

Economics Graduate Student Project I

Project Summary: The project focuses on examining the trajectory and agency of young people living in a context of marginalization and exclusion in the slum neighborhoods of Greater Cairo. The project approach builds on the perspective that it is essential for youth to be involved in developing the solutions for their generation to successfully navigate the transition from education to work in a way that supports youths' overall wellbeing. Accordingly, we define "success" not only in terms of individual achievement, but also in terms of case studies of youth-led organizations and initiatives that are working to advocate for and improve youth outcomes in informal communities. Using a quantitative and qualitative mixed-methods methodological approach, the project will analyze individual youth trajectories. The quantitative analysis will build on data from a proposed new survey, Youth in Slums Survey (YSS), in three slum communities in Greater Cairo. This will be complemented with data from qualitative life history.

Introduction: Young people living in informal urban areas in Egypt are often perceived as growing up in a context of multiple inequalities of opportunity. Although the great diversity between and within Egypt's informal settlements has been highlighted in previous research, there is a consensus that most informal urban residents still suffer from an "urban penalty," due to overcrowded living conditions, and poor quality of core public services (Jorgensen and Rice 2012; Roushdy et al 2016). It is also widely thought that young people living in these areas are disproportionately exposed to multiple hazards and vulnerabilities, not only more than young people in formal urban areas but also more than those living in rural areas (Population Council 2010; Roushdy and Sieverding 2015). This project aims to advance the state of knowledge on young people living in a context of marginalization and exclusion in the slum neighborhoods of Greater Cairo. The ultimate goal is to demonstrate how young men and women identify opportunities and overcome the challenges of the transition to adulthood within their informal communities.

Problem Statement: Young people growing up in the Greater Cairo slum areas are a particularly vulnerable group, due to structural forms of deprivation, poverty and powerlessness on their part or that of their households. Recent data from the 2016 Survey of Young People in Informal Greater Cairo (SYPE-IGC) shows that rates of access to basic services such as water, sanitation, healthcare and education are not necessarily lower than those in comparable formal urban regions. Many young people in IGC attend secondary school or university. Their labor market outcomes are quite similar to that observed among young people living in the formal urban neighborhoods of Greater Cairo. Nevertheless, the critical gap that the SYPE-IGC findings point to is in the quality of public amenities, and the inefficiency and inadequacy of local health and education services. Additionally, young people living in informal areas expressed their sense of marginalization in both public and private spheres of life due to where they lived. This sense of marginalization among youth in IGC highlights the importance of engaging youth in these areas in the generation of programs and policies to support better outcomes for them and peers.

Background: Although the trend of "slumization" has predominantly been viewed as a negative urban development challenge, informal areas are highly diverse in their characteristics and residents' incomes; they are often the starting point for newer urban populations such as migrants and youth (UN-Habitat 2003). The origins of Egypt's *ashwaiyyat* follow these global patterns, and the *ashwaiyyat* are similarly diverse in their characteristics. Previous surveys have found that the wealth gap between residents of informal and formal urban areas of Egypt are not as great as those between rural and urban areas (Population Council 2010). Existing research also indicates that the majority of residents of *ashwaiyyat* have access to basic services such as water,

electricity, health and education (Roushdy et al 2016; Sieverding et al forthcoming). However, case studies indicate that the quality and accessibility of those services, as well as informal mechanisms of exclusion from them, vary widely across informal areas (Sieverding et al forthcoming). The costs of accessing adequate services, as well as hidden fees, also pose a substantial burden on some households (Sabry 2010). Perhaps even more so than the variability in access to (quality) services that characterizes Egypt's *ashwaiyyat*, marginalization of informal residents may take place through political, economic and social processes. The marginalization of the *ashwaiyyat* mirrors the global trend of "slums" increasingly being used to denote stigmatized areas that are excluded from broader urban development (Stephens 2012). More broadly, UN-Habitat conceptualizes urban poverty as a concept that goes beyond income to encompass low human capital, including weaker social and economic networks, exclusion and labeling or discrimination (UN-Habitat 2003).

Significance: The main objective of this project is to contribute in identifying "success" at both the individual as well as youth-led organization and initiatives levels to inform the design of government policies as well as the design of programs developed by NGOs, international development partners and donors working with youth. Accordingly, the overarching hypothesis in this project is that there exist stories of successful youth school to work transition within the context of marginalization prevailing in the *ashwaiyyat*, and that analyzing and disseminating such stories is critical to identifying effective lessons learned for policy and programmatic efforts to improve young men and women's wellbeing in similar marginalized context in Egypt and in other developing countries. The novelty of this project is that its approach builds on the perspective that it is essential for youth to be involved in developing the solutions for their generation to successfully navigate the transition to adulthood.

