Egypt is due to the language of the dominant culture, which is linked with the inheritance of social customs and traditions. So as a result the girl is subject to this pain and suffering.

3-1-3 Deflower:

This habit is still widely practiced in the communities east of the Nile in the Minya governorate; 98.8% of the women sampled said that they went through the deflower phenomenon.

Though the bride is old enough to express her opinion, defloweration is similar circumcision in that the bride does not have a part in the decision, protesting the habit would raise doubts concerning her dignity and purity. Therefore, she surrenders to this tradition in order to protect the public's perception of her. The bride's parents are in the same position as their daughter; they cannot protest and wish that the day passes safely and that their daughter is polite. The deflower decision is in the hands of the groom, his parents, or his grandmother.

In this phenomenon, the groom accompanies many of his female relatives to perform the defloweration. The bride's mother and some of her relatives also attend to be sure of the bride's purity. A midwife is usually invited to that party to perform the operation is the

groom should fail. This practice is generally accompanied with very high tension on both sides; so many problems could happen on that day.

The result of deflowering is bad because the brides suffer from many diverse problems. Around 80% of the women sampled stated that they went through great pains, while 51% of them went through psychological problem, and 11% said physical and sexual problems resulted from the defloweration.

The bride is not the only one who encounters problems, it extends to the groom too. It is considered shameful for him if he is unable to perform the deflowering.

3-1-4 Violence at work:

The previous forms of violence against women have a cultural and religious form while violence which women face at work has an economical and social aspect. Many women state that the aggression they experience at work is because their bosses know that there are not many job opportunities and, at the same time, women will endure these different forms of violence in order to provide for their families.

Women work in irregular and unofficial professions in which keeping their jobs depends on the satisfaction of the owner. Therefore, women have to overlook inappropriate behaviors, especially when they are the only provider in the family.

Table No. 14 Forms of Violence Against Women at Work

Forms of violence	Number	Percentage
Verbal	208	13
Physical	16	One
Sexual	16	One

This table shows that 13% of the women sampled were verbally insulted to do more work than they are supposed to. Only 1% claimed that they were exposed to physical violence, and 1% stated that they were molested by their supervisor or the owner (Table No. 14).

3-1-5 Family Violence:

The form of family violence that we are referring to is the violence, which a husband practices against his wife because of household responsibilities. Because women lack awareness of their rights, they do not complain to the village mayor or the police. They simply complain to their relatives.

More than 75% of the women sampled were exposed to aggression from their husbands. Half of the violence that women are exposed to is physical and may result in disabilities or fractures. Further, 75% of women state that verbal aggression happens daily.

On the other hand, a considerable amount of women sampled, 8.5%, stated that they have endured sexual violence. This aggression is accompanied by severe psychological problems; 72.2% of these women mentioned suffering from depression and other psychological trauma after being forced to have intercourse with their husbands. While over half of the women stated that this sexual violence is accompanied by physical violence.

Table No. 15 Forms of Family Violence Against Women:

Forms of violence	Number	Percentage
Verbal	1199	74.9
Physical	871	54.4
Psychological	435	72.2
Sexual	136	8.5

Family violence is common among the families who live east of the Nile; and it is seen to correlate with economic status. Among families with a low economic status, less than 120 LE a month, 45% of women reported having been abused; while among families of a higher economic status, incomes over 150 LE a month, 25% of women reported having been abused.

Thus, the cultural phenomenon of family violence is seen to be intensified by the family's economic status.

3-2 The reaction of violence is repression:

Women east of the Nile naturally repress their problems. Though circumcision causes severe sexual, physical, and psychological problems, 38% of women refuse to talk about these problems. Through 75% of the women sampled are exposed to different kinds of violence, 27% of these women refuse to talk about their problems. On the contrary, 69% women claim that it is one of their husband's rights, thus justify the violence. In addition, the wives' or their families' remain silent about this violence or try to pacify the situation. The aim is to keep the family together.

Fourth: Developing women's capabilities and ways of empowerment.

Developing women's abilities in different areas: health and education, is the quickest way to empowerment women. Working to improve women's health must incorporate their social and economic status not simply eliminating diseases and improving their physical and

psychological health. While educating women means teaching them to read and write and making them culturally aware.

In 1990, the development program of the United Nations issued the first “Human Development Report” in which they redefined development to be synonymous with human development, which is based on increasing opportunities for people, enabling them to make a secure living, and enjoying full rights and liberties. Human development requires fair and sustainable economic growth, gender equity, and an individual’s participations in the decisions which affect their lives.

