

Egypt

Research and Writing Sample

Quick Facts

All facts below are from CIA Factbook unless otherwise noted.ⁱ

Official Country Name	Arab Republic of Egypt	Capital City	Cairo
Currency Name	Egyptian Pound (EGP)	Currency Conversion	\$1 USD = 17.6 EGP ⁱⁱ
Major Airportsⁱⁱⁱ	Cairo International (CAI); Aswan International (ASW); Sharm El Sheikh International (SSH)	Exit/ Entry Fees	None ^{iv}
Visa Requirements^v	Visas are required for entry into Egypt. Tourism visas can be purchased ahead of time or upon arrival for those planning to stay less than 30 days; Business visas must be obtained prior to arrival and require an official business letter of introduction including details about the sponsoring agency and evidence of financial solvency	Visa Costs	Tourist: \$25 (single entry); Business: \$40 (single entry) ^{vi}
US Embassy	+(20) (2) 2797-3300 (24/7 line)	Emergency Contact Information^{vii}	Ambulance: 123 Police: 122
Time Difference	10 hours ahead of PST, during Standard Time	Primary Language(s) Spoken	Arabic (Egyptian dialect); English widely understood by educated classes

Brief History

Egyptian civilization has flourished since prehistoric times, seeing rule by 30 different royal dynasties as well as surviving occupation by Persians, Nubians (Sudanese), Greeks and Romans. At times, the borders of ancient Egypt stretched into what is now Sudan, Cyprus, Lebanon, Syria, Israel, and Palestine. While the civilization's rulers and borders have changed many times over the millennia, Egypt still exists as a modern-day country,^{viii} and most Egyptians are descended from settlers who moved to the Nile Valley in prehistoric times.^{ix}

Prehistory and Indigenous People

It is unclear when the first hominids arrived in Egypt although modern humans are thought to have dispersed out of Africa about 100,000 years ago. It is possible that Egypt was used to reach Asia in some of these migrations. Egypt's climate was much wetter in prehistoric times than today and early written records suggest that some areas that are now barren desert were once filled with water.^x The annual

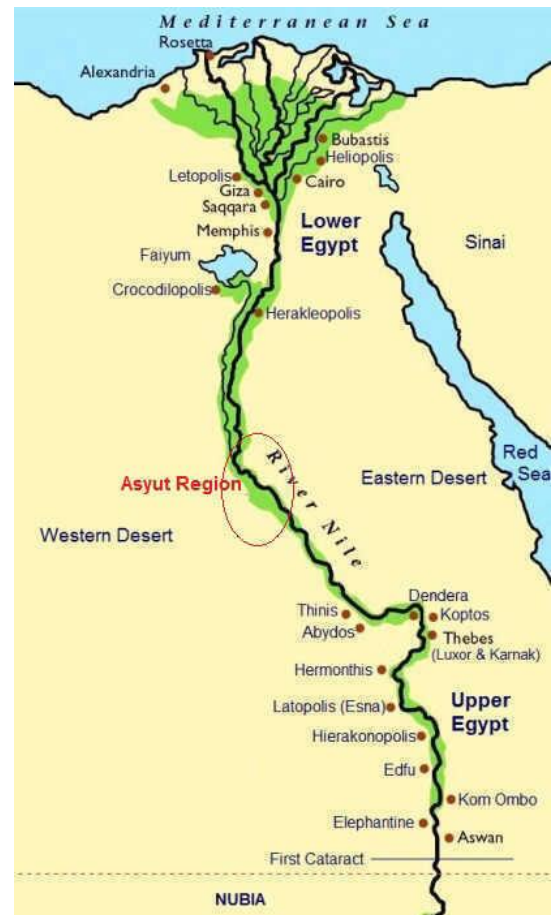
flooding of the Nile River, between June and August, created a fertile agricultural climate and early populations were concentrated in the Nile Valley and Delta. Villages dependent on agriculture began to appear in Egypt about 7,000 years ago with a focus on the cultivation of cereal crops, primarily wheat and barley. The fertility of the land and predictability of the annual flooding ensured high productivity from a single crop. The high productivity of the land made it possible to store large crop surpluses which not only protected against future crop failures but also formed the basis of Egyptian wealth.^{xi} Population increases in prehistoric times came as a result of natural fertility although various periods also experienced mass migrations from Nubia, Libya, and the Middle East.^{xii}

History of Asyut

Asyut (sometimes spelled “Assiut” or “Assiout”), known as “Syut” in ancient Egypt, lies on the west bank of the Nile River almost midway between Cairo and Aswan.^{xiii}

Although undoubtedly a prime agricultural location, Asyut claims its importance from the pharaonic times and served as the capital of the Thirteenth Nome (“Territorial Division”) of Upper Egypt around 3100 BC. “Syut,” translated as “guardian,” was a famous center for worshipping the jackal or wolf-headed god Wepwawet who was associated with funerary rites and the underworld. Some believe that Wepwawet may have also symbolized the unification of Upper and Lower Egypt which is unsurprising given the central location of the area dedicated to the god.^{xiv} During the Hellenistic period, roughly 332 BC to 31 BC, Greeks re-named Asyut “Lycopolis” meaning “City of the Wolf” in reference to the worship of Wepwawet.^{xv} Excavations around the ancient city site have revealed mummified remains of wolves which provide further proof of the importance of these animals to ancient residents. Some believe the remains may also provide confirmation of a legend which states that an invading Ethiopian army was repelled by packs of wolves.^{xvi}

Ancient Asyut was located at the end of the “40 Day Road,” a trading route that reached its peak in the 14th century, connecting what is now the Darfur region of Sudan to central Egypt via the Selima and Kharga Oasis. The path, created by ancient camel caravans, dates back 700 years and served as an important transportation vein carrying ivory, ebony, gold, ostrich feathers, cowry shells, camels, and slaves into Egypt and textiles, metals, and, later, firearms, into Sudan.^{xvii} Until the 1850s, Asyut served as the largest slave market in ancient Egypt.^{xviii}



History of the Bahariya Oasis

The Bahariya Oasis, also known as the “Northern Oasis,” has been populated since Neolithic times^{xix} and has served as an important agricultural center for Egypt dating back to the Middle Kingdom (approximately 2055 BC through 1650 BC). People indigenous to the oasis are referred to as the Wahati (“of the oasis”) people^{xx} and many who live in Bahariya today are descendants of the ancient tribes who inhabited the area after migrating from Libya and the North Coast.^{xxi} Bedouin tribes are also an important part of the Bahariya Oasis and serve as a reminder of the ancient importance of the place as a transit point for caravans travelling between the Nile Valley and tribes in Libya through the Western Desert.^{xxii}

