

Population Problems in Egypt⁽¹⁾

The High Dependency Ratio, A Challenge for Economic Development

Egypt shares with other Arab countries the problem of the raised dependency ratio, a problem that results from a variety of factors: 1) the high birth rate, 2) the increasing numbers of the elderly, 3) the unemployment of a large number of young males and 4) a number of women who, for one reason or another, leave their jobs.

The percentage of dependents increased from 58% in 1937 to 66% in 1979, due to the following reasons:

1. Increased education for the young.
2. Decreased number of employed people, six years and above, because of the decreasing death rate.
3. Increased numbers of children below six.

Low Participation of Women in the Labour Force: 1.4 – 1.9% of the total population, compared to 22.7–23.8% for males in 1960 and 1976 respectively.

The actual dependency ratio⁽³⁾ reached 236% in 1960. The ratio was 132% for children, 8.1% for the elderly and 95.9% for the unemployed individuals considered in the labor force. Most of the latter group were females.

During the last ten years, there has been a slow drop in the actual dependency ratio, from 269% to 173%. This is due to the drop in birth rate and the increased participation of women in the work force. However, the gain is insignificant because of the low average income in Egypt: 5% of that in industrialized countries. Although the income seems to have increased in the last 20 years from 49.5 to 143.7 L.E., it has actually decreased due to the increase in prices.

- a) Consequences of the high dependency ratios:
 - Low individual income.
 - Low standard of living.
 - Decreased job opportunities due to low investment.
 - Deterioration of the national economy.
- b) Elements of the problem:
 - High birth rate.
 - Low level of education leading to more unemployment.

- Increased number of the elderly.
- Low individual average income.
- Underemployment of those who work in agriculture with their families.

Management of the Problem

- Decreasing the birth rate.
- Increasing the education level and industrialization.
- Creation of new training centers for youth to detract them from early marriage.
- Creation of social-care centers where women can be trained for productive jobs.
- Creation of rural industries with adjoint training centers.
- Providing housewives with facilities for outside work: day-care centers for children and adequate maternity leaves.

(1) Condensed from Population Studies, 9th year, no. 61, April - June 1981, **Population Problems in Egypt** by Mohamed El-Motassem Moustapha Ahmed, pp. 31-36.

(2) See "Demographic Structure of the Lebanese Population" by Francois Farah, in **Al-Raida** Feb. 1, 1983, Vol. VI, no. 23, p. 8.

(3) Actual dependency ratio =
$$\frac{\text{Actual young age dependents} + \text{old age dependents} + \text{no. of unemployed male and female at employment age} \times 100}{\text{no. of employed individuals above 6 years of age}}$$

Stereotyped Language and Creative Language⁽¹⁾

In this article Claude Talahite⁽²⁾ insists that words are important, in that they are able to fashion people and create a whole world. Every time we take hold of a word we have power in our hands.

According to the author, language may be utilized in two ways: slavish repetition of stereotypes (cliches), or creation of a new language. The first is a passive discourse; the second is active.

Examples of stereotyped language connected with the discourse on women:

"By the side of man", "our women", "honest women", "woman is dangerous", "people will talk".

What do these phrases evoke? What connotations do they imply?

"By the side of man" suggests that woman's place is beside a man, that she depends on him, struggles

Apology to Children ⁽¹⁾

O children of the world
 How great is your innocence!
 My skin will serve you as a cover!
 Pardon me
 I own nothing but torn up skin.
 In the holes of silence
 I own nothing but silence
 Climbing over the side of time.
 Pardon,
 My words shiver
 For the standing sword
 Is ready to fall
 On the heads of words,
 The prison cell
 With a widely open mouth
 Frightens me.
 O children of the world
 O children of my country
 O my child
 (I am afraid)
 That my song of love
 Will fall on the road,
 Unable to reach you,
 The whip of the executioner
 Will eat up my lip.
 Prevent it from singing you
 The song of falling rain
 and rising sun ..
 Pardon ..
 Is it enough to give you my heart
 And make of my mortal body
 A bridge of time?

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(1) Translated from the Arabic.