In 2000, the United States stated that promoting gender equity and empowering women is one of the most prominent development aims in the new millennium. All the world leaders who attended the summit agreed to achieve these goals by 2015. Egypt was among the countries which responded to the initiative of the US Secretary General that education is for all. Egypt implemented the “Initiation of Egyptian Girls’ Education” from 2002 to 2007.

Hereafter, we will tackle the other aspects in which women’s development difficult. Holding official IDs, educational level, and political participation are important facets from which to evaluate the level of equity for women in general and specifically for rural women.

4-1 Absence of official papers (IDs) in the study area.

All human beings should be able to enjoy certain rights. However, in Egypt those rights are linked with official papers; thus, children who do not have a birth certificate are deprived of such things as joining schools, health insurance, traveling, and obtaining further identification.

In spite of it being very simple to register a baby, some poor parents do not record the birth of their children. Among the sample, 16.5% did not have birth certificates and as a result did not get an elementary education which affects illiteracy level in east of the Nile.

It is noticed that 40.5% of the sample do not have IDs. People stated that the expenses and bureaucratic procedures for obtaining IDs and birth certificates are the obstacles that prevent them from obtaining official papers.

This demonstrates a relation between economic status and awareness which result in a high percent of females not having IDs; thus, a they may lie about the girls age and have her marry early. Women who do not have IDs are unable to participate in civil or governmental organizations.

4-2 Educational status:

Education is one of the important indicators of human development. According to the estimation of the International Bank, the illiteracy rate in Egypt was 31.3% in June 2002¹³.

Though the illiteracy rate reduced almost 17.5% between 1990 and 2002, it is still high because the roots of the problem have not been dealt with. Holding classes for the adults are very important in dealing with illiteracy, but the other problems (children not joining or dropping out of school and the discrimination between boys and girls) must be confronted in order to avoid going in a vicious circle.

- Statistics indicate that 16% of children are not going to elementary school and 20% have dropped out of schools¹⁴. These high statistics of children not in school leads to the high percent of illiteracy.
- Statistics show that poverty plays a major role in education. The rate of illiteracy among children of poor families is greater, 23%, than the illiteracy rate of children who are not from poor families, 13.6%.
- The illiteracy rate in rural areas of Upper Egypt is higher, 24%, than in rural areas of Lower Egypt, 21%.
- Illiteracy is higher among poor families, 48%, than among the families who are not poor, 28.4%¹⁵.
- Education level has a relation with income. Most poor individuals might only finish elementary education. The education level is lower in Upper Egypt, the illiteracy rate among the poor is more than 52%, while it is 46.27% among others*.
- Illiteracy is twice as high among females in rural areas who are between 11 and 15 then among males. This is primarily due to poverty but cultural concepts are also a factor.

4-2-1 Education status in the area of the study:

The district of Minya is 396th in human development in the entire country, while the Minya governorate ranks tenth in the country.

In the Minya governorate, 49.4%¹⁶ of are able to reading and writing, while in the Minya district the rate increases to be 50.4% among individuals who are older than 15. This means that half of the population is unable to read and write.

International Bank, poverty in Egypt, June 2002¹³

International Bank¹⁴

Report of the development goals of the millennium of Egypt, Egyptian planning ministry, page 20¹⁵
previous reference*

Human Development report (Cairo: International planning institution, 2003) page 44¹⁶

Illiteracy rates among the sample are higher, 67%. This rate is similar to illiteracy rate among females in the countryside of Minya, the women are in many different stages of education; 4% have literacy certificates, 16% didn't finish elementary school, 4% did not finish their intermediate education, 8% graduated from a technical high school, and 1.5% received a university or institutional education.

Statistics indicate that 24% of the sample dropped out of elementary school for family reasons. Around 11% of the girls dropped out because of family instability (divorce), while almost 11% dropped out due to economical and practical reasons. The distance children have to travel to get to school is why approximately 2% quit school.

On the other hand, 43% of the females sampled never attended school, which of course is one of the major reasons behind illiteracy.

Women mentioned that the main reason why 60% of the sample did not attend school was simply family refusal. While 34% of the sample did not attend school because they were needed to help at home and the family could not afford the burden of school fees. Marriage was the reason why 6% of the sample did not attend school.

4-3 Political participation:

Only 24.1% voted in the 2000 council elections¹⁷. The percentage that voted in the Minya governorate was higher, 28.4%, while in the city of Minya it was 25%¹⁸. This leaves three quarters of eligible voters not participating in the decision making process.