Much of what is known of the ancient history of the Bahariya Oasis is derived from tomb paintings in the Nile Valley which depict the oasis as a place of wine, olive, and date production. The Bahariya Oasis is home to the remains of the temple of Alexander the Great, famed Macedonian ruler and conqueror (approximately 336 BC– 323 BC), leading some Egyptologists to speculate that Alexander the Great traveled through the oasis on his return to the new capital, Alexandria, after visiting the Siwa Oasis to consult the Oracle of Amun. Historical records state that the oasis prospered considerably during his rule and counted among its population many Greeks.^{xxiii} Extensive Roman ruins as well as the discovery of some 10,000 well-preserved Roman mummies, some of which were wearing golden face masks, suggest the area was also heavily populated during the period of Roman Rule (approximately 30 BC until 619 AD).^{xxiv} Some believe the high number of Roman mummies as well as their ornate coverings also signifies that the Bahariya Oasis was the most important Egyptian burial ground for Romans.^{xxv} During Roman rule, oases around Egypt, including Bahariya, began to cultivate grains.^{xxvi}



Current Political Climate

Revolution and Upheaval

Inspired by the protests that ousted Tunisia’s oppressive leader, tens of thousands of Egyptians gathered night and day in January, 2011 to demand an end to then-President Hosni Mubarak’s rule. These protests were considered an important, initially successful piece of the Arab Spring; a series of anti-government protests, uprisings and armed rebellions that spread across the Middle East in early 2011 as an expression of deep-seated resentment at aging Arab dictatorships, unemployment, rising prices, corruption, and government-sponsored brutality.^{xxvii} The initial hope for change represented by the Arab Spring has given way to uncertainty and, in the case of Egypt, a return to political extremes and continued social upheaval.

By the time he was removed from power, President Mubarak had ruled Egypt for almost 30 years (1981 – 2011) following the assassination of President Anwar Sadat at the hands of Islamic extremists.^{xxviii} In effect, Mubarak ruled as a quasi-military leader when he took power. For his entire time in office, he kept the country under emergency law, giving the state sweeping powers of arrest and curbing basic freedoms. Until the elections in 2005, rival candidates were not permitted, rendering Presidential elections a ceremony more than a democratic process. The government argued the draconian regime was necessary to combat Islamist terrorism, which came in waves in the decades of Mubarak’s rule. He presided over a period of relative domestic stability and economic development which caused most Egyptians to accept his monopolization of power. However, towards the end of his rule, he received pressure from his most important international ally, the United States, and increasing calls for his resignation from Egyptians.^{xxix} Following three weeks of protests, Mubarak resigned as President on February 11th, 2011, handing over power to the military.^{xxx} The military said it would guarantee changes to the constitution as well as free and fair elections, calling for normal business activities to resume. The news was met with what many described as “euphoria” as Egyptians celebrated in the streets.^{xxxi}

Following Mubarak's resignation, the world held its breath in anticipation of Egypt's first steps toward true democracy with many believing that the historic vote would set the trend for the rest of the Arab world. Over 30,000 volunteers across the country made sure the voting was fair and, despite initial fears of military interference, only minor violations were reported usually in the form of citizen supporters attempting to influence voters at polling stations. Egypt's elaborate political mosaic created a complex build up to the election with many unsure what to hope for. One political analyst summed up the election as follows: "It's far more complicated than 'Islamists vs. liberal democracy.' It's rich vs. poor, (hardline) Salafists vs. the (more moderate) Muslim Brotherhood, secularists vs. Islamists."^{xxxii}

In June, 2012, Mohamed Morsi (sometimes spelled "Morsy"), a former member of the Muslim Brotherhood, became Egypt's first democratically-elected President. As many predicted, Morsi faced an uphill battle and inherited a struggling economy, a barely-functioning bureaucracy, and a nation deeply distrusting of the military. Although he achieved some recognition for his efforts to reduce the influence of the military, including forcing 70 army generals into retirement, many Egyptians were disappointed by his failure to meet his promise to tackle some of the country's most difficult problems within his first 100 days in office. Frequent power and water cuts, the continuous long lines for bread, and the uncontrollable traffic congestion were often highlighted by the media as proof of his shortcomings. In November, 2012, Morsi issued an executive order preventing any court from overturning his decisions, essentially allowing him to run the country unchecked and push through a new constitution. This power grab led to protests and increasing anger from the population as well as international outcry. By July, 2013, demonstrations turned deadly as Morsi's opponents and supporters clashed at Cairo University. On July 3rd, 2013 Egypt's military officers, led by then-General Sisi removed Morsi from power, suspended the constitution, and installed an interim government.^{xxxiii}

Following Morsi's ouster, Egyptians continued to protest against a perceived return to military rule. In mid-August, 2013, Egyptian security forces used automatic weapons, armored personal carriers, and military bulldozers to raid and crush a month-long sit-in protest by thousands of Morsi supporters at a mosque in eastern Cairo. Human Rights Watch investigated and found that at least 817 people were killed, calling the carnage "one of the world's largest killings of demonstrators in a single day in recent history." Continuing protests and social unrest caused a severe drop in tourism and, with it, the continued decline of the Egyptian economy. In June, 2014, Egypt's former military chief, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi was elected President, winning a reported 96% of the vote.^{xxxiv}

President Sisi

Former-President Morsi appointed then-General Sisi to Minister of Defense and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces in August, 2012. On July 1st, 2013, it was Sisi who delivered the military's message that Morsi had 48 hours to resign before the military would step in to "restore order."^{xxxv} Although he initially claimed no interest in running for the Presidency, most assumed he would do so and few were surprised when he announced his candidacy. Supporters of former-President Morsi condemned him for his role in the overthrow of a democratically elected leader, but Sisi countered that the military had only carried out the will of the Egyptian people who had been protesting for Morsi's removal. Sisi soon found significant support among Egyptians who were exhausted from two years of economic and political turmoil.^{xxxvi} Under the slogan "Long Live Egypt," Sisi outlined an ambitious plan to develop agriculture, housing, education, and impoverished areas and boost employment. He pledged that Egyptians would see a better standard of living within two years of him being in power, calling on the public and private sector to help the poor by opting for "lower profit margins" or else the military would step in and offer higher quality goods at lower prices. Given his military background, supporters believed he would be a strong enough leader to finally bring about long-awaited change.^{xxxvii} Although Sisi appeared to win an overwhelming majority of the popular vote in 2014, reporters at polling stations said voter turnout was

incredibly low^{xxxviii} with international observers ruling that the voting failed to meet democratic standards for free and fair elections.^{xxxix}

At first, President Sisi appeared to be a genuinely popular leader projecting a soft-spoken but charismatic presence and often delivering emotional speeches^{xl}. In keeping with his campaign promises, he has spearheaded efforts to address social issues, including the treatment of religious minorities and women, and boost the Egyptian economy through fiscal reforms, such as the elimination of fuel subsidies, and large infrastructural projects, such as the expansion of the Suez Canal and the construction of a new city just outside of Cairo which will become the “new administrative and financial capital for Egypt.”^{xli}

