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## **CONFÉRENCE**

### **"Unskilled Temporary Labor Migration from Upper Egypt to Cairo"**

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**Démographe**

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# Unskilled Temporary Labor Migration from Upper Egypt to Cairo<sup>1</sup>

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## INTRODUCTION:

Given the growing and well-known difficulties that face the overall Egyptian population in finding productive employment, it is important to study the characteristics of laborers who migrate from rural to urban areas. Youth in rural areas, where the economic base is largely dependent on agriculture, face a different set of employment problems than do young people in urban areas, where the economic base is more varied. It is also important to examine what strategies rural young men and women (in the Egyptian case it is mainly men) pursue when they are faced with limited economic opportunities. Do they migrate? Do they attempt to acquire new and/or different skills through formal or informal education? Do they adopt a “waiting strategy”? If they migrate, what are their “migration fields”? And what are their intentions with regard to length of stay, return, etc.? For those who are moving back and forth, are we dealing with true “migration” or perhaps some other human mobility phenomenon such as “commuting” or “circulation” etc.?

The main aim of this study is to analyze one strategy that is chosen by young rural men who face limited economic opportunities in their villages: that is, rural-to-urban migration. This migratory phenomenon is examined within a set of wider macro-issues which include the rapid but uneven nature of Egyptian development and urbanization; the hyper-growth of Cairo; the nature of Egyptian employment trends, especially as regards the informal economy; and the long-term demographic trends of a country whose rate of population growth, though falling, is still high and whose distribution of population remains uniquely spatially concentrated.

These objectives and research questions were mainly addressed via a questionnaire/interview survey of rural-urban migrant workers in Cairo, which is the

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<sup>1</sup> This is a draft extracted from the original work by the author. The original work is available online in the following site: <http://www.egyptpop.org/azohry/thesis/>

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main research instrument of the study, and by supplementary field work in a selected district of Upper Egypt.

## **UPPER EGYPTIANS IN CAIRO:**

### **Rural/Urban Migration in Egypt:**

In developing countries, those with low-to-middle incomes within the global ranking, rural-urban migration is very much driven by, or at least related to, the uneven geography of employment, income, opportunities or just plain survival. Rapid population growth, especially in rural areas, provides an important demographic backdrop to these rural-urban population shifts. The Egyptian case – quite apart from my own personal interest in it as a citizen of that country – is highly relevant for at least three reasons. First, Egypt is a rapidly modernizing society and economy which, like many other states bordering the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean Sea, has aspirations of soon becoming a middle-income and more highly-developed state. Second, the vast size of the country and its sharply-etched divisions between urban and rural districts makes it a suitable case-study of the phenomenon of internal migration. And third, like North Africa and the Middle East in general, it has scarcely been studied by population geographers and migration specialists in recent decades.

### **Internal Migration and population Re-distribution:**

Internal migration is responsible for the redistribution of nearly 25 percent of Egypt's population, and for the rapid growth of Egyptian cities – especially Cairo and Alexandria. Internal migration in Egypt has generally been: a) from South to North; b) from South and North to Cairo and Alexandria.

### **Typology of Upper Egyptian movements to Cairo**

Upper-to-Lower Egyptian migration is a long-standing phenomenon, statistically traceable to the first population census in 1897, but probably in existence before that date too. One can distinguish two main phases of this long-distance migration: pre-modernization and post-modernization. The Egyptian revolution led by Nasser (1952) and the independence from British colonization (1956) make the boundary between the two migration eras.

**The pre-modernization phase** was characterized by a low but consistent migration stream from Upper Egypt to Cairo, in which migrants were mainly motivated by the search for better health services, education for their children, and other amenities, which were all lacking in Upper Egypt. Migrants of this type and time established typical migration selectivity rules: they tended to be more open-minded and ambitious, and with better education (and, therefore, aspirations for more education), than the norm for the Upper Egyptian population. Most of these migrants settled permanently with their families in Cairo, keeping, at least initially, strong contacts with their extended families in Upper Egypt. With successive generations, however, these contacts became less strong until they reached a minimal, symbolic level – perhaps by burying their dead in the village.

Not all the migrants to Cairo before the 1950s were of the above type. Other, poorer segments of Upper Egyptian population were also migrating at that time. Whilst the Cairo construction sector was not big enough to absorb many migrant workers, most of the servants, private drivers, and porters in Cairo did originate from Upper Egypt – especially from Aswan governorate. Before the building of the Aswan Dam in the 1960s, many peasants in Upper Egypt used to work in agriculture seasonally and “circulate” for the rest of the year under what was known as the *‘taraheel’* system (for more details on this see Toth, 1999). Rural-based subcontractors, who had prior contacts with the main contractors involved in public works and civil engineering schemes, were specialized in hiring unskilled rural laborers (usually in village groups of about 20-50 workers) to work on projects such as paving roads and cleaning and digging new canals in Lower Egypt. This system started with the building of the Suez Canal in the 1860s. Labor circulation and *taraheel* work afforded a minimum level of living for the poorer peasant families of Upper Egypt, and can be seen as a kind of historical antecedent of the less organized and more informal contemporary circuits of labor migration that I am studying in this study.

**The post-modernization era** saw a profound change in the social and economic geography of Egypt. Nasser’s “industrial revolution” moved Egypt from an agricultural society to a partially modern industrial society; heavy industrial zones were established, mainly in and around the capital, notably at Helwan in the southern part of Cairo and Subra-el-Kheima in the northern part of the city. Tens of thousands of unskilled laborers

migrated from all parts of Egypt to work in the new factories, enjoying both a secure job and a housing unit. This period – the late 1950s and the early 1960s – can be called the “golden age of migration” in Egypt. However, some of those who moved during this golden age – the less qualified – failed to get access to the public sector industrial jobs; they settled in Cairo doing unskilled work in services and general laboring.

By 1975, when Anwar Sadat announced an open-door economic policy (Nasser had restricted international migration as part of his socialist revolution), massive numbers of Egyptians migrated on a temporary basis to the Arab Gulf countries. In the early 1980s another major emigration took place to Iraq to replace the local workers who were engaged in the Iran-Iraq War. By this time, the building boom had started in Cairo, fueled by two factors: remittances from Egyptian workers in the Gulf; and the construction of satellite towns surrounding Cairo, such as the “6<sup>th</sup> of October” and the “10<sup>th</sup> of Ramadan” settlements. This construction boom stimulated a large and constant, yet unorganized, stream of unskilled laborers, mainly from Upper Egypt, who migrated on a circular basis, replacing the old *taraheel* system. This migration stream has been sustained and reinforced by many factors – land fragmentation and agricultural rent increases, overpopulation of rural areas, the return of hundreds of thousands of Egyptian workers from Iraq and Jordan

after the Second Gulf War, and the size and centralization of economic activities in Cairo, as well as the dynamism of the informal sector and its ability to absorb very large numbers of rural laborers.

Concluding this survey, Upper Egyptians in Cairo today can be classified into three main groups according to their migration history and the type of their movement:

- “Old migrants”, and their descendants, who are totally integrated into Cairo’s social and economic life. With the passing of time these migrants, who were a kind of “upper class” of rural migrants who migrated for educational and related reasons, have tended to fade in numbers, since better education, including more than ten new universities in different regions of Egypt, and improved health services have become widespread in Upper Egypt.

