



## **Curbing Green Corruption Through Civic Engagement**

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As the international community sets its course toward creating green environments and mitigating the impacts of climate change, Egypt has potently engaged in the green growth plan by setting in motion numerous nationwide initiatives, including Sustainable Development Strategy: Egypt Vision 2030; National Strategy for Cleaner Production in Egyptian Industry; and Towards a National Strategy for Sustainable Development. Egypt also ratified the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), and the Kyoto Protocol in an attempt to decrease greenhouse emissions on its end. (Osama, 2019) However, these efforts seem to be undermined particularly in the agricultural sector in Upper Egypt, which has been greatly susceptible to climate change. (El Mowla and Abdelaziz, 2020) This is largely due to poor governance and over-centralization of local (municipal) administrations, as well as ineffective anti-corruption agencies and regulations in Upper Egypt. (El Menofi et al., 2014) This paper argues that traditional acts of corruption do not only hamper socio-economic development plans in the rural sector, but also result in “green corruption,” which is defined as private gains in agribusiness that are made at the expense of the environment. (Di Cortemiglia and Pauwels, 2016). As a result, this triggers economic, human, social and environmental insecurity, while disrupting economic development and investment efforts within the agrarian sector. (Di Cortemiglia and Pauwels, 2016).

### **Poor governance, weak local administration and green corruption**

The World Bank defines governance as effective, efficient and transparent public management of economic and social resources for development by State institutions, in the presence of an anticipated and translucent framework of rules, regulations, and policies, as they help reinforce the integration and coordination necessary to achieve sustainable development. (El Menofi et al., 2014).

The rural areas in Egypt, however, reflect poor governance due to lack of coordination and collaboration between relevant entities and stakeholders, be it capital, financial, natural or human resources. (El Menofi et al., 2014). This is due to a complex, weak, and overly centralized local administration system compounded by fragile follow-up, underperforming systems that rely on nepotism rather than merits in the hiring and retention of employees. (El Menofi et al., 2014) As a result, this precipitates corruption in various forms, most evidently nepotism, and bribery for the issuance of permits and licenses that lead to the exploitation or theft of natural resources, as well as the facilitation of business operations that stimulate private gains. (Gamal El-Din, et. al, 2018)

Corruption therefore affects “land title and use, credit availability, quality of supplies, water allocation, product standards and certification, marketing, and the development of agribusinesses,” (Fink 2002, 1) thus sabotaging economic and social development, while wasting government spending and depleting public services. (Fink, 2002).

For example, an official source from the Ministry of Local Development (MoLD) reported that he encountered a robbery incident related to the sale of sanitary drainage pipes. The pipes were sold at “4,700 EGP per pipe” (Gamal el-Din 2018), despite an original official estimated cost of “2,500 EGP each”.(Gamal el-Din 2018) This not only cost the government “245 million EGP” due to theft of public resources, but also hindered farmers’ access to drainage systems due to high pricing. (Gamal el-Din 2018). This prevents them from disposing of excess water that limits the establishment of an environment fit for plant nurturement, and greater productivity of crops yield. (Gamal el-Din 2018).

A similar issue is seen with regards to quality. The local administration has allowed the sale of poor-quality sewage pipes by private companies in return for bribes. (Gamal el-Din 2018). This leads to the depletion of the physical and chemical properties of soil and the loss of air inside the pores of the soil decelerating the oxidation of organic materials, thus changing it into a water-repellent soil that is no longer good for cultivation. (El-Nashar, 2017).

Furthermore, the acceptance of bribes by officials for the issuance of building and factory permits on agricultural lands is another significant form of green corruption. In light of weak monitoring systems, poor governance, absence of rule of law, and the inability to deter and penalize violations by the local administration, over the past nine years, has resulted in “2 million” (El Youm 7, 2020) construction infractions on agricultural lands, posing major threats to Egypt’s agricultural production and development under the banner of urbanization, mismanagement of resources, nepotism, and incompetence. (Gonzales de-Asis, 2000)

### **The Ramifications of Green Corruption**

In Egypt, agriculture directly accounts for about 2.57 million tons of carbon, representing 1.25% of the total greenhouse gas emissions for different sectors in 2017/2018. (El Mowla, 2020) Furthermore, Egypt ranked 107 out of 181 countries in the 2019 ND-GAIN Index, according to which countries with lower scores show more susceptibility to climate change. (Reliefweb, 2021) Causes of greenhouse emissions in the agrarian sector encompass deforestation or degradation of terrestrial ecosystems; biodiversity loss; machine-intensive cultivation methods; accelerated soil erosion and loss of soil organic matter, all of which exacerbate carbon concentrations in the atmosphere and induce climate change. (Intergovernmental Panel On Climate Change, 2019). This is largely due to the misuse of agricultural lands and other public resources as a result of unsustainable and poor management practices reinforced by the lack of governance, and incompetence of the administrative (municipality) system. (Elmenofi, 2014.)