His regime has also faced a noticeable rise in terrorist attacks and extremist groups^{xlii}, particularly in the Sinai Peninsula, and President Sisi has responded with an iron fist. Under his leadership, the government and military have been accused of a long list of human rights abuses including brutal crackdowns on protestors, a surge in politically-motivated arrests and detentions, and severe restrictions on freedom of speech including the imprisonment of hundreds of journalists. Many Egyptians as well as the international community fear that this has marked a return to authoritarianism formerly represented by the Mubarak regime. In an address to the Arab Summit, President Sisi defended his ruthless approach by saying: “A comprehensive confrontation of terrorism requires standing up to all aspects of the phenomenon... regarding financing, arming and political and ideological support as the terrorist is not only the man who carries a weapon but he who trains, finances, and arms him and provides him political and ideological cover.”^{xliii} President Sisi was the first international leader to call Trump to congratulate him on his election to the Presidency^{xliv}, and President Trump has frequently praised him for his strong leadership. In April, 2017, President Sisi became the first Egyptian leader to visit the US since 2010.^{xlv}

Presidential elections, currently scheduled for March 26th – 28th, 2018, have been denounced as “farical” by both international and Egyptian human rights groups. According to Human Rights Watch, Egyptian authorities have successively eliminated key challengers who have announced their intention to run for President. They have arrested two candidates, and a third potential candidate was placed under undeclared house arrest in a hotel until he withdrew from the race. Media reports have said that 44% fewer organizations have been granted permission to oversee the elections than for the elections in 2014 that brought Sisi to power. On February 6th, the Egyptian Prosecutor-General’s office ordered an investigation of 13 of the leading opposition figures who had called for boycotts of the election accusing them of plotting to overthrow the regime. President Sisi has publically threatened to use force, including the army, against those who threaten to undermine “Egypt’s stability and security.”^{xlvi} On a visit to Cairo on February 12th, US Secretary of State, Rex Tillerson, defended continued American support for Sisi’s government despite growing criticism of the regime’s renewed repression of electoral democracy.^{xlvii}

Notable Legislation

In August, 2015 President Sisi approved sweeping legislation, dubbed the “Anti-Terror Law,” aimed at strengthening Egypt’s efforts in combatting a rising terrorist insurgency.^{xlviii} Critics of the law say that it shields law enforcement personnel from accountability for use of force when implementing the law, it limits the right to peaceful assembly, and that it restricts freedom of speech particularly for journalists who may report facts or figures that contradict official government statements.^{xlix} International human rights groups say the legislation “erodes basic rights,”^l and vastly expands existing Presidential powers^{li} with many Egyptians worrying that it will be used by President Sisi to crush any form of dissent. During legislative sessions in early 2017, Egyptian politicians considered passing additional legislation which would impose unprecedented controls over social media platforms and limit access to certain websites, including international news organizations, in an effort to crack down on both extremism and criticism

of the President.^{lii} While these restrictions have not yet become law, many Egyptians continue to be concerned about the government’s apparent growing desire to limit free speech.

On May 28th, 2017, President Sisi ratified a law imposing strict regulations on aid groups. Dubbed “The NGO Law,” the regulation requires 47,000 Egyptian NGOs and 100 foreign organizations to receive approval from a new regulatory body before conducting fieldwork or publishing surveys to ensure their work “fits the state’s plans and development needs and priorities.” Although many human rights groups and international governments have expressed concern over government overreach, Sisi claims such restrictive laws are a necessary component of Egypt’s battle against terrorism and extremist groups.^{liii}

General Statistics

General – Asyut Governorate	
Land Area:	1,551 sq. km ^{liv}
Location:	West bank of the Nile River ^{lv} ; 360 km south of Cairo
Topography:	River valley, extending into Western Desert ^{lvi}
Major Cities/ Towns:	Asyut (capital), Manfalout, Abnob

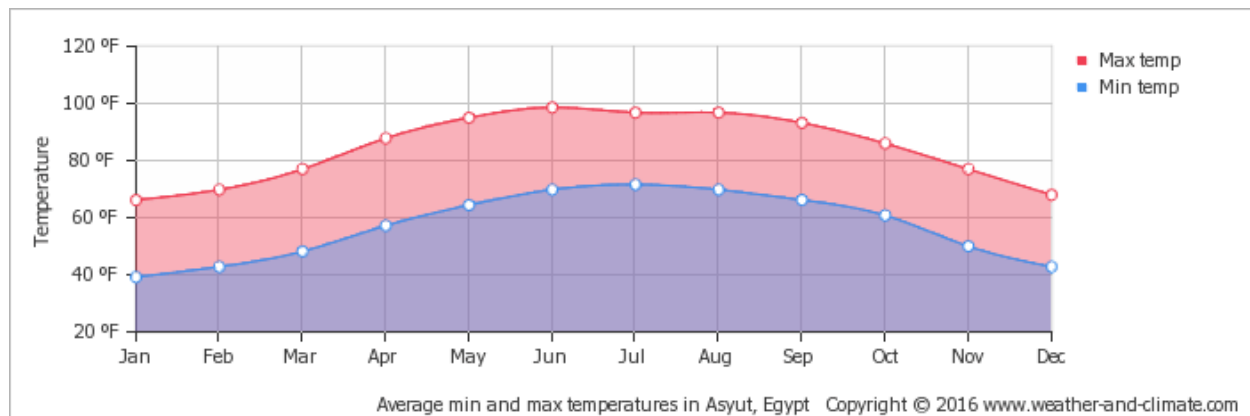
Population Statistics – Asyut Governorate ^{lvii}	
Population Size: (2015 Estimate)	4,245,215 people
Population Growth Rate*: (2015 Estimate)	2.6% per year ^{lviii} (Among the top 10 governorates in Egypt) ^{lix}
Population Distribution (2015 Estimate)	26.5% urban, 73.5% rural
Gender of Population (2015 Estimate)	48.9% female, 51.1% male

General – Bahariya Oasis ^{lx}	
Land Area:	2,000 sq. km
Location:	Within Giza Governorate; 380 km southwest of Cairo
Topography:	Valley oasis, surrounded by mountains
Major Cities/ Towns:	El Bawiti (admin. center), Qasr (twin of Bawiti)

Population Statistics – Bahariya Oasis	
Population Size: ^{lxi} (2016 Estimate)	27,000 people
Population Growth Rate: ^{lxii} (Estimated)	2.4% per year
Population Distribution	<i>Unknown</i>
Gender of Population	<i>Unknown</i>

Weather

Both Asyut and the Bahariya Oasis are classified as a “subtropical desert climate”^{lxiii} with very little rainfall throughout the year.^{lxiv} “Hot Season” runs from April to October^{lxv} with day time temperatures frequently reaching 100F or higher between May and August, particularly in Asyut.