- “Established migrants” who have kept their Upper Egyptian identities. Such migrants arrived in Cairo mainly in the early Nasser era as “left-overs” from the industrial migration system, staying on to do very low-status jobs in the informal urban economy. They settled in, and developed the expansion of, poor, degraded areas of the city, including occupying the city’s cemeteries. These unplanned, often peripheral districts have kept links to the village and district origins, with the result that these migrants have not managed to fully integrate into Cairo’s social fabric. Some of their settlements, including the cemetery, are regarded as “risky” areas for outsiders to wander around. These migrants are less educated and less privileged than the first group. Given their time of arrival, since the late 1950s, they are now into their third generation.
- “Circular” migrants who spend most of their working lives in Cairo but retain family and socio-cultural bases in their home villages in Upper Egypt. Basically, these to-and-fro migrants represent the rural poor and have replaced those who in earlier decades moved as *taraheel* workers. This is the group my research mainly focuses on.

## **WHO ARE THE MIGRANTS AND WHY DO THEY MIGRATE?**

### **Who are the migrants?**

About two-thirds of the migrants (65.2 percent) are between 14 and 29 years old. The highest concentration of laborers is found in the age group 20–24 years old: 34.7 percent of the surveyed population. Migrants’ ages range between 14 and 54 years old, but respondents who are 50 or more years old comprise only 2.9 percent of the surveyed. The mean age of migrants (at the time of survey) is 28.9 years old. It is quite clear that in Egypt young people tend to experience rural–urban migration more than old people. This young age structure of migrants has an effect on the marital status of migrants, where I found that more than half of them are single (42.1 percent) or engaged (13.6 percent), while 43.4 percent are married. The extent to which married migrants bring their wives and families to Cairo, as opposed to leaving them in the village, will be commented on later.

Most of the migrants (81.4 percent) belong to two educational categories: none (no education) comprise 45.9 percent, and those with a technical secondary certificate comprise 35.5 percent. Technical secondary certificate holders have higher rates of unemployment and higher rates of migration too.

From where did those migrants come? They came from all Upper Egypt governorates, from Beni-Sueif in the north (100 kilometers from Cairo) to Aswan in the south (1000 kilometers from Cairo), but most of the laborers in my sample came from three governorates that are located in the middle of the Upper Egypt region. These governorates are Souhag (95 migrants or 39.3 percent), Assiut (61 migrants, 25.2 percent), and Menia (42 migrants, 17.4 percent). The contribution of Beni-Sueif (in the north) and Qena (in the south) is about the same (19 and 18 migrants respectively). Distance control seems not to work in the Egyptian case.

### **Why do they migrate?**

The most common influencing reason – as given by respondents – is the unavailability of job opportunities at the village. This reason comprises 35.8 percent of the reasons given by respondents. It is followed by a similar reason, which is the rarity of job opportunities at the village (8.8 percent). Some of my interview respondents summed up the dire situation with regard to rural jobs as follows. *‘Work opportunities are almost non-existent there – in the village. In case I find a job, it will be for five pounds a day – about one third of the Cairo rate. This will never be sufficient for my expenses and the family’s’,* said Khairy. *‘Here, I can go working for 15 to 20 pounds a day according to what is available, and I might be paid an extra 5 pounds as a tip. It is much better than my hometown’* (Diab). *‘On my best day, I earn 18 pounds. My daily income here is almost equivalent to my weekly income in the village’* (Henein). On the other hand, what does not seem to happen is any significant narrowing of the gap between Upper and Lower Egypt, the two parts of the two-sector model. This implies that the rural–urban labor transfer is not (yet) an equilibrating mechanism for wage differences, but rather a fundamental structural element of the geographically divided dual-sector economy, where the two economies remain both functionally and spatially apart yet connected by migration channels which, as we will see later, are partly circulatory but partly also very long-term.

### **Rural knowledge of the town**

Most migrants were to some extent lured on by what were essentially rather exaggerated pictures arising partly from faulty communications and partly from the inability of persons unfamiliar with the town to interpret correctly the information they received.

The deteriorating living conditions and rising unemployment in Upper Egypt made it easy for potential migrants to believe or imagine better conditions in Cairo than the reality.

Worker-to-worker communication seems to be the prevailing pattern of information sharing. Team-, chain-, and family-migration prevail, and circulatory movements bring a constant stream of labor migrants in Cairo back to their villages for visits. Earlier migrants tend to guide their younger family members and relatives. It is common to find brothers, father and son, and groups of relatives all working in the same place in Cairo. It is common also to find that all occupants of a particular place of work in Cairo have come from the same village.

## **WORK EXPERIENCE OF THE MIGRANTS:**

### **Migrants' patterns of accommodation**

Migrants face a whole range of urgent problems the minute they disembark in the city. The first is where to stay. The matter is important because most migrants have no job, nor even in many cases a clear idea about the labor market. Moreover, many new arrivals are very young. Typically, they are teenagers. They need a period, while looking for a job, in accommodation that is cheap, or preferably free. I asked my interview-subjects the following question: *“How did you come? When you first set foot here, where did you go? What did you do?”* Here are some answers.

*“When I arrived, I immediately headed to Guiza and inquired about the Faisal neighborhood. I heard about it from many people from my village who traveled to and from Cairo. I was told that I was already in it. I got out of the microbus and walked for a while till I was here. I got to know a guy from Fayoum. He generously allowed me to spend that night staying with him; he was a doorman,”* said Mohamed from Menia. *“I came with a friend of mine. He persuaded me to come with him. I sat by a fountain and waited for a working opportunity. I have not moved away from this place for 15 years”* (Dessouky). *“As for the first time, it was my brother who accompanied me. I was 15 years old at that time, and hardly knew anything”* (Henein). *“I came to this place directly. Some people talked to me about it. Some of my relatives were living here when I came. I stayed with them”* (Mahmoud).



### **Relatives in Cairo and channels of labor migration**

About 65 percent of migrants interviewed in the questionnaire have relatives in Cairo; earlier-established and more or less permanently-settled migrants from their place of origin in Upper Egypt. However, in this study of unskilled laborer migration I found – perhaps surprisingly – that these permanent migrants do not by and large take an active role to facilitate the migration process. More than two-thirds of the interviewees (including the in-depth ones) mentioned that they rarely or never visit their relatives in Cairo who are permanently settled in the city. Some of them mentioned that these permanently-resident relatives do not actually know that they are in Cairo. A few of them said that they do not want them (the relatives in Cairo) to know that they are in Cairo.

So, who helped these people in their migration process? How did they find their current job? Almost two-thirds of the migrants found jobs through their relatives in Cairo. But “relatives” here means laborers who work in Cairo, not permanent resident relatives. Friends, in the village and in Cairo, ranked second, accounting for about one fifth of migrants. Often current jobs were found through friends from the village who used to work – or currently work – in Cairo. They provide accommodation and an introduction to the labor market. Those

### **Search for Work:**

Migrant workers in Cairo help new migrants and introduce them to the labor market. The relevance of kinship and friendship networks is confirmed – in finding work as well as initial accommodation. But we also note another interesting social phenomenon: these networks of social solidarity are largely confined to the migrant laborer class and do not extend to relatives and co-villagers who are permanently settled in Cairo. My reading of this situation is as follows: long-term settled migrants are likely to have better living conditions and more secure jobs than the recently-arrived or shuttle migrants who work only in casual laboring and who frequently have no fixed abode – hence the latter feel an element of shame because of their inferior position and are reluctant to visit their better-off relatives and village contacts.

