

HIC-HLRN MENA Regional Land Forum V  
Tunisia 5-7 December 2014  
Peasant Solidarity Committee- Egypt

### **The agriculture deterioration in Egypt and disregard for peasant organizing in the context of World Bank and FAO policies**

At the outset, we would like to recall that agricultural progress in any society is not only planting seeds in the ground, tending them and harvesting crops. The role of peasants and their future does not stop as a simply a professional career, but exceeds to involvement at all levels, such as agricultural policy, influencing the national policy decisions and supporting strong and independent union representation as the “driving force” for support peasants and the support of effective nongovernmental cooperatives. Peasant groups should have a critical role in empowering their communities to take part in decision-making processes.

Peasants are the only group in Egypt that is legally deprived of establishing independent unions, as the government continues to intervene in the establishment, formation, and management of productive cooperatives. These interventions and undemocratic processes have stripped cooperatives of the vast majority of membership (approximately 75%), which primarily constitute the poor, small-scale farmers. This increases vulnerability as they lack groups and tools to defend their livelihoods.

The state has imposed policies and implemented several laws and ministerial resolutions against the rights of peasants through economic/agricultural liberalization policies and restructuring which have guided Egyptian economic policies since former president Sadat in 1974, and thus far include:

1. Lifting the sequestration policy which provided land redistribution and access for peasants;
2. Expelling many small-scale farmers through the new rent act 96/1992 which increased the rental price of agricultural lands;
3. Establishing extraordinary courts (court of values) to expel farmers from their lands;
4. Considering peasants who owned less than 3 acres of land as non-farmers and expelling them from cooperative membership and services;
5. Repealing acts that supported small-scale farmers and agriculture, or implement policy modifications that work against their interests such as agriculture rotation, agrarian reform, cooperation, credit, guidance, and marketing;
6. Lifting subsidies on agricultural production supplies, fuel, and loan benefits, as well as increasing taxes;
7. Leaving the price of crops to be prey to market forces.

These factors have lead to increased agricultural production cost and decreased profits, forcing many peasants to leave or sell their lands. This has caused

damage to small-scale production in Egypt which constitutes 85% of agricultural land area, and rather favors intensive and large-scale farmers, owners and investors.

The World Bank has overseen the implementation of agricultural liberalization and restructuring policies in the international conference on “Egyptian Agriculture Strategy in the Nineties” held in 1992, at the International Center for Agriculture in Cairo, in cooperation with the IMF, FAO, the United States Agency for International Development, the Common European Market, UNDP, Ford Foundation, the US council of Wheat, the Canadian Agency for International Development, Canadian Project “Sem-Arab”, and the German Aid Programme, with the presence of many Egyptian political and agriculture bodies. The conference adopted several resolutions, including:

- State disengagement in its executive role in agriculture production and is confined to planning processes;
- State renunciation of providing production supplies, distribution, pricing and support services;
- Opening of the way for the private sector in trade of production supplies;
- Lift on all many subsidies, including those related to agricultural loans;
- Deregulation of agricultural trade.

In addition to the problems previously listed, there have been significant issues related to the (mis)use of water resources, as water for agriculture has been used for maintaining resorts, golf courses and swimming pools, while the peasants are often forced to use waste water to irrigate their lands, which has lead to spread the Kidney failure. Additionally, the use of internationally banned pesticides that poison lands and crops with chemical carcinogens are contributing to the spread of public health issues in Egyptian villages, especially hepatitis and various types of cancer.

The ministry of agriculture has violated the agriculture law in order to grant agriculture supplies to land owners, despite the fact that many are not engaged in agricultural activities, while depriving those who actually cultivate the land. With the state refusing to market peasant crops, the local market-value decreased,; and without a union they were unable to export or trade the products, as the government cooperatives would not assist them. Many crops were stored for long periods and lost their value, and crops such as corn and cotton suffered a price collapse; many workers became unemployed and displaced.

Concurrently, the agricultural ministers stripped the cooperatives from the small-scale farmers and transfered them to the union of the agricultural laborers to prevent them from accessing agricultural supplies and equipment, and rather provided these inputs to the large-scale farmers to support intensive agriculture and large farms.

During the Sadat era the central union of cooperatives was eliminated and its properties and headquarters were confiscated. The public body of agriculture cooperation was eliminated, while the agricultural lending bank transformed into a commercial bank and doubled the benefits of the agriculture benefits several times. The maximum limit on property was increased from 300 acres to 3000 acres, and land was distributed primarily for large-scale farm operations. This is the policy that has been conducted since 1974.

The agriculture ministers represent their countries in FAO, and we don't know if they conduct in their country specific policies and show other policies in the FAO meetings? Or if the FAO has complete information regarding the violations against the Egyptian peasants and how they have suffered? Also, the World Bank, IMF and other agriculture and financial international bodies were have a sort of supervisory role in implementing the liberalization of agriculture policy that has affected the vast majority of peasants.

In conclusion, when peasants are involved in daily disputes with the state, banks, traders, private sectors, large-scale farmers, and the livelihood needs, they cannot find the opportunity to develop themselves. They are peasants without trade unions, independent cooperatives, and deprived from access to the agriculture supplies; they become peasants in the documents not on the grounds.

We always read about the breaches committed by the governments of developing countries to the international human rights instruments. How can we believe that the international organizations are unaware of their breaches in the Egyptian agriculture sector including within the unions and cooperatives? Can we mention for these international organizations such as FAO, World Bank, and IMF an affirmative proposal they present to the Egyptian peasants? Or to be more precise, is it possible that Egyptian agriculture and peasants are facing disaster and one of these international bodies are not involved? I doubt this very much.

December 2014  
Basheer Saqr  
Peasant Solidarity Committee- Egypt