Climate Change

According to the World Bank, Egypt is extremely vulnerable to the effects of climate change. Rising sea levels are already impacting the Nile River Delta, a once-fertile region where the country grows more than half of its crops. With the increase in sea levels, the river banks are eroding and sea water is seeping into Nile water used for irrigation. The increased salinity of the water, especially when coupled with the effects of pollution from nearby factories, is causing crops to die and fish yields to fall raising alarm in a country that is already struggling to feed its growing population.^{lxvi} Experts note that climate change, a contributing cause of the ongoing Syrian Civil War, could have similarly dire consequences in Egypt, potentially prompting another mass migration to Europe.^{lxvii} In 2017, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and Ministry of Water Resources and Irrigation dedicated more than \$31.4 million to climate change adaptation efforts in the North Coast of Egypt.^{lxviii}

Although removed from the Nile Delta and North Coast of Egypt, Asyut is also increasingly impacted by the effects of climate change. While the desert has always been hot, rising temperatures and unpredictable rainfall impact available water supply as well as growing conditions for crops and working conditions for outdoor laborers, including farmers.^{lxix} Over the past few decades, experts say that the area has experienced a decrease in biological diversity, arable land, and land fertility as a result of these changes. This warming trend has prompted the Ministry of Agriculture (MOA) and World Food Program (WFP)^{lxx} to work directly with farmers in vulnerable villages, including those near Asyut, to adopt new irrigation techniques and organic farming methods to increase their resiliency in the face of climate change.^{lxxi}

The Bahariyah Oasis is one of several large depressions west of the Nile deep enough to reach underground water.^{lxxii} However, the oasis exists within the Western desert of Egypt and is at risk of desertification due to low levels of precipitation, low levels of vegetation cover, and areas of poor soil properties which together increase the likelihood of soil erosion.^{lxxiii} At the time of writing, little information exists regarding proposed projects or initiatives to address this issue.



Bahariya Oasis, October 2015 (NASA image)

Holidays

The following holidays have been officially declared for 2018^{lxxiv}. All dates below are from officialholidays.com unless otherwise noted (*):

Date	Occasion	Comments
January 1 ^{stlxxv} *	New Year's Day Bank Holiday	Observed by public sector only
January 7 th	Coptic Christmas Day	National Holiday
January 25 th	Revolution Day	Celebrates the start of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution; National Holiday
April 6 th *	Coptic Good Friday	Observed by those in the Coptic faith
April 7 th *	Coptic Holy Saturday	Observed by those in the Coptic faith
April 8 th	Coptic Easter Sunday	National Holiday
April 9 th	Sham El Nessim	Monday following Orthodox Easter. Also known as "Spring Festival." National Holiday
April 25 th	Sinai Liberation Day	Celebrates the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the Sinai Peninsula in 1982; National Holiday
May 1 st	Labor Day	National Holiday
June 15 th	End of Ramadan	Also referred to as "Eid Al Fitr;" Marks the end of the holy month of Ramadan and the end of the associated day-time fasting; National Holiday
June 16 th	End of Ramadan, Day 2	National Holiday
June 17 th	End of Ramadan, Day 3	National Holiday
July 1 st *	Bank Holiday	Observed by banks only

Date	Occasion	Comments
July 23 rd	Revolution Day	Celebrates the Revolution of 1952; National Holiday
August 22 nd	Eid Al Adha	Also known as “The Feast of Sacrifice,” the most important feast of the Muslim calendar; National Holiday
August 23 rd	Eid Al Adha, Day 2	National Holiday
August 24 th	Eid Al Adha, Day 3	National Holiday
August 25 th	Eid Al Adha, Day 4	Observed by public sector only
September 11 th	El Hijra	Islamic New Year; Coptic New Year; National Holiday
October 6 th	Armed Forces Day	Celebrates Egypt’s victory in the October War; National Holiday
November 20 th	Moulid El Nabi	Observing the birthday of the Prophet Mohamed; National Holiday

The majority of religious holidays celebrated in Egypt are dependent on a sighting of the moon. For this reason, different religious groups may celebrate the same holiday a day apart.

NOTE: A standard working week in Egypt starts on Sunday and ends on Thursday. Friday and Saturday are considered the weekend.^{lxxvi}

Religion and Culture

Islam

In Egypt, 90% of the population practices Islam with the vast majority affiliating with the Sunni Sect. As a result, Islam influences much of Egyptian life even though there are a wide variety of traditions followed and perspectives represented.^{lxxvii} A notable example of the influence of Islam on Egyptian life is their standard work week which differs from the Western world to accommodate Friday as the holy prayer day. As mentioned above, a standard working week in Egypt starts on Sunday and ends on Thursday. During the holy month of Ramadan, employees are only allowed for work for six hours each day, and after five consecutive years of employment, Egyptian employees are also eligible for a month’s paid leave to make a religious pilgrimage.^{lxxviii}

The influence of Islam is unmistakably woven throughout Egyptian society and culture. Egyptians have strong family values and are expected to maintain close ties to both their nuclear and extended families. Clothing, particularly for women, is expected to be modest, covering at a minimum both knees and shoulders but, as a best practice, covering most of the arms and legs. Touching between genders, including shaking hands, is not always welcome. A good rule of thumb for foreigners is to wait to see if the other person extends their hand first for a hand shake. If not, a small bow of the head is an appropriate greeting. It is not unusual, however, for men to greet male friends and family members with a kiss on the cheek.^{lxxix}

Islam and Politics

Islam is embedded into the Egyptian constitution with sharia law underpinning legislation, particularly that which governs family law.^{lxxx} Although Egypt has been considered one of the more politically moderate Islamic countries, there are concerns of Islam’s growing role in political and social life.

The Muslim Brotherhood (MB) is perhaps the best known political group in Egypt and is the oldest political Islamist group in the Arab world. The MB was founded in 1928 by an Egyptian Islamic scholar and teacher who was opposed to British rule and instead wanted to promote Islamic laws and morals. Today, the ideology of the MB is mainly focused on reform of existing political systems in the Arab world. It embraces the idea of political activism and social responsibility and organizes charitable works and social support programs as part of its outreach to lower-income populations. In fact, “...over the decades, the [MB] movement [has] built mosques, schools and clinics that often outperformed the [Egyptian] government’s social welfare system.”^{lxxxix} Although the government of Egypt has recently labeled the MB as a “terrorist organization,” the Egyptian branch of the MB officially renounced violence in the 1970s and is not known to endorse violence as a means to achieve its goals.^{lxxxii}

In June 2012, Mohamed Morsi, a member of the MB was elected president in the first free and fair presidential elections in Egypt’s modern history. Morsi, an American-trained engineer and former lawmaker, was also the first Islamist elected as head of an Arab state. In his victory speech, he pledged repeatedly to be “a president for all Egyptians,^{lxxxiii}” and formally resigned from the MB. By July 2013, Morsi had become deeply unpopular and was overthrown in a military coup with his opponents claiming that he had acted only in the interest of the Brotherhood and was open only to Islamist ideas. Although the overthrow of a democratically elected leader is generally not seen as a good sign, many Egyptians as well as members of the international community had been especially concerned with Morsi’s November, 2012 decision to award himself total executive control and bypass judicial oversight in order to fast-track an Islamist-slanted constitution.^{lxxxiv} After Morsi’s overthrow, the army-led government began a brutal crackdown on the MB and their supporters, freezing their assets, arresting thousands of its members, and killing over 1,000 protesters.^{lxxxv} However, Western outcry over these abuses was viewed by many Egyptians as support for the MB which seemed to encourage intensifying hatred towards the MB and their supporters and instead grew support for the new Egyptian government controlled by the military. Even after weeks of protests, Egyptians remained deeply divided over support for the MB.^{lxxxvi} As it has been classified as a “terrorist organization,” the MB is currently banned from participating in the Egyptian political sphere.