Project Description: Following our interest in both individual success and models of successful youth leadership in informal areas, the research work under this project is organized under two primary objectives that address, respectively, individual youth trajectories over the transition to adulthood in informal urban areas of Cairo, and case studies of youth-led organizations and initiatives working to improve the wellbeing of young people and their informal communities. Our approach to the project builds on the perspective that it is essential for youth to be involved in developing the solutions for their generation to successfully navigate the transition to adulthood. Objective (1) Identify facilitators and barriers to successful youth school to work transition in Informal Greater Cairo. Objective (2) Map, evaluate and highlight creative case studies of youth leadership in informal areas. The duration of the project is 12 months. The first 9 months will be for the graduate student to conduct the research work and the following 3 months will be for finalizing the thesis document.

The Advancement of Scientific Knowledge and Broader Impact: Overall, we anticipate this project to provide novel findings using new qualitative and quantitative evidence and case studies on youth school to work transition and wellbeing in slum areas of Greater Cairo. The results of this project have the potential for wide-reaching application and influence for government programs, NGOs, international agencies and donors working with youth. Given the scope of the challenge of slums and the wellbeing of youth growing up in slums in both Egypt and in other developing countries, the project has the potential to not only generate new empirical evidence but to provide a model for how research with youth in slums areas can help to empower young people and youth-led organizations to share their stories and influence the policy agenda in their countries.

Biographical Sketches: Dr. Mona Said is currently an associate professor and chair of Department of Economics. She earned her BA and MA degrees in Economics from AUC and her MPhil and PhD degrees in Economics from University of Cambridge, United Kingdom. Said is currently an academic affiliate of the London Middle East Institute (LMEI), SOAS, London, board member of FEMISE (the Euro-Mediterranean Forum of Institutes of Economic Sciences) France and active Research Fellow of the Economic Research Forum for Arab Countries, Iran and Turkey. Her current research interests are in labor and human resource economics, poverty and income distribution, gender gaps in earnings and job quality and equity implications of trade policy, Islamic finance and micro-finance.

Dr. Rania Roushdy is an associate professor of practice in the Department of Economics. Before joining AUC, Roushdy served as the senior research manager, associate II, of the Poverty Gender and Youth Program of the Population Council, Egypt Office. Roushdy has over a decade of experience working in the development non-profit field in Egypt, as well as several countries in the region. Her recent research focus is on youth school- to-work transition and labor market outcomes, youth civic engagement, women empowerment, gender dynamics, program evaluation and urban poverty and special inequality. She holds a PhD and an MA in economics from the State University of New York at Stony Brook, as well as an MSc in statistics from the Faculty of Economics and Political Science at Cairo University. Her work on migration had earned an international and a regional award for best paper.

Leveraging Resources: The network of the Economics Department including the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS) and the National Council for Youth and the National Council for Women will positively support the research conducted, and will benefit the graduate student for the purpose of the project and their own professional development.

Deliverables: Deliverables include a master thesis deposited at the Digital Archive and Research (DAR) Repository of the American University in Cairo, publically accessible. In addition, the results of the research project will be disseminated through recognized venues in the field, such as international conferences, journals, policy briefs, infographs and documentaries.

Professional Development and Mentoring Plan: The Co-Is will be committed to the close mentoring of the graduate student through thesis research supervision, in order to have them develop the required skills for successfully carrying out the research, in addition to mentoring, support and guidance for results dissemination at local and international venues of relevance. The graduate student will be involved in the survey and qualitative component design phase, data collection and analysis, project publications and dissemination activities.

References: Central Agency for Population Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS) and the National Population Council (NPC). 2014. A study of Factors of the Growth of the Slums areas in Greater Cairo, and the Effects on the Demographic and Social Characteristics, Cairo, Egypt. Jorgenson, Andrew K., and James Rice. 2012. “Urban Slums and Children’s Health in Less-Developed Countries.” *Journal of World-Systems Research* 18:103116. Published, 02/2012. Population Council. 2010. Survey of Young People in Egypt. Cairo: Population Council. Roushdy, Rania, and Maia Sieverding. 2015. Panel Survey of Young People in Egypt 2014: Generating Evidence for Policy, Programs and Research. Cairo: Population Council. Roushdy, Rania, Maia Sieverding, May Gadallah, Ali Rashed and Rasha Hassan, 2016. Survey of Young People in Informal Urban Areas of Greater Cairo: The cup-half full or half-empty”. Cairo: Population Council