

FORUM:	Arab League
ISSUE:	Situation in Egypt (Demographic Explosion)
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Introduction

One of the biggest problems that the Arab Republic of Egypt is the demographic explosion. It is a developing issue that underlies many of the problems that the nation is currently facing, such as poverty, high rates of illiteracy, and general shortages in the basic needs of the Egyptian people. It has a population of approximately 99.4 million (July 2018) and is the most populous country in the Arab region. The current population trend is an increase of 1.5 million each year, and by 2036 the Egyptian population is projected to increase to 113 million. With the rate of population growth outpacing the growth and development of the economy, the severe repercussions of drought, famine, and poverty that follow Egypt's unsustainable growth are no longer simply just part of a distant future.



This picture was taken in Cairo, Egypt. Egypt is the third most populated country in Africa.

Background

Political Instability

Egypt's overpopulation problem is not new and was previously addressed by former president Hosni Mubarak's government campaign to reduce the fertility rate. His government adopted many policies on birth control, and in the 1990s his efforts to reduce fertility rates led to birth control awareness campaigns and the opening on Planned Parenthood clinics. These clinics offered subsidised condoms and contraceptives along with advising couples on birth control. Also, in 1994 Egypt hosted an international population conference. However, with political unrest in the last few years of his regime, less funding was given to reduce the problem of overpopulation. When the unrest culminated in his removal from office in 2011, the political chaos that followed soon after meant that most of these efforts were given a lesser priority or discontinued.

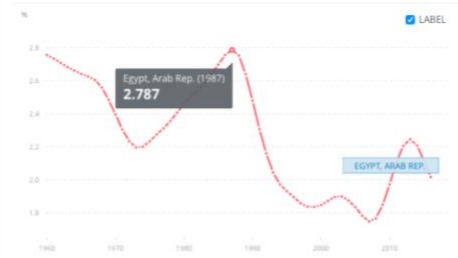
During this time, the years of work that led to some decreases in birth-rate were setback by a sudden surge in population growth. As mentioned before, the next president, Mohammed Morsi, did not approve of contraception. However, the current government has taken action curb the issue of overpopulation with the 'two



children are enough' campaign, and President Abdel Fattah al-Sissi himself has stated that 'Terrorism and overpopulation are the two biggest threat's in Egypt's history.'

Cultural Views

Egypt is 90% Muslim, and in Islam family is considered very important. Children are seen as gifts from God, and thus the use of contraception is hotly debated upon. Even though 8 out of 9 schools of Islam law permit it, the general view is that children are precious and a source of pride and so usually not much is done to prevent children from being born. It is even perceived as intervening in God's will. Education on the topic of sex and birth control is crucial to resolving the issue of overpopulation, however as shown by the backlash from Egyptian media that was faced by university students that created a project on contraceptive awareness and sex education. It was seen as 'scandalous', which is not surprising as Egypt's society is generally very conservative. Even during the former president Mohammed Morsi's time in office, programs raising awareness on the topic of contraception and other birth control methods decreased due to his government's view that contraception 'disrupted traditional family values'.



Egypt's annual population growth since 1960. World Bank.

The rise and fall of Egypt's population from the World Bank.

Problems Raise

Falling Resources and Infrastructure

As Egypt's population growth exceeds its economic growth by far, the rapidly growing population places stress on the resources available such as water. The nation is largely dependent on the river Nile for water, and as Egypt's population increases, the amount of water in the Nile decreases as there is no increase in the supply of water to the Nile. Hossam Moghazi himself has stated before that Egypt is failing to meet its water needs. The unsustainable impact of the nation's overpopulation is further highlighted by the 23 billion cubic meter gap between the volume of water that Egypt receives yearly through the Nile and rainwater (60 billion) and the amount that it consumes (83 billion). The infrastructure fails to meet the needs of the people,



Many of Egypt's villages are taking the brunt of the effects of the lack of resources.



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especially in rural areas. This is shown through a report from the end of 2015 that found that three-quarters of Egyptian villages do not have sewage systems. Even the sewage systems in the villages that had them were not very developed and some were rarely functional.

Although many villages have access to water and electricity, 40% experience regular power cuts and more than 50% experienced water shortages either daily or weekly. The problem of weak infrastructure and resources will only increase as Egypt's population continues to grow.