### **Work characteristics of migrants**

#### *Mode of work*

By mode of work I mean whether migrant laborers work in a contract-based, daily-based, or task-based work mode. The first of these is relatively rare. In fact, it is not surprising when talking to a group of unskilled migrants waiting for work in the street to find that not one of them works (or indeed has ever worked) in a contract-based mode. Most respondent migrants accept to work on a combined task-based or daily-based mode (76.0 percent). Those who prefer to work solely in a task-based mode comprise 5.4 percent only. Those who get work solely in a daily-based mode comprise 18.6 percent of the migrants.

**It is important here to refer to a unique type of hiring that prevails among migrants who have solid family and social networks in Cairo.** As I mentioned before, for some villages – or a group of villages – in Upper Egypt there are well-known permanent focal points representing a concentration of old migrants and transitional migrants who refuse to be fully absorbed by the Cairo urban system. They live pretty much as if they are in their villages, keeping the same customs, norms, daily lifestyles, and traditions. It is an example of a kind of “urban ruralization”. In Cairo, newly-migrated unskilled laborers live together in these urban suburbs and districts, which facilitate their accommodation and the finding of work opportunities for them. Henein told me in my interview with him that *“we are about 200 people here from the same home town (Malwy in Menia governorate)... We are all acquainted with each other because we know each other back home.”* The most noteworthy examples of these migrant suburbs are *Imam Shafi* and *Bassateen* in southern Cairo. Thousands of families who have migrated from two village groupings in Souhag governorate – mainly Seflaque and Sawam'a villages – have settled and resided in these areas near the Mokattam “mountains” and then established and expanded these two suburbs as a kind of model of slum areas in Cairo. About half of these families live in cemeteries (the infamous “city of the dead”) and other areas with no access to public services.

Most of the newly migrated Upper Egyptian laborers who migrate to such areas in Cairo, however, cannot be seen in the typical focal points and parks of migrants. Migrants with counterpart villages (as I may call them) sit in specific coffee shops in the evening – after 5.00 pm – and the employers come to them instead of the migrants seeking employers or work opportunities. Employers or contractors are usually old migrants from these areas – but who have now become permanent residents. They select

the number of workers that they need and confirm with them their job for the following day(s). When the contract is made between the contractor and the laborers, workers sometimes receive a “*biata*”, an advance of approximately 5–10 LE, to take the work without a written contract. Oral agreements are very common in the construction sector in Egypt. It is worth mentioning here that these coffee shops function as highly effective means of networking among the migrant workers, where they may see each other daily, and know about the latest news of their village in Upper Egypt. Because the migrants do not have permanent residence at a recognized address and due to the fact that their living spaces in Cairo are often unplanned areas with no street names, the coffee shop plays an important role in communications. Newcomers from the village of origin come directly to the coffee shop when they arrive to Cairo. The coffee shop owner and the servers are key individuals in facilitating communication among the workers’ groups since they all know each other and most of the customers. Workers frequently leave oral messages for their workmates with them. In addition to oral messages, sometimes they leave work tools, and other things to be picked up by their co-workers. As I mentioned before, this network also greatly facilitates communications with the origin village, since there is frequent travel contact by migrants moving back and forth – a topic I shall expand on later in my account.

The remainder of migrant laborers – after the daily-based hired workers – work in the so-called task-based mode. Task-based workers work for two groups of employers: the private sector contractors, like the daily hired workers, and the family sector. In addition to the daily-based workers, private sector contractors hire laborers in a task-based mode to do specific heavy jobs like unloading and lifting sacks of cement, sand, or loads of bricks. Migrant laborers refuse to do such work on a daily-based mode in most cases, simply because such physically demanding tasks are difficult to carry out all day long. In the family sector, families hire task-based laborer migrants to do construction and non-construction works. Construction work includes unloading and lifting packages of cement, sand, bricks, or tiles like the construction sector but for small-scale in-house works. The non-construction work includes lifting lighter loads, such as furniture and home equipment. Task-based workers are more likely to have more than one task per day. Like the contractors who hire migrant laborers on a daily basis, the family sector members who employ migrants on a task basis are not happy about them too. *They abuse us. After agreeing with them about the cost of the task, they ask for more money.*

*In addition they want me to offer them cigarettes and food”, one family member said. “I needed one laborer to lift three pieces of furniture. Three of them insisted on turning up. They rushed into my car without me permitting them. I took them all after agreeing about the deal. After they lifted the furniture, they started to bargain again with me. They started nagging at me to give them more money”,* said another person I interviewed in this capacity.

### ***Working hours and wages***

Working hours per day for the surveyed population range between two and 18 hours. Migrants who work more than 10 hours represent only 3.3 percent of the total migrants. The average working time is 8. Task-based workers are likely to work more hours if they can find enough work to do. Migrant workers in task-based activities try to finish the task in the shortest time that they can. This is to return back to their focal point to be ready for another task. However, in some cases, their colleagues prohibit them to go to another job if they themselves did not get any work since the early morning.

Daily work is not guaranteed. Some migrants work the seven days while some others may, if they are unlucky, work only one day per week. Reference in the questionnaire is made to the week that preceded the date of interview. Workers who work three days or less per week comprise 1.3 percent only. The average working days per week is almost five (4.9 days to be exact).

### ***Migrants and non-migrants***

Now I move to another, but related, comparison, which is that between the migrant laborers and their supposed equivalents from Cairo in the workspace. In my fieldwork I visited many construction sites in Cairo and I interviewed – via unstructured interviews – employers and employees from Cairo to carry out a comparison between unskilled migrant laborers and the native Cairo unskilled laborers. The findings of my fieldwork in this respect were a surprise to me. I discovered that no Cairo-born native workers – even those with little or no educational qualifications and who come from an equivalent social background to “my” migrants – were working as casual unskilled laborers; and furthermore, that there were none who were even willing to contemplate such work nowadays. They see that unskilled laborers come from Upper Egypt – or from “other regions” as they said – *“but us, we work as masters and we are able to train our*

*relatives to be masters too. If they are not willing to work in construction we send them to car repair workshops or any other work that they may like.*” These words are from one of the specialist tradesmen that I met on a construction site in Guiza. Another employer explained to me how Cairo residents have more options than those who came from Upper Egypt to work in Cairo: *“It is difficult for many young men in Cairo to do such harsh work. They are spoiled. They have many options other than working as ordinary laborers in this sector. If they do not have any qualification to do productive work they can work as street vendors, work in a coffee shop, or in any workshop with any of their relatives”*. Another employer whom I interviewed stressed the economic importance of unskilled Upper Egyptian laborers in the construction sector: *“These very poor people are the backbone of the construction sector in Cairo. Before, they were the backbone of the construction sector in Arab countries, especially Saudi Arabia and Libya. Now, they are very important to us in this sector. We use newly developed machines and equipment but also we use Upper Egyptian laborers.”* So it is clear that hard work in the construction sector in Cairo is an Upper Egyptian specialty. It is clear also that they are more eligible than any other segment or category of laborers to do such work, physically and psychologically. I shall return to comment further on this key finding in the concluding chapter.

### **Work dynamics**

By “work dynamics” I mean, first, the type of occupation (whether migrants have special occupations or are ordinary unskilled labor migrants); duration of working away from village; work experience in different jobs in Cairo; evolution of various jobs and professional development; work experience in other places in Egypt; and finally work experience in the village. Each of these dimensions will now be briefly analyzed in turn.

