



EGYPT URBAN FUTURES “Informal Areas after 25 January 2011”

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Summary

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Participatory Development
Programme in Urban Areas


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EGYPT URBAN FUTURES is a workshop series, organised by CEDEJ, GIZ and UN-Habitat, which aims to promote dialogue between the public and private sector, civil society, activists, development organisations and academia. The workshop series will provide a platform to exchange experiences and opinions on issues concerning urban development for all stakeholders engaged in the field.

The first workshop on 11 March 2013 addressed the future of informal areas in Egypt in the post-Mubarak era. With the unexpectedly high number of 200 attendees, lively discussions and positive feedback to the speakers, this first workshop clearly highlighted the need for more exchange on urban topics concerning Egypt.

“Informal Areas after January 2011”

The 25 January 2011 Revolution was a turning point not only from a historical, political and social perspective, but also for urbanism. Inhabitants of informal neighbourhoods played a seminal role in the 2011 uprisings, revealing the deficiencies of governmental policy in these areas. In post-Mubarak Egypt, informal area residents pursue new means of action, putting pressure on the government to recognise their rights – often with the support of civil society, scholars and activists. Taking advantage of the dwindling state of affairs in the months following the uprising, city-dwellers seem to have developed new capacities for construction and self-organization.

This first part of the “Egypt Urban Futures” workshop series delved into the conditions of informal areas in Egypt in light of recent political events. Considering that the recent Arab Spring events have been triggered in cities, how will the revolution affect the structuring and governance of urban spaces? How does the Egyptian government view and intend to deal with the challenge of informal areas? Will action follow the many promises made during the presidential campaign on social justice and the improvement of living standards for the poorest?

The workshop examined the changes in informal neighbourhoods since the outset of the revolution. Setting apart myth from reality and focusing on the challenges, as well as, opportunities presented in this new era, the first “Egypt Urban Futures” workshop set out to define new strategies of territorial action and aid to development. The session consisted of a presentation of the development of informal areas since 25 January 2011, and a brief history of the phenomenon. Then, the focus shifted to mechanisms for dealing with challenges of informal and unsafe areas with presentations by a wide range of national and international speakers, from the government, civil society, international organisations and academia.

Session 1: Development of informal areas since 25 January 2011:
Rupture and Continuity

In the first presentation Agnès Deboulet gave a critical overview of categories of informality and their usage. She stressed that terminology is never neutral and therefore there is a need to change our view and consider informal areas as permanent. Subsequently Dina Shehayeb provided an overview of informal areas in Egypt. According to her, informal areas started to increase massively in the 50's due to a major industrialisation process, and important migration trends. The incapacity of the governments to establish new housings worsened the situation. In the 80's, 50% of the new housing stock was informal. And nowadays 75% of the urban population lives in informal areas, including not only poor people but also upper social classes. She argued that one should stop searching for substitutes and instead start developing these areas, she stressed that these areas aren't only a burden for the state. In fact they are entirely self-financed, demand driven, of compact build form and low energy consuming. Dina Shehayeb tried to offer a different perspective of the phenomenon tackling the usual stereotypes. The last speaker of the first session was David Sims who presented trends in informal areas' development since 25 January 2011, stressed the lack of information about growth rates for this period and showed the potential and problems of using spatial analysis (Google Earth) for measuring such growth.



The speakers of Session: David Sims, Dina Shehayeb and Agnès Deboulet

Summary Session 1

Khaled Abdelhalim asked in reference to the presentation of David Sims the major question of why the scale of the phenomenon of informal areas is not recognised. He highlighted the importance of finding evidence for the scale of growth, how many feddans have been lost since the revolution and so on, which David Sims did in his presentation. This information, he said, is very hard to get hold of, but very much needed. He also added that the recognition of the scale of the phenomenon could lead

to an alternative view of the areas, as Dina Shehayeb pointed out. This would in turn lead to Agnes Deboulet’s analysis of different perspectives of self-built areas based on terminology and implicit prepositions. Right now these areas are still disconnected from the government and the media and are still stigmatised. Khaled Abdelhalim spoke about the importance of how we perceive informal areas and the importance of avoiding negative connotations because it affects decision-making and interventions in these areas. In this sense he referred to John Turner’s term ‘Slums of Hope’, asking: How can we influence terminology?