Egypt’s current President, Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, considers himself to be a “defender” of Islam while also taking the approach of a religious reformer blaming “outdated religious discourse” for holding the country back. As an example of this, his government has enacted strict new rules limiting who is allowed to preach Friday sermons, effectively removing radicals, as well as those against Sisi, from the pulpit. Although Sisi has said there is no such thing as a “religious state,” he is outwardly pious and seems to encourage the role played by religion in Egyptian society. Under Sisi, the government has begun to issue standardized weekly sermons including those advocating for Islam as the religion of “building and construction” and those extolling the virtues of water and electricity conservation.^{lxxxvii} Sisi’s continued vocal opposition to the MB has earned him the support of the Coptic Christians, Egypt’s biggest religious minority. However, “some Egyptians fear that long-persecuted smaller minority groups such as Shi’ites, Baha’is and atheists will face more harassment as the state adopts a pious veneer.”^{lxxxviii}

Christianity

Egypt is home to the “Copts” (“Coptic Christians”), one of the world’s oldest Christian communities. The word “Copt” is a Westernized version of the Arabic word “qibt” which was itself derived from the ancient Greek word for Egyptian, “Aigyptos”^{lxxxix} reaffirming the long history of Christians in Egypt. Some estimates suggest that Christians currently make up 10% of Egypt’s population although official census data shows this number as closer to 5%. Experts suggest this discrepancy may be linked to lower fertility rates among Christians relative to Muslims^{xc} as well as a growing Christian diaspora linked to the ongoing persecution of Christians in Egypt.^{xcii} In January, 2018, the non-profit watchdog Open Doors reported that Christians in Egypt are currently facing unprecedented levels of persecution with over 128

Christians killed for their faith and more than 200 driven from their homes in 2017.^{xcii} Although President Sisi has the official support of the Coptic Church for his work to oust the MB and associated Islamists, there is little Christian representation in the Egyptian government and the Brookings Institution reports that many Copts suffer routine discrimination despite protections under Egyptian law.

The head of the Coptic Church is the Pope of Alexandria, who is based in Cairo. In November, 2012, Bishop Tawadros was appointed the newest Pope of the Coptic Church following the death of Pope Shenouda III.^{xciii} During President Morsi's year in office, the newly installed Pope Tawadros openly criticized Morsi and his Islamist policies and encouraged Coptic Christians to become more involved in Egyptian politics. Following this criticism, hardline Morsi allies labelled all Christians as "enemies of Islam." After the military coup, media supportive of Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood depicted anti-Morsi protests as dominated by Christians,^{xciv} deepening the divide between the two groups.

In December, 2016, ISIS-affiliated attackers bombed St. Mark's Coptic Cathedral killing 25 and injuring dozens more. In the aftermath, the Egyptian government issued a nationwide state of emergency and implemented a robust security program to protect the Coptic Community from additional assaults. Some of these measures have included additional security personnel at Christian sites, increased surveillance and screening methods, and even cancelling religious celebrations. Unfortunately, these new protocols have enabled public officials and communities to make more explicit distinctions along religious lines.^{xcv}

Roughly 40% of the population of Asyut identifies as "Coptic Christian," making it one of the largest concentrations of Christians in Egypt. Of the Christians in Asyut, a relatively high number belong to the upper and middle class. Following the overthrow of President Morsi in 2013, Asyut experienced an increase in tensions between Christians and Muslims. In August, 2013, an estimated 10,000 Islamists marched through a notably Christian neighborhood, chanting pro-Islamist phrases and vandalizing walls with anti-Christian slogans. The same week, escalating mob violence led to the ransacking of Christian homes causing many to flee the area.^{xcvi} Although tensions among the general population have since decreased, members of the Christian community remain on alert as attacks against Christians, including the December, 2017 murder of a teenage tuk-tuk driver,^{xcvii} still occur.

Extremists

Violent extremist groups have operated in Egypt for decades^{xcviii} with many using religious ideologies to justify killing and destruction. CNN has dubbed Egypt's Sinai Peninsula "the new front line in the battle against ISIS"^{xcix} after the group claimed responsibility for downing a commercial flight there on October 31st, 2015 with a bomb hidden inside a soda can.^c Bound for St. Petersburg, Russia, the flight had just departed from Sharm el-Sheik, a popular resort on the Sinai Peninsula. All 224 people on board were killed.^{ci} When news of the crash was first released, an ISIS-affiliated group claimed that the attack had been perpetrated "in response to Russian airstrikes that killed hundreds of Muslims on Syrian Land."^{cii}

Two years later, on November 24th, 2017, ISIS sympathizers stormed a Sufi mosque on the Sinai Peninsula, killing 305 worshippers. Officials have called this the worst terrorist attack in Egypt's modern history.^{ciii} As a dimension of Islam, Sufism emphasizes the inward search for God, peace, and tolerance,^{civ} and is perhaps best known in the Western world for the Sufi worship style of chanting and dancing. Sufis are seen by ultra-conservative Muslims, particularly Salafists, as being more permissive when it comes to Islamic law.^{cv} For this reason, some view Sufism as a threat, and its adherents as heretics. Al Qaeda has explicitly targeted Sufi sites and ISIS has called for brutal attacks against Sufis. "Experts say that amicable ties between Sufis and the Egyptian government may also be a factor, giving the attack a political dimension."^{cvi}

ISIS has also increasingly targeted Christians, including bombings against Coptic Churches in December, 2016 (mentioned above), March and April, 2017. Official ISIS propaganda has labeled Christians their “favorite prey,” and the Heritage Foundation reports that ISIS sees the Sinai as a “stepping stone” to Israel and Jerusalem.^{cvi} The Sinai Peninsula is now one of the deadliest places for terrorist attacks in the world, and tourism in the area has suffered greatly as a result.^{cvi}

Although many extremist activities have been limited to the Sinai Peninsula and Nile Delta, there are occasionally encounters with extremist cells in other parts of the country. On April 10, 2017, Egyptian security forces killed seven suspected ISIS militants in a shoot-out in a remote desert compound outside of Asyut. Authorities say the militants were meeting to plan more attacks on Christians as well as police officers in the vicinity of a monastery. The raid came some hours after President Sisi declared a state of emergency and vowed to crack down on extremists.^{cix} On May 26th, 2017, ISIS gunmen attacked a bus carrying Coptic Christians in the Minya province, located between Bahariyah Oasis and Asyut. The passengers were part of a religious pilgrimage to the St. Samuel Monastery. At least 29 people were killed and dozens more injured, many of whom were children.^{cx} In response, the Egyptian government carried out several airstrikes on suspected militant training camps in Libya.^{cx} Following the bus attack, many Egyptian Christians began to question the effectiveness of the government’s declared state of emergency with several telling media outlets they feel that little is being done to protect them.^{cxii} Minya province has experienced more than 75 attacks targeting Christian residents in the past six years.^{cxiii}