### ***Occupation***

About 94 percent of migrants are ordinary laborers without any specific occupation. Only 5.8 percent of migrants claimed that they have a specialized trade or occupation (14 cases out of 242 cases). I asked those 14 individuals why they generally work as ordinary laborers since they have a trade. They replied that they cannot compete with city residents since they do not have a permanent place of residence or a permanent place of work (workshop). They mentioned also that their occupations are not profitable in their villages. My personal impression is that they are not qualified for any

occupation in the urban labor market. Their skill level is lower than urban residents and their work style is different, especially in occupations like painting or scaffolding. The main trades that they possessed were construction-related.

### ***Duration of working away from village***

Given the mean age of migrants (28.9 years) and the mean duration of working away from the home village (8.95 years), it is clear that the surveyed population has spent about one third of their life in a migratory status (31.0 percent exactly) and more than one half of their active life, given the fact that they enter labor market activities at a very young age. Duration of working away from the village ranges between less than one year and 35 years. Migrants are not fully decided about their aims behind migration. The migration outcomes are not clear enough to them before migration, so that they have little clear idea about the likely or probable duration of migration. Migration is not seen as a means of achieving planned long-term goals. It is a **survival strategy**, above all to get money to feed children and other family members left behind in the village.

### ***Work experience in the village***

About four-fifths of migrants (189 cases) experienced work in their villages in the past or on their visits to their villages in Upper Egypt; most of them worked as farmers. About two-thirds of migrants (62.6 percent) work in their villages during their visits to their places of origin, either for others or on their own farms. The wage made per day – for the last five years as a reference period – was 7.96 Egyptian pounds on average. This village daily rate is way below (only 41.2 percent) the daily rate in Cairo (19.31 LE). In addition to the rarity and seasonality of job opportunities in rural Egypt, the wage difference is the most important factor in rural-urban migration in Egypt.

### ***Occupational safety***

First of all I have to say that all the migrant laborers – the 242 interviewees and the 20 case studies – are not covered by any type of health or even social insurance. In addition, the percentage of those who have had serious job-related injuries while working in Cairo comprises one fifth of the total migrant laborers surveyed (19.8 percent).

## **LIVING CONDITIONS IN PLACES OF ORIGIN AND DESTINATION**

### **Living conditions in the village of origin**

The percentage of households with electricity in rural Upper Egypt (93.3 percent) is less than that of Greater Cairo (99.7 percent). Regarding the migrants' households in the villages the coverage is 91.7 percent, while it is only 71.9 in their accommodation in Cairo. This set of figures illustrates that, whilst electricity provision is near-universal now in Egypt, for migrants living (or, often, squatting) in Cairo, it is significantly less, reflecting their marginal accommodation situation there. Greater Cairo households are more likely to have access to piped water than rural households in Upper Egypt (99.7 versus 75.6 percent). The situation in migrants' households in the villages is much worse, only 29.3 percent of households having access to piped water. This is a further confirmation of the earlier finding that rural migrants from Upper Egypt are selected from amongst the poorest households in village areas. About 65 percent of migrants have access to piped water while being in Cairo. As a matter of fact public sewage disposal networks do not exist in rural Upper Egypt. In general, except for electricity, migrants enjoy better services in Cairo than in their households in Upper Egypt; but migrants are notably worse off on these criteria than the rest of the Egyptian population.

**About six in ten of the migrants are landless.** They do not own any, even small, piece of agricultural land in Upper Egypt. Landless people in Upper Egypt are regarded as the poor of the poor. Keeping the inherited land is a tradition and selling it is regarded as a shame, unless under exceptional circumstances. Migrants' ownership of farmland ranges between zero and 3 feddans with an average of 0.36 feddan.

### ***Rural adjustment mechanisms***

The 100 migrant laborers who have agricultural land in Upper Egypt depend on remaining family members in the village to take care of their land while they are in Cairo. Since most migrant workers come from extended family households where several generations live together, and due to the shared responsibility that household members feel towards the agricultural land that is owned by the family, most family members feel a duty, as well as an economic necessity, to substitute the absence of migrants by more participation in agricultural work. **In my visits to villages in Souhag governorate** I found that it is not only the male members of the family who take care of the farm, but also female household members, especially wives and older sisters. It is important here to stress that the participation of women in agriculture is common in

Egypt; but the absence of a male family member tends very much to increase this participation.

### **Living conditions in Cairo**

The vast majority of migrants live with each other (79.3 percent). Migrant laborers seem to prefer to live together in groups in crowded and cheap places. Migrants from the same village, or sometimes the same governorate, tend to live together. I found also a few migrants from different governorates who live together. Living together makes it easy to keep the same social contacts and traditions of the village; at the same time this pattern will weaken the mechanisms through which

The number of persons who share the same sleeping room is one of the indicators of standard of living. The higher the number of persons who share the same bedroom the lower is the standard of living and vice versa. The mean number of persons per sleeping room among migrants in my main survey in Cairo is 6.8, which is almost double the mean of their own households in Upper Egypt (3.5 persons per room). Persons who share sleeping arrangements with six workers or more comprise one half of migrants in Cairo. Given the fact that migrants live in the cheapest and the worst accommodation in Cairo, and given this very high number of workers who share the same room, and the very poor dietary conditions one can imagine how poor these migrants are.

### ***Cost of housing in Cairo***

I found that 37.6 percent of the migrants reside for free. They pay nothing for housing in Cairo. After further questioning with migrants I found that they live in derelict properties and houses. Some of these places can host more than twenty migrant laborers. Migrants who live in such places have almost no luggage or personal possessions with them. Some of them have only worn-out blankets which they bought or borrowed for next to nothing. They do not cater or cook for themselves. They buy their food from street vendors. It is very cheap and rather unhealthy food with low fat and low calories. Hence its nutritional value, for a person engaged mainly in heavy manual work, is poor. Daily payment for housing is between 0.50 and 1.00 LE (0.12 and 0.25 US\$) depending on the condition of the room. However, rooms are not, or only minimally, equipped. There is only one blanket for each resident, to sleep on, not to be



covered with. Toilet facilities are shared – sometimes by more than 20 workers – and they are very primitive and dirty.

### ***Cost of living and daily expenses in Cairo***

The daily expenses range from 2.5 to 15 LE (0.60 to 4 US\$) with an average of 6.34. Adding one more LE to these average daily expenses for housing makes the overall daily living cost equal to 7.34 LE (1.80 US\$). This amount of money comprises about 40 percent of migrants' average daily income (19.31 LE, 5 US\$). This means – roughly speaking – that migrants can save up to 60 percent of their daily income. Let us now exclude the cost of housing and decompose the average daily expenses (6.34 LE, 1.60 US\$) to its main components. These are food, tea, cigarettes, and other expenses. Other expenses include the cost of transportation in most cases, and hospitality of newcomers from Upper Egypt or from other places in Cairo. Expenditure on food comprises the main bulk of migrants' expenditure while being in Cairo. Migrants' expenditure on food is widely varied. It ranges between 1 LE per day to 8.5 LE with an average of 3.64 LE. This average represents 57.4 percent of the total daily expenses.