Unemployment

Egypt's youth (0 to 24 years old) make up for 52.03% of the population. The education isn't equipped to deal with such a large number of students, and thus classroom densities usually end up being very high, even exceeding 100. This high student to teacher ratio means that many youths end up illiterate or unable to read and write well even if they go to school. However, even for those that complete their degrees in university and are qualified for work, they deal with a lack of demand for workers and skill sets that are incompatible for what the labour market requires. To meet the demand for workers in several areas such as in Engineering and Medicine, standards are lowered to produce more graduates and thus produce graduates that are not as qualified as they should be. This impact on unemployment is shown by the 12% unemployment rate. While this has fallen, the fact remains that Egypt must create jobs for the one million that enter the labour market every year.



Poor education due to a lack of resources because of overpopulation causes unemployment.

International Actions

National Population Strategy (NPS)

The NPS's main aim is to improve the quality of life for Egyptians through controlling population growth, and this comprehensive strategy was formulated with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). It hopes to achieve its aim through promoting family planning and raising public awareness of the problem of overpopulation among other ways. The four 'pillars' of this plan are: strengthening access to family planning, improving the health of the youth and their engagement in society, empowering women in terms of economy and education, and the media. The NPS is scheduled to end in 2030 and works with other strategies such as the anti-female genital mutilation strategy and the Egyptian women strategy to achieve full effectiveness. The European Union in 2019 donated 540 million pounds to support a recent project that has been launched to strengthen the NPS.



2 Kefaya (Two [children] is Enough)

The ‘2 Kefaya’ campaign is an effort on the part of the Egyptian government to curb the population growth by encouraging citizens to only give birth to two children. It was launched in 2018 and is a two-year project. In addition to simply hoping to stabilize the population growth in one way, the campaign also hopes to offer free birth control and develop existing clinics and provide training to doctors and nurses to work in them. Yet again, the UNFPA has sponsored 10 million Egyptian pounds to ‘2 Kefaya’. Also, the NGO Support Fund has donated LE 75 million to the NGOs that are taking part in the project.

Key Players

Arab Republic of Egypt

The Arab Republic of Egypt is currently experiencing a huge demographic boom which has been negatively affecting many aspects of the nation such as the economy and its resources. This issue is not new and was effectively managed by former president Hosni Mubarak until the last few years of his presidency where it was forgotten amid political turmoil. The years where the problem of overpopulation slipped off the agenda allowed it to get out of hand and develop into its current state that disrupts many parts of Egyptian life. In recent years, this issue has been given great priority by the government even though the impact of these campaigns and efforts to alleviate the effects of overpopulation remains to be seen due to the disconnect between the government and the population and other factors.

United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)

The UNFPA has donated large sums of money to many of the efforts that Egypt’s government have undertaken to control its population issue. This UN organ has also actively collaborated with Egypt’s government to come up with new strategies and ideas and has aided the national family planning and population program since 1972.



The UNFPA has taken measures such as educating Egyptian women on family planning in to reduce overpopulation.

Possible Solutions

Incorporate Awareness on Overpopulation in Schools



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The youth are currently the largest age group in Egypt's demographic and are poised to either curb or continue the unsustainable population growth. It is important to educate the next generation on these issues to ensure that they understand the impact that overpopulation is having on Egypt's resources and how they can contribute to alleviating the situation. In this way, they can be encouraged to have lesser children and make more informed decisions for their families when they become adults. It is also much more likely for them to accept and be open to new ideas in opposition to the traditionalist idea of 'the bigger the family is the better' than adults. While such action may not yield immediate changes, it is important if Egypt is put to an end the problem of overpopulation.



Teaching sex education at school is important so that children are aware of the problem from a young age.

Educating Women

Educating women is an important step to ending Egypt's population crisis. As women traditionally are lower in society than men and therefore are not given as many opportunities in terms of education or career many end up staying at home. This makes them substantially more likely to want to have children as they do not have much to do at home. In addition, lack of education on the mental, physical, and emotional effects of pregnancy add to the want for children. Even if the wife does not want to have children, the husband can often bully her into giving in as she lacks bargaining power due to her not having any income and thus being dependent on him. Therefore, a solution to lowering the birth rate is for the Egyptian government to invest in educating women and including sex education into the curriculum. This is especially important as Egypt's population growth is only expected to stabilize in the year 2065, and population momentum is expected to contribute to at least half of Egypt's population growth over the next century. Population momentum is what occurs when a large fraction of women are in their childbearing years, and it can lead to the number of births increasing even as the rate of childbearing falls. The sooner fertility rates fall, the less population momentum will affect population growth, and this can be done by targeting and educating women.

Glossary

Demographic

The structure of a population.

Planned Parenthood

A non-profit organization that provides healthcare and sex education to people globally.



Contraception

Preventing a pregnancy through interfering with the process of ovulation, fertilization, and implantation.

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