

Housing and Land Rights Network Habitat International Coalition



Workshop Report “Cairo2050” The Urban Development Projects and People’s Right to Adequate Housing In the light of Revolution of 25th January 13-14 July 2011

HLRN-MENA organized a workshop in cooperation with 6 Egyptian CSOs: Al-Shehab Institution for Comprehensive Development, Egyptian Center for Civic and Legislative Reform, Development Support Center, Association of Supporters of Justice, Egyptian Association for Collective Rights, Association for Health and Environmental Development, and the South Center for Human Rights. The discussion concerned Urban Development Projects, in particular, ‘Cairo Plan 2050’, and the resulting issue of ‘People’s Right to Adequate Housing in the light of 25th Jan Revolution’.

The workshop aimed to facilitate a systematic and scientific discussion, and encourage public participation in drafting new housing and urban development polices. This would contribute to our ultimate aim of creating a popular and civic coalition, demanding adequate housing for all. The enjoyment of the right to adequate housing was a main demand of the 25th January revolution, especially for the poor and marginalized residing in inadequate housing conditions. Yet these citizens remain affected by housing violations including development based evictions and displacement.

The participation in the workshop was wide ranging, including publicⁱ officials, researchers, academics and civil society activists. These participants exchanged their views and experiences concerning urban development plans in Egypt before, and after 25th January revolution. The officials presented their vision for ‘Cairo plan 2050’ in the context of urban development policy, whereas civil society groups and activists documented violations that occurred through the impact of these plans, specifically on informal settlements (slums). These observations were also reinforced by number of testimonies from different areas in the capital, where urban development projects and beautification have lead to grave violations of housing rights.

The workshop was divided into two days. The first contained the theoretical aspect of the workshop activities, by reviewing several points regarding the housing policies implemented in Egypt by the officials from experts, consultants on the urban

development in Egypt.

The first day

Session one” housing situation in Egypt”

Session one was conducted by Rabie Wahbah, HLRN-MENA program officer, who presented a summary report on ‘The Housing Situation in Egypt’. This report examined The Egyptian Revolution in a context of a decreasing lack of respect and protection of human rights during the past five decades; deterioration reflected in the quality of health services, education, adequate housing and water. This parallels the State’s gradual subordination to Neo-liberal economic and financial policies, such as the Structural adjustment loan and market liberalization, implemented by institutions such as the World Bank. These policies ensure the continued economic dominance of industrial states over developing nations, at the expense of the latter’s structural disfunction. Previous Egyptian governments became complicit in this trend towards liberalization, evidenced in practices such as land sale to foreign investors by ‘direct order’, a process that ignores original owner’s rights.

Mr. Rabie specifically addressed the damaging nature of ‘Cairo 2050’. This project, promoted before January 25th, consists of urban development and planning policies that aim to transform the Cairo capital into a ‘Universal City’. There has been a lack of clear information and transparency concerning the body responsible for the project, including their specific objectives, and the methods they plan on utilizing to achieve their aim. This is particularly worrying for the population residing in those areas subject to development, as they have already experienced a series of housing violations, such as displacement and forced eviction.ⁱⁱ After the revolution, the planning process and development policies are continuing unaltered, with no further consultation or collaboration with those people affected. Contradictions in statements of project officials reiterate a continuing need for clarification of the objectives of ‘Cairo 2050’. To summarize, it is ‘as if nothing has changed’ after the revolution.

The HLRN-MENA program officer confirmed that urban development policies are a dangerous global phenomenon, and that the world is witness to a growing number of disasters, due to the prevalence of pollution, congestion, and informal settlements (or ‘slums’). These problems result from the State’s lack of respect to its local and international obligations; namely, Economic, Social and Cultural covenants.

Mr. Rabie concluded that we have only two choices: we can either continue the former regime’s policies, overthrowing its head figure only; or, continue our struggle against this regime through our demands for the realization and protection of human rights and freedoms, ensuring that the State fulfills its obligation to adhere to international conventions. However, the recent government’s declared intention to borrow from the International Monetary Fund is simply a continuation of the previous damaging policies that people have rejected. Again, in this respect, it renders the consequences of the

revolution negligible.