Tea and cigarettes are also an important component of migrants' expenses. **I found that 67.8 percent of the migrants are smokers.** They smoke cigarettes and some of them smoke the water pipe, or what is called *shisha*. It is important here to mention that smoking cigarettes or *shisha* may be regarded as a kind of substitution or compensation for their low standards of living in Cairo. Migrant workers consider it as a sort of a cheap pleasure. Other expenses include transportation from their place of residence in Cairo to their work-place for those who live far from their regular work, plus – as mentioned before – hospitality for new arrivals and for visitors from the village.

### ***Food and nutrition***

Because of the low level of their housing conditions in Cairo and the unavailability of cooking equipment in most of rented places in Cairo, migrant laborers tend to buy ready-made food from street vendors and cheap restaurants in Cairo. I asked interviewees to list the type – and the quality and quantity – of food that they ate in the last three meals (breakfast, lunch, and dinner). The reason for asking such questions is not so much to achieve a precise analysis of their nutritional habits, but rather just to

explore and investigate the general characteristics of their patterns of food consumption in order to compare them with average Egyptians in Cairo and Upper Egypt.

Generally speaking, the consumption of meat is the main indicator of nutritional well-being in Egypt. As a rough estimate – from my own observations – average Cairo families eat meat about twice per week. However, meat is cheaper in Upper Egypt than Cairo, so that, despite the overall marked difference in income standards, average Upper Egyptian families purchase meat once per week and eat home-reared chicken or other birds once per week also. So, both Cairo and Upper Egypt “average” residents eat meat twice per week. The only difference is that Cairo residents purchase it twice while Upper Egyptians purchase it once. **When I asked migrant laborers about the last time that they ate meat while being in Cairo, the vast majority reported that they last ate meat on the occasion of their last visit to the village, and that they do not eat meat in Cairo in order to save money.** So what do they eat? The in-depth interviews with the migrant laborers may give more clarification about their eating habits. In the following quotes there is frequent reference to *falafel*, a very cheap traditional Egyptian food.

*“When I have enough money, I head into a restaurant. When not, I just buy falafel for 0.50 Egyptian pounds and bread. I mean that I get some beans and falafel in the restaurant. When I do not have enough money, I buy two pieces of bread, just something to eat for 0.30 or 0.40 LE. At night, I also have dinner at the restaurant if I have enough money. If not, I go eat beans. I eat meat only in my hometown because meat here – in Cairo – is expensive. Moreover, I do not have enough money to order meat at restaurants”* (Mohamed). Some migrants do not eat much because they believe that they should suffer like their families in Upper Egypt. *“Before I eat anything here in Cairo, I think about those in my home. Even if my mouth waters to eat chicken, meat, or any thing else, I ignore it for the sake of my family. They are deprived from certain things at home, and I am here too”* (Henein).

### **Urban–rural linkages**

Theoretically speaking, urban–rural linkages and social and family networks shape and condition the migration flows from rural to urban. What (in the Egyptian case) are the linkages between migrants in Cairo and their villages in Upper Egypt? What are the

frequencies of the village visits and by which means of transportation; and what is the effect of distance on the frequency of travel to the home village? Do some migrants lose contact with their rural origins over time?

### ***Visiting the village***

The strongest and most obvious physical contacts that the migrant maintains with the village are his return revisits. The length between successive visits is positively correlated with distance between Cairo and the governorates of origin. While the mean duration is 31 days for Beni-Sueif migrants, it is 170 days for Qena migrants. (Luxor and Aswan are discarded from the statistical comparison due to the small numbers of cases).

### ***Contacts and means of communication with the village***

The main means of communication between migrants and their families in Upper Egypt is oral messages with colleagues who are visiting the village as part of the “circularity” of this migration form. About 37 percent of migrants who have contacts with the village while staying in Cairo use this method to contact their family in Upper Egypt. Given the fact that migrants work and live in groups coming from the same village, and sometimes the same family, migrants who want to send oral messages to their families and friends can easily find passengers leaving for their villages almost every day or week.

As a means of communication with the village, telephone calls ranked second. It is worth mentioning that most of my surveyed population's houses have no telephone lines. How do they communicate? A single telephone in a rural settlement may be used by many households. Hence, neighbors can be asked to pass on messages or bring somebody who lives nearby to the phone.

Communications via written messages sent via colleagues or via the mail are almost non-existent. This is almost certainly due to the high illiteracy level among migrants and the easiness of communication via oral messages and telephone calls. It was noticed that most migrants who prefer telephone communication have telecommunication cards. Literate migrants help illiterates in using public service telephone sets and dialing the village numbers, which they keep in a piece of paper in their wallets, even if they cannot read them.

### **The mechanism of remittance use and allocation**

In economic terms the most important aspect in rural–urban circular migration is the counter-flow of remitted money and goods that characterizes the migration stream. Such flows of wealth are undoubtedly important, not only to the families in rural areas but also to the migrants. Russell (1986) distinguished between three major components of the remittance process: a) the decision to remit; b) the methods used to remit; and c) the use that is made of remittances in the origin community.

### ***Migrants' savings and expenditure***

The amount of money that migrants save per month ranges between zero – only ten cases of young migrants – and 500 LE. The average monthly saving is 198.5 LE, or rather less than US\$50. This average represents nearly half the migrants' monthly income and is almost equivalent to the monthly salary of an average government employee, as I mentioned before. Migrants recognize the value of their savings while working in Cairo but they think that they could have been saving more money if the cost of living in Cairo were not so expensive. Hence they tend to do all they can to minimize their living costs in the city, by scrimping and saving in the ways I have already described.

A great proportion of migrants' savings goes to supporting their families in Upper Egypt and satisfying their basic needs. About nine-tenths of migrants declared that the main thing that they do with money that they save is to support their families. A proportion of single migrants tend to save the money to support themselves. One of the parents in Upper Egypt said to me about his migrant son in Cairo: *'I don't need anything from him. I just want him to satisfy his own needs and prepare himself for marriage. Being responsible for his own expenses is an asset to me. God bless him.'* In fact, many young migrants consider their work in Cairo or in another major city as a good opportunity to save for marriage expenses. One fourth of the migrants save money to cover – or make a contribution to – marriage expenses. Building a new house, or adding a new housing unit to the family's house, is regarded as the main catalyst to save money. One fourth of migrants save to build a house. Other plans are to educate children, buy land, buy home appliances and durable goods.

***Remittance use and allocation: findings from the village***

My visits to migrants' houses in selected villages in Souhag governorate enabled me to see and discuss with migrants' families how they invest – in some cases spend – the remittances of their family members' migration experience. The visits shed further light also on the decisions regarding the expenditure or investment of such remittances. The following are some extracts from interviews I conducted; they show both the use of migrant remittances and also the very frugal lives of rural folk in Upper Egypt, even those receiving remittances from the city.

*“The few pounds that he (the husband) sends can barely meet the needs of both the house and the children in these terrible expensive days. Can you imagine that my children are spending about three pounds a day for just buying their sweets, biscuits, and silly things?”* said one of the migrants' wives. *‘Suppose then that we have a few pounds saved after spending most of the money on the house and the children. That helps us buy a little goat and raise it at home, feeding it with the left-overs of our food. We can occasionally beg for some bundles of green food for the animals from the neighbors next door. We then become able to sell it and start again and buy a little goat again. Tell you what, the little change we get hardly makes us lead a comfortable life, let alone for a feast, an occasion, or even buying the children a uniform for the new school year;’* said another wife. It is clear that the consumption patterns have changed somewhat due to the husband's migration, although the ways in which they have changed clearly differ from family to family, as the above examples show. Spending three LE per day just for children's sweets is regarded by other families in the village as insanity and a bad allocation of expenditure. On the other hand, some migrants allocate resources better than others. The family who bought a goat and raised it at home follow a common and prevailing model of animal and livestock raising, whereby families buy little animals, raise them, sell them, buy another little one, and get benefit from the price difference between the raised animal and the newly purchased ones. Here is another good example of this practice.