On October 20th, 2017, a convoy of Egyptian security personnel was overcome by militants near the Bahariya Oasis. Eleven officers were killed, 13 were injured, and one is still missing making it one of the deadliest attacks against security personnel in 4 years. No group has claimed responsibility although authorities suspect that ISIS is involved.^{cxiv}



Minya Province (highlighted)

Women’s Rights

Egypt ranks low in gender equity compared to other countries worldwide. The 2015 Global Gender Gap Index, which measures disparities between men and women across countries, ranks Egypt at 136 out of 145 countries worldwide. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development’s Social

Institutions and Gender Index 2014, which measures legislation, practices, and attitudes that restrict women's rights and opportunities, classifies Egypt to be among the countries 'very high' in gender discrimination.^{cxv}

In 2012, former President Morsi was narrowly elected to office after running on a platform that didn't mention or support the empowerment of women and included no reference to women's rights or the societal barriers faced by women. Where women's issues were mentioned, they focused on the family and women's roles as mothers, not as citizens with equal rights and duties. Morsi's electoral victory in spite of the limited mention of women or women's issues is indicative of prevailing Egyptian attitudes towards women and their role in Egyptian society. As expected, constitutional reforms imposed by Morsi's government in December, 2012 referred to women only in the context of the family rather than as independent citizens. However, these reforms were met with strong condemnation and opposition by various women's rights organizations and activists. This wave of opposition was a contributing factor to the removal of Morsi from power in July, 2013 and carried into the drafting of a new constitution in 2014. The outcome was the most progressive constitution in Egyptian history with respect to women's rights; it explicitly states that men and women are equal and stipulates the responsibility of the state to guarantee this equality. In the 2015 parliamentary election, women continued to make history by winning a record 14.9% representation in the legislative assembly.^{cxvi}

Although women are benefitting from a resurgence of progressive, pro-women policies in Egypt's political sphere, daily life for the majority of Egyptian women continues to be influenced by less-progressive attitudes and cultural norms. A study conducted by the Thomas Reuters Foundation found that Cairo was the world's most dangerous city for women and that Egypt was the "worst" country in the Arab world for Women's Rights,^{cxvii} citing rampant sexual harassment, high rates of genital mutilation and child marriage, and limited opportunities for economic participation. A 2013 United Nations Women Report revealed that 99.3% of women surveyed had been sexually harassed on the street,^{cxviii} and 47% of divorced or separated women had been victims of domestic abuse.^{cxix} Perhaps unsurprisingly, women are blamed for inviting sexual harassment for activities as benign as laughing in public,^{cxx} and are tasked with the burden of proving domestic abuse in a legal system designed to overwhelm side with husbands and fathers.^{cxxi} Surveys show that 90% of Egyptian men and 70% of Egyptian women believe that women should tolerate violence to keep their family together.^{cxxii}

In an attempt to address the cultural climate of abuse and discrimination, President Sisi declared 2017 the "Year of Egyptian Women" publicly taking aim at rampant sexual harassment and high rates of child marriage. Many activists were pleased by the declaration and renewed political commitment to women's rights although some pointed out that one year was hardly enough time to make significant progress considering the wide range of issues faced by Egyptian women.^{cxxiii} In retrospect, 2017 saw some legal victories for women, including a law granting them inheritance rights, but, unfortunately, women's rights groups have also suffered under newly imposed NGO laws making it illegal for them to conduct advocacy work without prior approval from the government.^{cxxiv} While reported rates of sexual harassment have dropped, they remain high, and it is clear that cultural norms are slow to change. A 2017 survey by the United Nations revealed that 47% of Egyptian men believe women enjoy the attention they receive from sexual harassment.^{cxxv} Women from lower socio-economic classes are particularly disadvantaged by conservative attitudes and weak legal protections,^{cxxvi} and there is still much work to be done to improve women's rights.

Women's Economic Participation

Women have significantly lower participation in the labor force than men (26% vs 79%).^{cxxvii} Globally, women's educational attainment is typically an indicator of female labor force participation (FLFP); the higher the levels of women's educational attainment, the higher the levels of FLFP. However, in Egypt,

this is not the case as levels of FLFP are falling despite rising levels of women’s educational attainment. Almost all unemployed women are educated; 94% of unemployed women had at least reached secondary school in 2012. Moreover, visible underemployment increased between 2006 and 2012. Experts and Egyptian citizens alike point to the deterioration of working conditions and general social and political unrest since 2011 as a cause for lower rates of FLFP.^{cxxviii} Families, fearful for the safety of their wives and daughters, discourage them for venturing too far outside their homes. The United Nations reports that the gender gap in wages and segmentation of the labor market, barriers to accessing finance and markets, high reproductive rates especially in rural areas, and unequal gender division of unpaid domestic work are additional contributing factors to low rates of women’s economic participation. Consequently, women remain disproportionately affected by poverty and discrimination and are concentrated mainly in informal, insecure, low-wage jobs or in fields with little if any social protection and opportunities for career progression.^{cxxix}

Government Structure

Egypt is considered one of the most centralized countries in the world, ranking 114 out of 158 countries on decentralization and the closeness of government to the people, according to a study by the World Bank. The country overall does not have local government, but rather “local administrations” and the name reflects its limited role. Egypt has three local administrative levels: the governorate (can be thought of as “provinces”), the city (or “regions” for rural governorates), and city districts (or “villages” in the case of rural governorates). Each of these local levels of administration has a deliberative Local Popular Council (LPC) directly elected by voters and a Local Executive Council (LEC), whose leader is either appointed by the governor or by the prime minister (in the case of districts). Egypt can be considered closest to the mayor-council system of local government, with one major difference: The local executive branch in Egypt is appointed by the central government, rather than voted in by the public.^{cxxx}



Egypt is divided into 27 governorates each of which is overseen by a governor who is appointed and can be dismissed by the President. The governor has administrative authority over all government personnel in the governorate except judges and is responsible for implementing policy. In February, 2015, President Sisi appointed new governors to 17 provinces including both Asyut and Giza (sometimes spelled “Jizah”), of which the Bahariya Oasis is a part. Yasser Selim, a former commercial marketing manager of an export and import company, was appointed the governor of Asyut, and Zhaled Zakaria Al-Adly, a former deputy dean of Faculty of Urban Planning and Social Services at Cairo University, was appointed governor of Giza.^{cxxxi}