A public official representative Mr. Shiref Al-Gohary, the officer for technical support and capacity building for informal settlement development facilities (ISDF), introduced a presentation on the activities and the programs of the ISDF. The ISDF was established under the public order in 2008 with the aim of providing safe houses for the Egyptian population, and to improve the living conditions of the population who are living in informal settlements, particularly in hazardous areas. A five-stage methodology concerning the development of informal settlements has been established.

1. Monitoring of the current situation, and draft the development strategy
2. Draft the development plan and initial designs
3. Draft the executive program
4. Draft the budget plan.
5. Draft the cooperation agreement.

Mr. Al-Gohary reviewed the mechanisms in coordination with the ISDF and other bodies concerned with the development process, such as the General Organization for Physical Planning (GOPP), the National Organization for Urban Harmony (NOUH) and other officials. He demonstrated the current development process, which will commence in the near future within several Egyptian provinces.

Mr. Sherif demonstrated that the Egyptian government has been concerned with development informal settlements issue since the Al-Duwaiqa Disaster that killed more than 119 people, and displaced many households.ⁱⁱⁱ Therefore, ISDF concerned themselves with the unsafe areas as a first priority, then the areas of ability development, then the unplanned areas and recently, development the unplanned markets, which is confined at this time in all Egyptian provinces.

Session Two “Housing policies in Egypt before and after 25 January”

Mr. Abd-El-Mawlah representative of the Egyptian Association for Collective Rights conducted the second session and presented a report on ‘The Economic liberalization of Policies and Housing Right in Egypt’. The report demonstrated that the State’s implementation of liberalization policies have lead to a decrease of social housing schemes, shifting the priority to luxurious housing investments. Concerning the ‘Cairo 2050 Plan’, Mr. Abd-el-Mawala reviewed the case of Imbaba Airport Land - ‘Ard Matar Imbaba’. This area was affected by the creation of new roads to reach ‘Al-Waraq’ Island, destined to become ‘a new Manhattan in Middle East’, according to a project’s supporter. Mr Abd-El-Mawlah documented the consequential violations of the residents’ right to adequate housing.

On the West side of the Imbaba area, informal settlements were created by displaced people and consequently agricultural land dwindled. Under the ‘2050 Cairo’ plan, the government also promoted housing development projects for Giza and Cairo provinces, whilst the costs of building materials were increasing. These development projects

operate under the presumption that housing is an investment issue, not a fundamental right that all citizens should have. Therefore, the Cairo middle class become increasingly marginalized, the poor are crammed into slums or informal settlement areas, whilst the rich monopolize vast areas of land around the Cairo capital. The situation is further exacerbated by foreign ownership and investment, which drives up the costs of real estate, whilst the quality of the unit has reduced; another form of violation to the right to adequate housing.

After the representative of Egyptian Association for Collective Rights, presented his paper, Mr. Mohamed Abd-elazim, the director of Egyptian center for legislation and Civil reforms (Aman) presented his power point about Cairo Plan 2050, from a human rights perspective. He stressed that no one was against development as a principle, but that negative impacts of evictions on households should be considered, and other alternative solutions should be explored by the state. He reviewed the areas that will be targeted in the Cairo 2050 project, stressing that the expropriation process should be for wide public benefit, and not for private-sector interests.

Mr. Abd-elazim showed that in many cases, residents are subjected to forced eviction, and the alternative houses in the area to which they were relocated are often substandard in regard to basic facilities and sanitation. Alternatively, random planning projects in luxury areas of Cairo, such as Zamalek and Garden City, prefer to simply displace the poor and marginalized to the outskirts of the Cairo capital.

The third paper in the second session, addressing ‘The State Budget and Housing issues in Egypt’ was presented by Mr. Elhamy Al-Meghany, director of the Association for Healthy and Environmental development (AHED). It explained the importance of examining what is allocated to support the housing sector within the Egyptian State Budget, and therefore evaluate the government’s concern on improving housing for its’ citizens. He affirmed that the state budget is intricately connected with our daily life and basic needs. Therefore, ensuring the provision of these rights is a priority, and we must examine the role of both public and private sectors in the production and distribution process for goods and services. Mr. Al-Megnany scrutinized the 2011-2012 budget, drafted after the revolution, which included an increase of support of 500 million Egyptian pounds for affordable housing. He wondered if this figure took into account rising inflation and increasing population rates.