Session 2: Mechanisms for dealing with challenges of informal and unsafe areas since 25 January 2011 – the perspective of the Government

Nahed Naguib spoke about the strategy of the General Organization of Physical Planning (GOPP) in dealing with informal areas through a three-pillar policy. The strategy is based on minimising the appearance of informal areas, through a) re-planning, b) a national housing programme and c) containing existing informal areas. Crucial for the development of informal areas in her opinion, is the collaboration of government, the private sector, and civil society and community participation. Mamdouh Kamel (on



The speakers of the government Session: Nahed Naguib, Mamdouh Kamel, Ashraf Hussnein

behalf of General Ahmed Hany) spoke about the efforts of the GIZ/PDP in the previous phase in supporting the establishment of an Urban Upgrading Unit (UUU) in Giza Governorate. Then he spoke of the mandate and role of the UUU which has helped the Governorate in dealing with informal areas. He presented the experience in upgrading of Eshash El Seka El Hadeed area (Shacks of the Railways). Through the UUU there was a creation of value as the government acquired land and the area is in a better condition now. Ashraf Hassnein mentioned the four categories the government uses to define informal settlements, which determine the strategies for each area. He also highlighted the need for a new law for dealing with informal areas as well as establishing an observatory, which can record the growth of these areas.

Summary Session 2

Khaled Abdelhalim stated that while the government should facilitate access to alternatives of formal housing informal areas are still growing. He stressed that the government cannot realistically provide enough housing and therefore should acknowledge the existence of informal areas. Khaled Abdelhalim stressed that there is a need for a national strategy endorsed by GOPP, ISDF and other national institutions. The problem is however, that the local government is in most cases incapable to implement any strategy on the ground, due to the lack of mechanisms and various other difficulties. He emphasised that since the revolution there are important opportunities to reshape the role of the local government in dealing with informal areas.

Session 3: Mechanisms for dealing with challenges of informal and unsafe areas since 25 January 2011 – the perspective of Academics, civil society, development partners

Heba Safey Eldeen focused on the lack of post-graduate programmes dealing with informal areas and pointed to the deficient government support. She highlighted the urge for developing a post graduate programme for participatory urban development of Egypt’s informal areas. Subsequently, Yahia Shawkat portrayed emerging civil society activities in urban development, presenting a new typology of organisations, which includes charitable organisations, rights organisations, and built environment specialists. Then he emphasised that the communities themselves are part of civil society. Katja Schäfer spoke afterwards about the Development Partner Group (DPG), which is an initiative by EU, AFD, EIB, UN-HABITAT, and GIZ, aimed at bringing



One of the speakers of Session 2: Yahia Shawkat

together and coordinating organisations that provide financial and technical assistance with the national partners and civil society. Katja Schäfer presented the 2013 workplan of the group, with focus on three main objectives: 1) Understanding of stakeholders engaged in urban planning, their positions and activities 2) Having a clear overview of all donor related activities in the field of urban development 3) Establish a continuous dialogue of DPG-UD

with national institutions towards developing a national vision for urban development in Egypt. Afterwards, Ayman Elhefnawi gave a short overview of the GIZ/PDP highlighting its previous experience and its objectives for the current phase. He spoke of the participatory approach and its tools and stressed on the knowledge base that PDP has created in the field of upgrading informal areas.

In his wrap-up speech, Khaled Abdelhalim stressed that housing problems will always exist and that the question is how to deal with them. He also emphasised that one has to look at the time since 25 January 2011 not only as a time of crisis but also as one of potential. He mentioned that the concept of good governance is not brought to implementation. For example, local government has not yet overcome corruption while they could now take the chance to get rid of this stigma. He demanded that the new law for municipalities should support this and other good governance measures. One problem he mentioned is the lack of a national strategy for dealing with informal/ unplanned areas. In connection with that he posed some important questions: Does the ISDF really have a real strategy to solve problems? Or is the categorisation is just a strategy to make money? If the private sector is included in the urban upgrading, then which private sector? And what are criteria to tick off an unplanned area from the list of informal areas?

**Press coverage on
EGYPT URBAN FUTURES:**

- [Al Ahram Online](#)
- [Egypt Independent](#)

All these questions demand more debate in the future.



The audience engaged in lively discussions