Climate change is menacing since it causes food and water insecurity, socio-economic inequality, poverty, and climate change-related conflict over resources or climate wars. According to the UNFCCC, climate change studies anticipate that the yield of Egypt's two major crops: wheat and maize, will diminish by "15%" and "19%" respectively by 2050 due to "frequent temperature increase, a deficit of irrigation water, and plant disease." (UNFCCC 2021, 5) This takes away from the strains of efforts put in sustaining socio-economic development, and hence pose major threats to the national security of Egypt, given its immensely growing population and their rising associated demand, coupled with the constraints of a finite resource base. (World Resources Institute, 2013)

## **The Legal Context**

Green initiatives alone cannot decrease greenhouse emissions in the agricultural sector. In fact, the execution of such initiatives requires strong anti-corruption mechanisms, and more hands-on, civil participatory tactics to monitor and combat regular corruption that leads to green corruption. In this vein, a plethora of laws, executive orders, and strategies were established with the purpose of curbing corruption, including Egypt's Penal Code (art. 103), which penalizes corrupt individuals with "permanent hard labour and a fine of not less than one thousand pounds and not exceeding the donation or the promise he (she) was given". (Egypt Today, 2019) Similarly, the national anti-corruption strategy was developed by the National Coordinating Committee for Combating Corruption, which demands public officials disclose their assets while assuming their government positions "at the end of their term and every 2-5 years during their mandate." (Egypt Today, 2019).

Numerous agencies and committees were also set up to monitor and follow up on regulations and systems, uncovering the shortcomings in the administrative, technical, and financial systems, as well as the corrupt behavior of individuals, including the Illicit Gains Authority and the Administrative Control Authority. Nonetheless, corruption cases are still part and parcel of daily business life in Egypt. Nonetheless, in 2020, Egypt ranked 117 out of 180 (1 being "very clean" and 180 being "highly corrupt"), in Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index. (Transparency, 2020) This is largely attributed to "the poor enforcement of laws, as well as the weak regulatory mechanisms that exist." (GAN Integrity, 2020)

## **Recommendations**

Addressing the shortcomings of the institutional reforms placed for curbing corruption, the following recommendations aim to tackle these issues by encouraging collaborations and partnerships between civil society actors and local government. This is to ensure an efficient combatment of corruption, and reinforce a better mode of governance and management of public resources.

- Establishing an online platform for civil-local government engagement:
  - a) The platform will help simplify administrative procedures for interested investors/entrepreneurs, private actors, grassroot organizations and NGOs that

make up civil society, since the complexity and unpredictability of administrative procedures creates confusion, and hence an incentive for corruption. Initiating and regularizing computerized data systems for registering and storing administrative data, such as tax registers and estimates, can help in enhancing integration and coordination amongst offices, and in precluding the overlap of duties and abuse of administrative discretion. (OECD Anti-Corruption Network for Eastern Europe and Central Asia, 2021)

- b) The presence of an online public portal can also increase transparency by allowing civil society agents to follow up on municipal transactions via the internet. Likewise, all companies/individuals engaging in agribusiness within the municipal region/administration should register and submit their status reports online in order to increase transparency and accountability. This can even be reinforced by the currently-standing regulatory bodies and committees through obliging municipalities to create online networks to incorporate civil society actors and mitigate corruption.
- Encouraging offline platforms that still enhance civil society actors' (CSA) engagement in government decision making and effective policy discourse. (EGY918 - CARE Organization, 2017) For instance, these measures can promote public hearings as one of the main tools to guarantee access for the public representatives (i.e. CSAs) to information, and be part of "public budgetary hearing program and planning." (De-Asis 2000, 5) This public hearing can serve as a medium for increasing public awareness about the municipal budget, including revenues and expenses. (De-Asis 2000, 5). This will further help civil society agents, including grassroots organizations, and NGOs, to "co-manage municipal resources; evaluate the commitments and services handled by municipal officers and public servants; create opportunities for participation in public affairs...and demand efficiency, accountability and transparency in the execution of projects." (De-Asis 2000, 5)
  - Establishing corruption risk assessment programs that are based on identifying the causes and conditions of corruption, as well as, determining, creating, and implementing an action plan for curbing corruption. This program/action plan should delineate the guidelines that supply "information and practical advice on the elaboration of internal control, the identification/ analysis/ evaluation of corruption risks and setting appropriate countermeasures." (OECD Anti-Corruption Network for Eastern Europe and Central Asia, 2021, 29.) In that respect, the regulatory/legislative bodies should encourage the municipal councils to co-opt civil society in setting up these programs, and stimulate their capacities.

## **Conclusion**

Amongst several pioneers in the Middle East and North Africa region in the area of sustainable development, Egypt has relentlessly led numerous green initiatives to sustain a green

environment. It further tailored several initiatives for stabilizing green growth in rural areas, such as “Decent Life” or “Hayah Karima ” national initiative, whose aim is to provide human security and promote sustainable, socio-economic development for citizens residing in these areas. To safeguard the aims of these initiatives, more effective mechanisms need to be created and adopted by the local government with the concerned civil society actors in the agricultural sector to ensure a better combatment of corruption at the municipal level, and guarantee that agribusiness rather sustains a green economy within the sector.

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