In Egypt, 27% of housing units are currently uninhabited.^{iv} The lack of state regulation and involvement concerning affordable housing allows the private sector and foreign investors to monopolize real estate and lands; therefore increasing its’ value. This denies the Egyptian majority the right to adequate housing, and many use informal settlements as a popular solution to increasing rent and forced eviction. Concerning development projects in the Cairo area, Mr. Al-Megnany echoed Mr. Wahba’s comment that we are still suffering an absence of transparency, popular participation and information. Consequently, the state should stop the privatization of basic services and needs. It should instead embrace its responsibility to provide adequate infrastructure, including housing, water and sanitation for *all* citizens, and not solely individuals who can afford to

pay for such basic rights.

Following to the end of these two sessions, the discussions and interventions opened to an intensive exchange of views between the government officials and civil society organizations. The key point that emerged is that we generally suffer from a lack of information concerning development planning in Egypt; particularly the executive mechanisms of Cairo plan 2050. Mr. Bassem Saber, the director of the project 2050 for UN habitat, criticized the promotion method for the project, stating that it should be clearly presented to, and reviewed by the affected communities. This would result in more inclusive involvement, as well as greater transparency. Additionally this community involvement could bridge the gap between government official's theoretical planning and studies, drafted without consideration for the reality of the lives for residents, and NGO's attempts to consider the situation on the ground.

Session Three “reviewing the testimonies of the forced eviction victims”

This session reviewed the testimonies of the forced eviction and displacement victims from many areas, such as El-Hagana, an eastern suburb in Cairo, Mustorod shelters in a northern suburb in Cairo, and Manshayet Nasser in Helwan, a southern suburb in Cairo. Ms. Fatima Edress voiced her concern regarding the inhuman situation for refugees and their lack of rights to claim adequate housing. During the discussions, it became clear that the government officials were not aware of housing violations arising from development implementation, despite their declaration that they monitor problems that develop from the replanning process, and provide compensation or alternative housing to any persons affected.

Fourth Session “the international bank policies in Egypt”

Ms. Emmy A'qdawy, the regional coordination in MENA for the Bank Information Center (BIC)^v, presented an introduction about the BIC, and their mechanisms to monitor the World Bank and it's influence in MENA region. In this context, she reviewed the impact of the World Bank in Egypt, who are currently implementing around 25 projects, some categorized under the 'Cairo 2050' scheme. She urged NGOs to collaborate in the task of gathering and publishing information regarding these initiatives, and consequently apply pressure on the World Bank to rethink the application of any projects that will result in adverse impacts for communities. She also provided a presentation concerning the BIC website. The government officials had not previously been aware of certain projects she documented, for instance the project aiming to renew the transport network in Cairo.

The Second Day

First Session “Strategies and advocacy tools to the right to adequate housing”

This session documents the experiences of human rights activists, advocating for the right to adequate housing. Mr. Mohamed Abd-Alzim presented global examples of campaigns that sought to implement housing rights in urban areas, and what lessons we could take from them to further advocacy efforts in Egypt. Mr. Mahmoud Adawy, from the Development Support Center (DSC), reviewed his experience in networking and mobilizing those who aimed to improve the state of housing in Al-Shabi village in Aswan. He demonstrated how these activities created a network of enforced pressure on the government to meet these demands, in order to improve access to housing rights.

Second session “the working groups”

The work shop participants suggested to the three working groups in one general discussion session for the three issues of the working groups, and they add a new issue on the networking and communication mechanisms”, As following:

The First issue, “Towards Alternative Policies of Housing in Egypt”

This issue raised a debate over the point that housing policies should be formulated, considering questions of justice and human rights, out of the mechanisms of the free markets and investment for profit that not respect the right of the vulnerable and marginalized communities, at the end the participants submitted the following recommendations:

1. End the privatization policies for all state sectors concerned with housing issues, particularly New Urban Communities Authority.
2. Set out a strategic national plan for housing, with concerned CBOs participation by drafting the human rights framework for the project.
3. Adopt new legislation (Constitution, Laws, Regulations) related to the right to adequate housing, taking into account social justice and vulnerable citizens, according to the ESCR covenant;
4. Reform the mechanisms that regulate the building and construction process, including participation in defining the lands and all building materials;
5. Increase transparency by asserting the right to access information
6. Determine the mechanisms that could influence financial backers for housing projects in Egypt;
7. All financial resources (loans, fund, budget) relating to housing projects and infrastructures should consolidated into one figure within the state budget. Concerning projects implemented by these funds, an amendment should be included that allows new regulations for monitoring projects, ensuring full transparency, and popular support from communities.
8. Return to policies of the public sectors and replace holding company’s policies.
9. Provision of rules and mechanisms utilized by landlords and tenant unions. Stress the right of beneficiaries in housing regulation.
10. Attempts to encourage the owners of uninhabited apartments to rent their properties to revive the Egyptian real estate wealth.

11. Adopt a new housing regulation including legal remedies to end the forced eviction policies, except by order from a court.
12. Create a database for the Egyptian real estate wealth. Amend the cooperative housing law to ensure the people's right to access to adequate housing.
13. Oblige the real estate companies to provide to contribute in building cohesive social fabric.
14. Implement policies that regulate the costs and the rental value of the housing units.
15. End the foreign ownership for the real estate in Egypt.

The Second Issue, “The Social Function of Property and Secure Tenure”

After the discussions the participants drafted the following recommendations:

1. Revive the secure tenure principle in housing legislations.
2. Codification of the housing tenure status, for those who did not build on agriculture land, and spent five years with secure and stability tenure for the housing unit
3. Readopt the relation between the landlord and tenant law.
4. Clarify and determine the tenure for agriculture and desert lands.
5. Draft the housing legislations to consider international rules concerning forced evictions, and expropriation.

The Third issue, “The violations and how to address”

The recommendations related to the violations were mentioned in the previous recommendations, but the participants affirmed, the participation of the concerned CBOs during the eviction process to monitoring for any violations could be committed.

The fourth issue, “Network and Communication Mechanisms”

The participants from officials and human rights activists affirmed the importance of this issue to exchange the experiences and information. The recommendations:

1. Determine and identify the concerned parties with supporting communication mechanisms; (government, civil society, associations, experts, stakeholders)
2. Set a unified concept and methodology context between the concerned parties to identify the right to adequate housing as fundamental and indivisible right.
3. Create a committee between the concerned parties to find alternative solutions, as well as, mobilizing for urgent movements to end and address the victims of the re-planning and development based-eviction and displacement process before the revolution.
4. Affirming the integration and participation policy in the treatment between the official government and civil society.
5. Creating popular associations, and committees to promotion and increase the awareness among the majority level of the community.
6. Aim to create a social local movement such as ‘Habitat Egyptian Coalition’, consisting of ‘civil society organizations, academics, and experts’.
7. Promoting the communication and cooperation with media to focus on housing issues in Egypt.
8. Mobilize a campaign to recognize and codify the situation of informal

settlements.

9. Create a committee to follow up on the recommendations implementation process.

The first cooperation as first step to implementing the workshop's recommendations, it will be represented in several meetings with the official bodies on housing policies, planning, and its legislations, following the finish of the HIC-HLRN and its members their training course about "Video advocacy mechanisms" in cooperation with Witness.

HIC-HLRN called for a general meeting including representatives of the participants to create a suggested plan, to be declared, and shared between the parties of civil society, and the government officials, for any discussions or suggestions which contribute towards improve adequate housing for all.

ⁱ The government's officials, representatives (informal settlement development facilities (ISDF), General Organization for Physical Planning (GOPP), as well as, the director of the project 2050 for UN habitat.

ⁱⁱ Gazerat Al-Dahab- Muthalth Masbiro- Matar Imbaba- Gazerat Alwaraq.

ⁱⁱⁱ On Saturday (06/09/2008), a lump of rock collapsed on a number of houses of the poor people in al-Duwaiqa area related to Manshi'et Nasir Section (east Cairo), see the link <http://www.hic-mena.org/pNewsIda.asp?Id=750>

^{iv} 2.1 million Housing units is closed, 5.8 million housing units free.

^v BIC an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organization that advocates for the protection of rights, participation, transparency, and public accountability in the governance and operations of the World Bank Group and regional development banks.