According to a survey conducted by the Egyptian Center for Public Opinion Research in the last quarter of 2017, the Governor of Asyut received a 61% approval rating while the Governor of Giza received a 40% approval rating. The survey comes at a time when the House of Representatives is considering a newly proposed law to allow the people to elect their governors. The draft law also grants governors

additional responsibility and establishes oversight of the governor by a local council in order to eliminate corruption. Although still under consideration at the time of writing, this law would be an important step towards decentralizing the Egyptian government.^{cxxxii}

Livelihood Information

Agriculture

Agriculture is a major component of the Egyptian economy, contributing up to 14.5% of GDP and between 25 and 28% of all jobs. Agriculture employs almost 45% of all women in the workforce. The agriculture sector in Egypt is dominated by small farms which use traditional practices that do not comply with internationally recognized standards. For example, farmers tend to overuse and misuse agricultural chemicals and use outdated technologies and tools for land preparation, irrigation, and harvesting. As a result, farmers experience increased production costs, reduced yields, decreased soil fertility, and limited marketing opportunities. They are further constrained by lack of cold storage infrastructure, transportation systems, and market information.^{cxxxiii} Agriculture is the main activity of the Asyut governorate with cotton, grains, vegetables, and lentils representing major crops.^{cxxxiv} In the Bahariya Oasis, agriculture is also a primary source of employment for many residents, and the main agricultural products are guavas, mangoes, dates, and olives.^{cxxxv}

Industry

According to the United Nations, industry contributed up to 36% of the GDP in 2017 and 25% of all jobs.^{cxxxvi} The clothing and textiles sector is the largest industrial employer, driven in part by the proximity of Egypt to European markets,^{cxxxvii} and major international chains like Gap, Zara, and Macy's source clothing from Egyptian factories. Other sources of industry include chemicals (including fertilizers), steel, and auto manufacturing with the majority of industrial zones located in Lower Egypt, primarily in the Greater Cairo and Alexandria areas.^{cxxxviii} According to the Asyut government website, the governorate is home to "big" elements of the fertilizer, pharmaceutical, cement, and petrol industries in addition to smaller elements related to carpet manufacturing.^{cxxxix} Unfortunately, ongoing social and political security concerns, the falling value of the Egyptian pound, and rising fuel prices have hurt many Egyptian industries, including the clothing and textiles sector which has stalled in the last few years.^{cxl}

Services

United Nations data from 2017 suggests that "services and other activities" contributed up to 52.5% of GDP and 49% of all jobs.^{cxli} The services sector includes banking and insurance, communications, transportation, and the tourism sector which is one of the most important sectors in the economy due to high levels of employment and incoming foreign currency.^{cxlii} Much like sectors within industry, the tourism sector has been battered and bruised by social and political unrest as well as highly publicized terrorist attacks in recent years.^{cxliii} However, the United Nations' World Tourism Organization reports that, after a few rough years, a new wave of tourism is coming and ranked Egypt the second-fastest growing tourist destination of 2017.^{cxliv} Last year, revenues from tourism were estimated to exceed \$3.5 billion and, although nowhere near pre-Revolution earnings, this marks a significant increase over the \$2.7 billion earned from tourism in 2016. Government experts attribute this jump to an increase in visitors from Europe and other Arab nations.^{cxlv}

Development Narratives

Agriculture and Food Security

Given the importance of agriculture to the Egyptian economy as well as mounting concerns related to the country's ability to feed its growing population, it is not surprising that many development projects

focus on agriculture and food security. The Egyptian government under former-Presidents Mubarak and Morsi and now under President Sisi has made it a priority to direct investment toward the agricultural sector at times undertaking ambitious approaches to address problems created by the shrinking amount of available fertile land. One such project, known as “1.5 Million Feddans,¹” involves drilling 1,300 wells in the Western desert in an attempt to create new farmland in areas with small existing populations.^{cxlvi} If successful, the plan will expand Egypt’s total agricultural land by approximately 20%. Although many international agencies and foreign experts, including the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), warned against pursuing such a project for a wide variety of reasons, in particular its reliance on limited ground water supplies, President Sisi inaugurated the “mega-project” in December, 2015 announcing that the first phase, focusing on the Farafra Oasis 200 kilometers west of Asyut, would be complete within two years.^{cxlvii} The next phase will target the area surrounding the Bahariya Oasis. Various national news sources have reported the project as a success so far, citing increasing interest by foreign investors,^{cxlviii} while international publications report that the project is “mired in chaos” and that small holder farmers are upset they have not yet received land promised to them.^{cxlix}

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations has been involved in Egypt since 1978 and, in honor of their 40th anniversary in the country, released a Country Programming Framework outlining their priorities for 2017-2022. According to the framework, the top three priority areas are improved agricultural productivity, improved food security through strategic food commodities, and sustainable use of natural agricultural resources.^{cl} Related to the second priority area, the FAO recently launched a project to support the national reform of agricultural cooperatives in Egypt.^{cli} The FAO also recently announced their support for the “1.5 Million Feddans” project.^{clii}

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) is currently implementing several “Feed the Future” projects focusing the majority of their funding on Upper Egypt where over 55% of employment is agriculture-related.^{cliii} However, at the time of writing, it does not appear that any USAID programs explicitly target Asyut or the Bahariya Oasis. Using a market-driven approach, the projects seek to increase agriculture-related incomes for farmers by strengthening sustainable fruit and vegetable value chains with a specific pilot project targeting the creation of safe and women-friendly workplaces within the agribusiness sector.

In Asyut, the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA) has partnered with the Ministry of Agriculture and Land Reclamation (MALR) to implement a project to improve small scale farmers’ approach to market-oriented agriculture (ISMAP).^{cliv} The project aims to strengthen the existing government agricultural extension system through capacity development for both extension workers and agricultural cooperatives with a specific focus on gender mainstreaming in order to enhance women’s capacity in farming and their welfare in their families.^{clv} In 2015, the FAO launched a project to improve household food and nutrition security by targeting women and youth^{clvi} with a focus on several governorates, including Asyut.

In Bahariya, the Sustainable Rural Development of Bahariya Oasis (SRDO) project, sponsored by the Italian Agency for International Development, aims to improve the livelihoods and living conditions of rural communities by enhancing agricultural development of traditional crops, as well as developing skills needed to work in industries based on these crops. The project intends to focus on handicrafts as well as olive, date palm, apricot, and pomegranate cultivation, focusing on both improving agricultural production and establishing sustainable income generating activities.^{clvii}

¹ A “feddan” is an Egyptian unit of land roughly equivalent to an acre

Income Generation

Although the unemployment rate under President Sisi has fallen slightly from 13.3% to 12.7%, unemployment remains high, particularly among women (25.8%) and youth (31.3%)^{clviii}. Although President Sisi's focus thus far has been on "mega-projects" such as "1.5 Million Feddans" (above), the construction of a new administrative capital, and the expansion of the Suez Canal, experts warn that such nationalistic projects will not create jobs in the long term. A policy brief released by the Brookings Institution in July, 2016, outlined root causes of Egypt's unemployment problems highlighting a flawed higher education system and a labor market that is increasingly unable to cope with new job seekers.^{clix} Experts warn that, when coupled with a rapidly growing population, Egypt's unemployment issues could cause serious issues in the near future. Given such dire predictions, several organizations and government agencies have launched or are launching programs to encourage income generation.