Women who live east of the Nile participate very little in politics due to a lack of political awareness. This is surprising in spite of the fact that Minya has a female Public Council representatives, Mrs. Fayza El-Tahnawy.

Illiteracy and lack of the political activity are an obstacle in activating women participation.

What we mean with the absence of political infrastructure is the absence of the political institutions such as parties, union committees, and intellectual forums. In cases where this infrastructure is in place, it does not play an active role in civil education because there is an absence of democracy and transparency within these institutions.

One of the factors that exacerbate the problem is that communities lack the tools to support political participation. For example, 91.3% of the women sampled do not have election cards, IDs, or even birth certificates as aforementioned.

The national planning institution, previous reference, page 44 ¹⁷
Human development, 2003, previous reference, page 73 ¹⁸

So it is a vicious circle, and each problem leads to the other. Therefore, only 13% of eligible voters participated in parliamentary elections in 2000. This percentage represents a greater number of women than who actually have election cards. Sometimes transparency is a missed factor when it comes to women's voting.

4-4 Social capacity building and its relation to women:

In the early eighties and through the nineties, the vision of development changed. Now development pays attention to social capital. Because regardless of what any community reaches in terms of skills, a community can never achieve human development unless it learns to work efficiently and actively as team. Human development projects are developing action on one hand and interaction on the other. This means that human development is simultaneously developing human capital and social capital.

Social capital is the systems, institutions, and relations between society's different institutions, which are based on free will and participation. The free will of individuals and groups is the social capital, if people have more freedom, then social capital and outcomes will increase.

4-4-1 Political parties:

The National Party is the only political party that exists east of the Nile. This does not demonstrate political maturity or awareness; it is due to the overlap of the National party's structure and executive authorities who are already exist. Joining the National Party is the gateway to the benefits.

Therefore, we find that less than 8.6% of individuals are aware of the political parties east of the Nile. Of the women sampled, only 5.6% know about the National Party, 1.2% have heard about the El-Waffd Party, 1% knows about the El-Tagamo Party, and only 0.7% knows about other political powers in the country. That shows that political awareness must one of the gates which will increase social capital east of the Nile in Minya.

4-4-2 Semi official and nongovernmental associations

In the study area, the roles of social structures (local community development associations), overlap with municipalities' roles. Therefore, these associations are more similar to the municipalities.

There is only one woman who plays a role in any of these social structures, she is on the board of Tehna Elgabal Local Community Development Association and she is at the same time a member of the Minya parliament.

4- 4-2-1 Cooperatives:

Cooperatives are subjected to governmental authority; therefore, they act bureaucratically. All the agricultural cooperatives in Minya are the same. These cooperatives work is determined by the governmental administration. This bureaucracy is also practiced in choosing the officials responsible for the cooperatives. In the area of the study, women play no role in the leadership of these cooperatives.

4- 4 -2-3 Non-governmental organizations:

Civil organizations have helped in establishing several associations for women in the area east of the Nile. The Better Life Association helped establish the “Amal Association” and the “Daughter of Countryside Association” in two villages. These associations are lead by women and all their members are women.

BLACD tries to make sure that there is a women association in each village that aims to make women active in their communities east of the Nile.

Fifth: Women’s needs at east of the Nile

Though women in the study area are exposed to violence they do not mention addressing it as one of their needs. They believe that meeting their other needs would reduce that violence.

For these women, their most important need is improving their living condition, 75%. Other requests display their need for security; 65% quoted health insurance among their needs

Table No.16 Women’s Needs in the Study Area:-

Needs	Repetition	Percent
Health insurance	1042	65.1
Social insurance	278	17.4
Job opportunity	754	47.1
Getting loans	798	49.9
Issuing official papers	325	20.3
Improving living level	1197	74.8
Literacy	498	31.1
N.B: - some have more than one choice		

Because there are many times when women need money: illness, the beginning of a school year, and feasts, they need a credit or loan sources at a low interest. Some women dream of

having income generating micro-projects such as raising cattle or any rural industry. Therefore, providing a source for loans is something that almost 50% desire (Table No. 16).

Security to women means job opportunities for themselves and their husbands.

Reading and writing is a capacity building tools for women, more than 31% asked for literacy classes. Women see that not having official papers is one of the obstacles for enjoying their rights. Therefore, more than 20% of the sampled expressed their want to obtain their official papers. Social insurance was the least desired, 17.4%, which shows that these women are more worried and anxious to over meeting their daily pressing needs.