*“We have been raising a calf over the past for two years till the time came and we sold it for 3,000 Egyptian Pounds, which we spent completely on building these two rooms by the entrance of the house as you can see,”* said one of the migrants who was on a visit to the village. *“Last summer, work in Cairo was fine, my husband told me. He*

*earned good money and bought us a fan, a color TV and some clothes for the children and me. But we are now back to the same status as if nothing happened... he is staying now in Cairo and whenever he saves some money he sends it to us,”* said another of the migrants' wives. Building a house, enhancing housing conditions, and/or purchasing housing equipment and durables are some of the main aspects of expenditure and investment of remittances.

*“My two sons are in Cairo. Thank God, they are working well. It is true that I only see them once a month but this is better for them than staying here doing nothing. We don't have farmland or anything here in the village, and jobs are not available, as you may know. The two of them have secondary technical school. When they send me money, I save it for them. My eldest son plans for marriage. We are preparing his flat now in the upper floor. God willing, his wedding ceremony will take place during the next religious feast”* said a parent of two migrant laborers in Cairo. It is clear that one of the most important expenditure items from remittances is covering the cost of marriage, which is very expensive in Egypt. Usually, parents are responsible for the preparation of their sons' marriage. They start accumulating money to cover the marriage expenses of their sons from the money that they send. If parents in the village have enough money to cover their – and their young children's – expenses they save the whole amount that their sons send for marriage expenses; if not, they save some and spend some.

On the other hand, where families are very big and access to land is limited, even migrant remittances may not be sufficient to properly sustain the entire household, as the following testimony demonstrates. *“Conditions are not like they were in the past. My son is working in Cairo and his brothers and I are working in our field and in other peoples' fields as we only have a small amount of land. We are not supporting my sons, their children and their wives. We are 19 persons at home. What on earth could satisfy them all? May God help us, my son”.*

The houses that I visited in the villages of my fieldwork are not markedly different from the other houses in the village. I visited very good houses, well built, with water supplies, electricity, electrical devices, fans, washing machines, refrigerators and the walls painted very nicely. On the other hand, I visited some very poor houses, with crumbling mud or flimsy hardboard walls. However, what was common among all the

rural households I visited with member(s) of such families who work in Cairo is that they have something different. That “something different” consists of things which are easily observable as bought from Cairo – smarter children's clothes, or household goods and equipment.

I have also noticed that **women's status** and cooperation in work have increased, as she is now representing the absent migrant husband and the rest of her family in dealing with others, like other relatives and neighbors or representatives of government agencies. As for the families which own farmland, I observed that wives work in the family's farmland with the other male members of the family (or even without them) in order to reduce expenses and not to hire external workers. Although women have traditionally been closely involved in the integrated rural economy of the domestic household and the farm holding, it does seem that the migration of men has two effects in this regard: first it imposes extra burdens of responsibility and rural work on the women; and second it lessens the strong patriarchal control over women's behavior, decision-making, and physical movement outside the house.

## **FAMILY, POPULATION ISSUES,**

### **Migration and fertility**

The temporary and/or seasonal migration of one of the spouses – husbands in this study – affects the fertility outcomes of rural wives through two main inhibiting factors, one biological and the other socio-cultural. The biological factor is that the temporary absence of the husband reduces his wife's exposure to the risk of pregnancy and therefore decreases the duration of women's reproductive span which is assumed to affect her fertility outcomes. The socio-cultural factor – as I mentioned in the introduction of this section – is the hypothesis that migrants' exposure to modernization and new social patterns in urban areas will affect their awareness of family planning, the value of children, and their attitudes regarding their childbearing intentions and outcomes.

### **Current fertility and fertility preferences of respondents**

#### ***Number of surviving children by sex***

I hypothesize that fertility among migrants is expected to be less than their other counterparts in Upper Egypt. This assumption would be due to the abstinence caused by

the husband's migration which decreases the wife's exposure to the risk of pregnancy, as well as the man's exposure to the urban lifestyle where smaller families are the norm compared to rural areas, as I mentioned earlier in this chapter.

Out of the ever-married population (107 cases), 85 percent have children while only 15 percent did not have children yet. As expected, the mean number of children increases by age. It reaches its peak in the age group 45–49 which may be regarded as the completed or the cumulative fertility (5.6 living children). The equivalent mean number of surviving children for rural Upper Egypt region is 4.5 living children. This means that migrant laborers actually have more children than their village counterparts, which contradicts my assumption in which I hypothesized that migrant laborers would have less fertility than their counterparts in rural Upper Egypt because of their exposure to modernization and urban lifestyle in Cairo.

Some elements of an explanation of these apparently counterintuitive findings can be quite easily found. Migrants do not represent the average rural Upper Egypt residents. They are less educated than their counterparts in the village. Also they are the poorest, and it is precisely this poverty, often linked to landless and large families, which motivated them to migrate. Also, they do not live a complete social life in Cairo. They feel that they are marginalized and they re-enforce this marginalization to some extent by rejecting the urban lifestyle and trying to keep within their own networks and communities in Cairo.

An alternative explanation for migrants' higher than expected fertility relates to the increased material well-being that migrants' remittances bring to the family "basket of resources" to sustain and reproduce itself. Given this increased financial input, migrants may feel able to have more children than they would have had without this extra income supplement.

### ***Fertility preferences***

Some 57 percent of the migrant laborers did not reach their desired family size yet. They would like to have more children. Upper Egyptians tend to prefer boys rather than girls. This may be partly due to the harsh life in Upper Egypt that makes it difficult for women to be fully integrated in economic activities, and to old traditions that



marginalize the role of females in income generation and taking care of family. This is clear from the migrants' responses to the question regarding the desired number of children by sex. The mean desired number of males is 3.8 versus 1.7 for females. The desired number of male children is therefore more than twice the desired number of female children. The overall desired number of children is 5.6, which is higher than the current TFR of the rural Upper Egypt region.

### **Family dynamics and children's education**

In this section I shed some light on a variety of aspects regarding the relation between generations among migrants' households and their impact on migrants' social security and related perspectives. This includes a discussion on children's education and gender (in)equality, the value of children through their enrollment in work at early ages, and further discussion on the expected benefits of children in the future as a means of social insurance for parents when they grow old.

#### ***Child labor***

Child labor is considered one of the factors that weakens the family planning program efforts in rural areas in Egypt. Child labor makes children possess an economic value to the family instead of being regarded as an economic burden.

With respect to the study population, it is noticed that their children start work at an early age. Females start work at 9.6 years old and males start at 11.5 years old.

