

SoLD Assessment in Egypt

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The research showed that field work investigation greatly contributed to the knowledge of the team, and added much to the merits of the study. Although the team reviewed related literatures on the subject matters (in Arabic and English), testing the analysis in realities of the 5 local communities covered proved to be vital to our understanding of the context and dynamics of democracy at local level, in particular with regards to its "interactive features". The following are some of the main conclusions of this assessment in Egypt:

First: Negative attitude towards local authorities:

- Local communities showed overwhelmingly negative perceptions towards their local authorities, despite some variance in the degree of criticism to local officials, both locally-elected members of the local councils and the centrally-appointed local executives. Moreover, the majority of local councils' members themselves are not very happy with the local system at large, as they feel belittled vis-à-vis the (appointed) local executives, who represent central government at local level and thus have real powers, while the role of elected members remains generally "symbolic".
- There is a phenomenal increase of corruption at local level, especially in urban communities, where more central resources are poured in. The Chief of Staff of the President is widely quoted as saying: "corruption in local authorities reached up to the knees".
- Media, and in particular the national press almost ignore local democracy systems and developments, while continue to utilize local scandals for "national" political agendas, rather than providing the "national" public opinion with more objective and comprehensive analysis of the state of local democracy.

Second: Lack of sensitivity to variants (differences) among local communities:

- Despite the fact that it is clear in the legal literature, field assessments showed how much local environment affects the state of local democracy, in terms of geography, demographic settings, economic resources, and socio-cultural background. However, Egypt's legislative policy on local democracy does not take such differences into account, and rather follows unified codes traditions. Hence, the humble achievements and sustainability in local development, and the more dependence on governmental subsidies.

Third: Ups and Downs in decentralization policy:

- Although the 1971 constitution requires that powers and authorities be gradually transferred to local authorities, little has been achieved and sustained in this regard. The electoral system for local councils could not encourage more than 5-7% of voters to cast their votes in the last local councils' elections in 2008, in which the ruling party won more than 95% of the seats, while opposition parties altogether got less than 1%. Women representation slightly increased from 2-

3% in previous elections to a somewhat testimonial percentage of 4 % in 2008 elections.

- The Directorates of central government ministries working in local communities are still subordinate to centre, and do not adapt enough to local needs.
- Consecutive calls for decentralization resulted in an inflation of the size of bureaucracy at the local level (roughly 4 million employees).

Forth: Increasing role of civil society on local democracy and development:

- Civil society organizations, especially human rights and woman empowerment associations and initiatives are growing and widening their engagement at local levels, thus playing an increasing role in local affairs. By and large, political awareness among constituencies of poorer and remote neighborhoods is improving.
- Youth role is emerging, and its impact on the debate over democracy is widening. The *internet* offers young generations enough tools to participate in local politics at their convenience, although young voters participate less in elections.

Fifth: Launching a new reform package for local democracy:

- The last few years witnessed the development of a new policy by the government to enhance decentralization and strengthen local structures (elected councils and appointed executives) to work together and to interact more positively and pro-actively with local development needs. Such policy is clearly stressed in the President's electoral platform, policy papers of the ruling party, and resolution of the cabinet to implement decentralization processes in pilot governorates since 2008.
- While still to be assessed, this reform package of the local system (regulations, resources, policies..) represents explicit commitment at the highest political level to move towards decentralization and revitalize democratic structures at the local level.