Sixth: - Conclusions and Recommendations:

6-1 Conclusions

- Unofficial labor is one of the major problems which women and their husbands living east of the Nile within the Minya district face.
- The spread of unofficial labor is due to a lack of credit sources that are not characterized by the bureaucracy aforementioned.
- Lack of personal official papers is a major obstacle to improving women's social and economical situations.
- The associations' east of the Nile's credit policy prefers to give loans to those who are able to repay the loan. Loans range is from 300 to 1000 LE. Therefore, those whose economic status is low either cannot take a loan or they only take a 300 LE loan. This small amount cannot assist in creating an income-generating project. Therefore, they spend the loan on their daily needs.
- Because health and social insurance are linked with working unemployment means not having insurance.
- Unemployment has a relation with decreased health awareness.
- Although there are a great number of women who visit health clinics, 21% of the sampled women still do not visit the health clinics because of economic reasons or a lack of awareness.
- A quarter of women do not understand family planning well enough.
- The village culture, unofficial labor, and unemployment has a relation to increase violence against women.
- The community still has a low opinion of uncircumcised women.
- The spread of bad habits such as early marriage and the deflower phenomenon increase the violence against women.
- Because women are ranked socially lower than men there is a culture of violence against women. In such cases, the economical differences between families exacerbates the occurrence of violence.

- The poverty level east of the Nile has a direct relation to the problem of not issuing birth certificates.
- One of the reasons for illiteracy east of the Nile is that parents do not have birth certificates issued for their children. Therefore, those children cannot join schools, and live marginalized in their communities.
- Not having IDs is one of the reasons why women who live east of the Nile take unofficial jobs.
- Lack of official papers is one of the major reasons behind women's lack of capacity, lack of her access to loans, and social insurances, especially when they get old. Therefore, there is great need to issue official papers, birth certificates, IDs, election cards, as a means for political participation.
- Women who live east of the Nile have little social capital. Women are not involved in developmental associations in their local community. Social capital is not simple having organizations, but also working to increase women roles as leaders.
- Having women civil associations is a good sign, but they need capacity building in order to be able to accomplish social development.

6-2 Recommendations:

- Civil associations can play a major role by working to change unofficial labor into official labor through the following:
 - *Determining good mechanisms to provide workers of east of the Nile health and social insurance.
 - *Removing the economical conditions for giving loans to women.
 - *The value of loans given to women who suffer economically and socially should be raised in order to help them change their situations.
 - *The value of the loan should be defined according to the feasibility and project that the woman is going to do. Technical support should also be provided to the women before and during their project. This shows how important of a role the associations have to play.
 - *The unofficial labor that women work in must be eradicated and official, valuable job opportunities must be created for women.
 - *Civil community associations east of the Nile have to create job opportunities through encouraging domestic industries and making sure they include social and health insurance.
 - *Civil associations east of the Nile have to deal with health problems which women are exposed to, such as malnutrition and repetitive pregnancy, through some interventions:
 - a) Cooperating with doctors to provide direct support for women by providing medicine and vitamins, especially iron.
 - b) Providing contraceptives to women.
 - c) Producing booklets and brochures to educate women.

- d) There is a need to afford more medical cadres in order to improve health because doctors are unable to handle all the health problems women face such as investigation, analysis, and X-rays.

Community organizations can help in the following:

- Hold training sessions for doctors working in rural clinics in order to improve their performance.
- Providing doctors with cultural training to be able to stop violent negative traditions, such as early marriage and deflowering, that are related to women's health.
- Creating strong links with rural clinics by establishing projects which would provide free or inexpensive medical services; especially by getting some volunteer doctors after 2 pm.
- Community associations in cooperation with health clinics could make medical cards for women which would provide them access to free medical services and a place to record their health status. The associations can assist with this by helping to cover the cost of these cards.

Advancing culture is considered an important way to address the violence practiced against women and social violence in general.

Civil organizations could have a major impact if they issued birth certificates to children less than 5. This would allow children to be able to join schools. Because children are not responsible for themselves at this age, their deprivation of education is considered a social crime which prevents them from being able to decide their personal future.

Civil organizations can conduct a survey by checking governmental records of those villages and cooperating with the families of young children to avoid the consequent problems such as illiteracy, lack of health care, and practical problems.

- Raising families' awareness on the importance of issuing birth certificates for their children.
- Civil associations have to play a role in issuing IDs for females between 16 and 20, and not waiting until they are older. This can be done in cooperation with the responsible sectors by conducting a survey of the number the women in this age and determining a way to issue them IDs. Those who are financially unable to pay could have the IDs provided pro bono and others would pay according to their ability.