#### ***Children's education***

Migrants' wishes and desires regarding their children's education may reflect the high value of education perceived by those whose own school backgrounds put them in the category of the less educated group of people. In the interviews and the case studies, I consistently felt that migrants partially attribute their unsatisfactory work experience in Cairo to their illiteracy and low level of education. As a reaction they wish to enable their own children to avoid being exposed to experiences like their own. This may explain the somewhat optimistic desires regarding their kids' education. More than two-thirds of migrants would like their sons to achieve technical secondary or university level education. With respect to daughters, the percent slightly decreases to about 60 percent. The uncertainty factors made about 25 percent of parents say that their

children's level of education will depend on circumstances. Sex preference made a few migrants (only 13 cases) to prefer not to educate their daughters at all. Their reasons are interesting. Seven migrants said that they are not willing to educate their daughters because of the moral corruption at schools and universities. Two respondents mentioned that they do not have money to educate females; they can educate males only. It is important to mention here that the migrants' region of origin is considered one of the most conservative and male-dominated parts of Egypt. Being exposed to modernization made a few migrants react by holding on and keeping their own norms and traditions and applying them to their families restrictively. This may be a reactive strategy to keep their identity as rural Upper Egyptians.

### ***Children and social insurance***

In expanded families in Upper Egypt and in rural Egypt in general, children are always expected to help their parents when they grow old. A great proportion of parents expect to live with their children when they grew old in rural. With respect to the population under investigation, I found that 91.8 percent of them expect their children to help them financially when they grow old, while 73.2 percent expect to live with their children when they grow old. This means that the prevailing pattern of extended families and households is expected to continue for another generation, or more, in rural Upper Egypt. Parents' expectations may also shed light on the weakness of social insurance system in Egypt. This system tends to work against the poor.

## **PLANS FOR THE FUTURE**

The narrative so far has mainly looked at various facts and facets of migrants' lives and experiences recounted retrospectively and evaluatively. In this section I explore migrants' future plans, paying particular attention to their awareness of national projects, their plans for staying in Cairo, and their overall evaluation of their migratory experience. Particularly when I deal with future plans and the return to the village, I will draw on extracts of conversations I had with some of my interviewees.

### ***Awareness of national development projects***

Toshka project was the most known project among migrant laborers, 94.2 percent of whom knew about it. The main sources of information were friends (42.6 percent) and the television (41.4 percent). About two-thirds of those who had heard about Toshka

expressed their willingness to work in this project if job opportunities for them are available there. Those who are not willing to work in Toshka have their own reasons. Some of them see it easier for them to seek work in Cairo, where they are acquainted with the nature of work and work relations. *‘Toshka is very far from my village and there is no regular transportation between Menia – my governorate – and Toshka,’* said one migrant laborer. *‘They deceive us by saying that Toshka will provide a lot of job opportunities. The government sold the land to private sector investors. They want us to work on a monthly basis for 150 pounds per month. I went to Toshka seeking work and when I found it like that I returned to my village straightaway. In addition the weather there is very hot and living conditions are very difficult’* said another migrant laborer, this one from Assiut. My general comment on migrants' reservations regarding working in Toshka is that it will take time – perhaps a decade or more – to expect that such new areas might become destinations for rural laborers' internal migration. Investment in infrastructure, especially roads and transportation, between the old valley and the new projects is very important. Improving living conditions in the new areas is also a must. Potential migrants may not go to new areas only for job opportunities, they also might expect better living conditions or, at the very least, conditions which are no worse than at home or in the traditional destinations in Cairo, Alexandria etc.

Out of those who expressed their willingness to work in new projects, only 19 percent are also willing to take their families with them. Other migrants mentioned that initially they would probably prefer to migrate alone. If conditions were then to allow taking family, they may think of bringing the family later. This pattern is common in Egyptian migration, both internal and external; the head of the family in most cases migrates alone first, then if conditions allow for bringing the family, the head of the family prepares relevant housing for his family and they may follow him after one or two months. This has been the case of many migrants to the Arab Gulf countries.

Awareness of the other three mega-projects was found to be very low, only 14.5 percent for the Oweinat project, 2.1 percent for East Port-Said, and just 0.4 percent (one case) for the Gulf of Suez project.

### **Plans for staying in Cairo**

When leaving the village, few migrants envisage living the rest of their lives in the city. But, with the passage of years, and with the strengthening of urban bonds the position may change.

With respect to my study population and, 61.2 percent of them intend to return to the village, while 38.8 percent intend to stay in Cairo. When they were asked about the expected duration of their stay in Cairo, migrants who intend to return to the village failed to give time frames for their plans of return. Out of the 148 migrant laborers who intend to return, only 20 migrants set a time estimate for their return to the village. Duration before returning to the village ranges between less than one year and eight years. The remaining number of migrants gave non-numerical answers to this question, such as "*it depends on circumstances*", or said they would return after achieving specific monetary goals or finding profitable or permanent jobs in the village. My personal feeling is that migrants keep in mind the intention to possibly return as a strategy to maintain their psychological balance while being in Cairo, leaving room for hopeful improvements of economic conditions in their village or town of origin. Implementation of their plans seems, however, to be much less realistic than they may believe.

### **International migration intentions**

International migration to the Gulf countries still remains the migratory dream that Upper Egyptian laborers hope to realize. This is so even though the objective conditions in the Gulf States have changed somewhat. After the Second Gulf War and the deterioration of Gulf economies and revenues, plus the tendency among those countries to nationalize the labor force by replacing foreigners by national workers, and the strong streams of competing migrants from Asia who were willing to accept lower wages, the opportunities that remained for Egyptian unskilled laborers became less than before. The Gulf employers tend to prefer to import unskilled laborers from Asia, and skilled laborers from Arab countries because of the language aspect. However, the general level of education, training and skills possessed by potential labor migrants from Upper Egypt has tended to fail to measure up to what, in the post-Gulf War period, is demanded.

Recruitment agencies in Cairo that are specialized in announcing and screening applicants for jobs in the Gulf now follow much more restrictive rules than before in the selection of less skilled employees. The amount of fees and commissions that these agents take prohibit a great proportion of Egyptians from applying for jobs in the Gulf. Meanwhile, the average monthly salary for an unskilled laborer in Saudi Arabia, for example, has decreased from 3,000 Saudi Riyals to 600 nowadays. Regarding the study population, I found that more than nine-tenths (90.9 percent) of migrant laborers in Cairo are in principle eager to find any job opportunity in richer Arab countries. The preferred destination is the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which 56.8 percent of laborers prefer. Kuwait ranks second with a much lower 18.2 percent, then come the United Arab Emirates, Libya, Iraq, and Jordan. However, this intention and willingness to emigrate abroad is tempered by the reality of the practical and financial difficulties of this ever happening.

### ***Migrants' evaluation of their migratory experience in Cairo***

Migrants' evaluations can be divided into three groups: those who see that their migration experience is predominantly positive, those who see it as mainly negative, and those who see both the positive and the negative sides of their experience.

Among the positive responses come the appreciation of the good times that they spend in Cairo and the higher incomes that they earn there (38.8 percent of the migrants). Migrants feel that Cairo is *'better than the village and far from troubles'* in the village. Migrants appreciate their stay in Cairo because they can make their livelihood, get to know new people and be able to do their duties towards their families. Young migrants felt they learned self-reliance, saving money, and determination. When moving to the other side of the evaluation, the police and the instability of urban life come as the most common expressions of migrants' unhappiness with their stay in Cairo. However, it can be easily noticed from the negative evaluations of migrants' experience in Cairo that there is no overriding reason for their dissatisfaction with their stay in Cairo. Migrants mentioned that they stay against their will, and that they see their stay in Cairo as a humiliation. Work conditions are harsh and they are insulted and hassled by the policemen, but they have to stay to be able to take care of their families. One interesting response among the "negatives" of staying and working in Cairo, mentioned by five migrants, is that *'Cairo people have no ethics.'* Those who acknowledged the balance

between the positive and the negative of their stay are few, but I believe that they are more realistic than those who mentioned one side of the coin only. The bottom part of the table spells out the phrases that were most often used by those who took a more middle-of-the-road view of their Cairo migration experience.