The Bank of Alexandria, also known as "AlexBank," is one of the largest banks in Egypt and, in 2015, launched their latest corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiative "Ebda3 Men Masr" which funds income generating projects targeting "Egyptian masterpiece makers."^{clx} According to the AlexBank CSR website, their approach is based on the concept of Creating Shared Value (CSV) as AlexBank aspires to become "a full-fledged part of the community by blending the creation of social value with the growth of the economy," with a focus on preserving Egypt's heritage of handicrafts.^{clxi} In 2016, as part of "Ebda3 Men Masr," AlexBank partnered with Fair Trade Egypt to support marginalized crafts artisans in the creation of a sustainable and sufficient source of income by equipping them with updated skills and tools, creating new marketing channels, and enhancing existing export opportunities. The project included interventions and activities for capacity building, product development, technical assistance and the provision of tools and skills development to approximately 500 individual artisan clusters in 12 artisan groups in five different governorates, including Asyut.^{clxii}

As tourism is a growing source of income within the Bahariya Oasis, several development projects are currently targeting improvements within the sector. As an example of this, the "Bahariya Oasis Complex," a social development initiative, has partnered with a local hotel facing financial difficulties to provide needed upgrades and improvements including the introduction of a demo farm and craft workshop. The goal is for visitors to learn more about the Bedouin culture while allowing the Bedouins to earn supplemental income through the sale of handicrafts and jams.^{clxiii}

In January 2018, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the Egyptian Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise Development Agency (MSMEDA) signed an agreement to implement small-scale community development projects in selected governorates, including Asyut, to curb what they have identified as "irregular migration," or communities experiencing an unusually high rate of departure. The MSMEDA has issued a call for local community actors to submit proposals identifying community needs and suggestions to address them. The project, funded in part by the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation, is part of a larger "Initiatives for Local Development of Egypt through the support of Egyptians Abroad" project which aims to engage Egyptian expatriates in local economic development in Egypt.^{clxiv}

Renewable Energy

Currently, government subsidies make conventional, grid-based power affordable for the masses, particularly those in lower income brackets. However, in 2017, the government announced a 42% hike in electricity prices,^{clxv} and many are predicting an eventual end to government subsidies given the increasing cost burden of subsidizing energy costs for a growing population. The government has announced that it intends to supply 20% of generated electricity from renewable sources by 2022^{clxvi}, and Egyptian businesses and NGOs alike are starting to invest in renewable energy sources.^{clxvii} In 2012, Dar Elsalam Oasis Society, an Egyptian NGO, funded by the United Nations Development Program

(UNDP), completed a pilot project to provide households within the Bahariya Oasis with a clean environmental source of energy. Over the course of the project, the NGO established biogas units as an alternative to cooking stoves, held training for farmers on the production and maintenance of organic fertilizer piles, and subsequently decreased the use of chemical fertilizers and the burning of agricultural waste. The NGO also claims to have introduced new “medicinal plants,” but no further details were provided.^{clxxviii} A similar project was also completed in Asyut by the Egyptian Association for Comprehensive Development which worked specifically with women to install 214 environmentally clean ovens and 16 biogas units for use in cooking and heating.^{clxxix}

While the government is projecting that only 2.2% of its renewable energy will come from solar power by 2022, the country’s location and climate make it an ideal candidate for solar technology.^{clxxx} In 2016, KarmSolar, an Egyptian solar technology and integration company, completed a solar-powered water pumping project, a hybrid pumping-and-drip-irrigation scheme, and built an off-grid research and development laboratory in the Bahariya Oasis.^{clxxxi} They are currently developing a “hybrid island grid”^{clxxxii} solution to provide power to parts of the Bahariya Oasis.^{clxxxiii} The American University Cairo’s (AUC) Venture Lab, the first sustainability-focused crowdsourcing website in the region, has recently incubated a project to bring solar panels so that residents in the Heiz village of the Bahariya Oasis can have access to power.^{clxxxiv}

The new Asyut Barrage (Dam) and Hydropower Plant^{clxxxv} is another of President Sisi’s “mega-projects” designed to improve upon the original Asyut Barrage which was built in 1902. The \$300 million project aims to increase water available for irrigation^{clxxxvi} in five governorates, including Asyut, as well as generating 32 megawatts of clean electricity per year.^{clxxxvii} The project was scheduled to be completed by late 2017 but, at the time of writing, no reliable sources could confirm if this has happened.

Government Assistance Programs

According to the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS), 27.8% of the Egyptian population is currently living below the poverty line,² although Upper Egypt experiences poverty at a higher level than Lower Egypt, with some rural areas experiencing poverty rates as high as 57%.^{clxxxviii} Many point to the inflation of food prices as well as increasing family sizes as causes of high levels of poverty,^{clxxxix} while others blame the government’s recent economic reforms and austerity measures which are directly tied to conditions for Egypt’s loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF).^{clxxx} According to the Egypt Network for Integrated Development (ENID), poverty in Upper Egypt is mainly chronic poverty driven by a lack of public infrastructure, private capital accumulation, and low investments in human capital as well as the absence of pro-poor program-based fiscal policy which have collectively lead to a deterioration of living standards. Although rural Upper Egypt only accounts for 25% of Egypt’s population, it also accounts for 41% of births, reflecting the very high positive correlation between fertility rates and multiple indicators of poverty.^{clxxxii} In other words, the more children a family has, the more likely they are to be poor and therefore impacted by limited access to food, health care, and education. In this context, government assistance programs are an important step in providing for basic needs and, eventually, helping to lift families out of poverty.

In March, 2015, the Ministry of Social Solidarity (MoSS) began implementing a cash transfer program “Takaful and Karama” (“Solidarity and Dignity”)^{clxxxiii}. The Takaful piece of the program is a cash transfer program made to poor mothers provided they can prove their children are receiving regular health examinations and that school-age children are attending school. The Karama piece of the program is a cash transfer program for those who cannot work, specifically the elderly (65+ years of age) and those

² In 2015, the Egyptian government raised the poverty line to 482 Egyptian Pounds per month (5,784 pounds annually), per person; an amount roughly equivalent to \$27 per month (\$324 annually)

with disabilities. “Takaful and Karama” uses mobile technology to register households in the program, and social workers gather data through offline tablet applications. Initially rolled out in Upper Egypt with a target of enrolling 1.5 million households, the program has been expanded nationwide and scaled up to reach an additional 1.7 million household beneficiaries.^{clxxxiii} In June, 2017, the Egyptian government launched “Forsa” (“Opportunity”), a new program dedicated to providing job opportunities to youth, targeting the poorest 20% and starting with Upper Egypt.^{clxxxiv}

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