One of my more talkative interviewees, Ali, gives a typical summary of some of the good and bad points of being in Cairo: *“Indeed, living in Cairo is fascinating. Most people here are kind, however there are also some bad people... What is good is to find a place to settle in, what is bad is that there are just too many people living in this city. I have worked for a lot of people, and sometimes when I have done with my job, they refuse to pay me my wage, so I had to keep claiming for it. What is good also about working here is that working here for three or four days a week is better than staying jobless in my village.”*

### **Migrants' long-term aims and goals**

The aims of most migrant laborers that were surveyed are very modest. The utmost aim of migrants is to find a permanent source of income that can ensure sufficient resources to take care of family and other dependents. The methods of achieving such income vary from one migrant to another but the aim is the same. The main source of a permanent income – as viewed by migrants – is to run their own business or project (30.5 percent). Ali, again, had clear ideas about this, although one senses that his ideas are born out of hope rather than serious expectation of success: *“Capital is the backbone to launch any business... I pray God to enable me to have my own business, such as a small grocery, or at least get employed in a permanent job. I got my high school diploma in 1990, and I want to find a proper career job... My wishes for the future include having a small business of my own, or getting employed in a civil service job in my home governorate.”* Fakhry was also dreaming of a similar outcome: *“I am dreaming of making a business of my own in my hometown, a small shop by which I can do some trading. Also building a nice house. At present I only have a very small place, with no fixed walls... its walls are made of cardboard, with no electricity.”*

Getting a state service job is another alternative to ensure a small but stable and continuous income. As I mentioned before, the average monthly income of a government employee is only 200 LE. Even some migrant laborers obtaining a higher

level of income, that may even be double the government income, expressed their eagerness to get any government job for that income because of its stability. Also, working hours in the government enables employees to do other jobs or to run micro-business which can obviously help in pushing monthly income up. As previous accounts have shown, many migrants mentioned to me that if they had a government job in the village they would be able to save their expenditure of living in Cairo and also they would be able to run small activities or rear animals and livestock at home at the same time. The government salary is regarded – by migrants – as the minimum guaranteed monthly income. In addition they could get the benefit of other government services such as health and social insurance.

I realized that some of these people may not have long-term or even short-term plans for the future. They live their time as it is without thinking of the future and maybe without realizing that their behavior today may affect their behavior and opportunities in the future. This may be attributed, in part, to their low education level and their low status, professionally speaking. So it is important to bear in mind once again that the study population do not represent the Upper Egyptian migrants in general or in their totality, but rather the large specific proportion of that migration flow which is composed of unskilled labor migration.

### **CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION:**

As I mentioned at the outset of this study, my aim in this study has been to analyze in depth one strategy of action that is taken by many young men in rural Egypt to deal with the harsh life and limited opportunities that they face in their villages, namely rural–urban migration. Whether to call this phenomenon rural–urban migration, or something else (to-and-fro movement, circulation, etc.) has been a continuing dilemma throughout this research. In this section I will focus on the economic aspects of rural–urban migration and research findings as related to the processes of modernization and development in Egypt.

The results of the study show that the motives for migrating are overwhelmingly economic and linked to the support and survival of the family base in the village. Key migration factors are unemployment, very low incomes, lack of rural job opportunities, landlessness and bad living conditions in rural Upper Egypt. Cairo offers higher wages, more regular

work, a more exciting life (for some) and, most important of all, the chance to remit cash in order to support family members at home in the village. Migration thus improves the material quality of life for rural families and contributes to poverty alleviation, at least in part. For many rural laborers working in Cairo, migration is a waiting game until they can find permanent and more secure job opportunities in their villages, especially in the public sector. However, for many, such hopes are illusory and hence to-and-fro migration will continue. Meanwhile the construction sector in Cairo is crucially dependent on Upper Egyptian laborers who provide a cheap and flexible source of labor for this burgeoning activity.

### ***Policy reflections***

The relation between population movements and development is reciprocal. It is not only migration that affects development and contributes to modernization, but also development affects the nature and direction of migration streams and their magnitude. In this respect, migration is part of the socio-economic development of any country. Considering both urban and rural areas as well as different regions in Egypt in formulating policies that affect internal migration and population redistribution is a must. To regard industrialization as the panacea of Egypt's development is no longer a credible policy stance. Policies and plans should be formulated in order to achieve the more balanced structure that would enable residents in rural and non-metropolitan areas to get access to the benefits of socio-economic development. Rural poverty alleviation schemes will help to reduce the migration streams from rural to urban areas. They will help also to re-unite families whose historic pattern has been one of having the head of the family work in Cairo and leave the family in the village.

An effective migration policy for a country like Egypt should be to ensure that migratory moves are a) not driven by rural frustration and rural-urban inequality; b) directed towards a range of smaller and intermediate urban settlements and away from very large urban agglomerations; c) slowed down to a pace which avoids social and economic disruption, either in origin or destination; and d) shaped in such a way that migration does not have the effect of transferring a problem from one place to another.



**Direct and forced measures of influencing internal migration should not be used.**

They are against Egyptian law and human rights. Rural development is among the key policy options that may contribute to the reduction of the potential flow of rural labor to urban areas. Rural development includes the following types of interventions:

- Rural industrialization and establishing small-scale, labor-intensive industries.
- Developing micro-credit schemes and participatory funding of labor-intensive activities and especially handicrafts.
- Supporting the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in their developing of training schemes for the surplus population of agriculture.
- Control of population growth in order to reduce the pressure on public services and to slow down the unemployment rates in the future.

Parallel to the rural development approach is the need to promote potential internal migration destinations, such as Toshka and the other new development projects, and to explain to the public more effectively the potentials of these new areas with respect to job opportunities, living conditions, services and facilities.

Due to the current economic situation in Egypt and the over-population pressures on public expenditure and the high levels of unemployment in both urban and rural districts, I see that the government of Egypt is not capable in the short run to go for a massive rural poverty alleviation strategy. However, the second option in the listing, which is the promotion of potential alternative internal migration destinations, is more feasible. The private sector and multinational companies, besides the government, have managed to establish new communities that can absorb part of the surplus of the agricultural sector. This promotion of new urban development outside of the heavily-urbanized Nile Delta region will help to diffuse and decentralize internal migration patterns away from the main metropolitan destinations.

With respect to the future national research agenda of population studies in Egypt, it is clear that in the last two to three decades migration research was an almost missing aspect of demographic and geographic research. The study of the other two factors of population growth, fertility and mortality, gained the great proportion of research

interests and funding by population scholars, sociologists and demographers. **The funding priorities of the international donors directed most of the funds towards research on family planning, fertility, infant and child morbidity and mortality, and reproductive health.** Population geographers' and sociologists' potential contributions to research on internal migration were neglected. After releasing the data of each population census, demographers have produced a few research papers that skim over the internal migration issue and deal with it mathematically rather than in-depth. As is well-known, the census data on rural-urban migration usually underestimate the real volume of movement, so that the summary findings of demographic research do not reflect the real nature and scale of rural-urban migration in Egypt.