Water Problems in the Egyptian Countryside
Between corruption and lack of planning
Case studies of two Egyptian villages

Edited by
Land Center for Human Rights (LCHR)

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Introduction:

While issuing this report issue no. 32 of the Land and Farmers series, the LCHR hopes that the Egyptian political parties competing for the parliamentary chairs 2005 – 2010 could put water problems among their priorities and plans to solve them. This report indicates that none of the Egyptian villages is free of water problems, quite the opposite of the urban areas that most of the times enjoy better services.

Among the water problems that the Egyptian villages face we can find: polluted drinking water, not cleaning drainages and lack of irrigation water. The Egyptian farmer stands helpless before such problems because of the absence of central planning by the state foundations or negligence by the government to the problems of the poor and marginalized people in the countryside or the spread of corruption among the governmental employees or negative interference by the powerful and rich people to gain more advantages to their agrarian lands, which result into farmers and their families being infected with epidemics, like: kidney and liver diseases because of the polluted drinking water and the unclean drainages that spread malodors and insects that cause infectious diseases or lead to great losses in the agrarian production as a result of the lack of irrigation water or bad distribution which highly decreases the production rates and the livelihood levels. Of course this doesn't only effect farmers families, but it also greatly effects the Egyptian economy as a whole, as it will lead to the decrease of the national income level, the deterioration of manpower in the countryside and the withdrawal of the agricultural and economic development in general.

The report is an attempt to tackle some of the water problems in the Egyptian countryside. It is composed of four sections:

The First Section introduces the international and regional as well as the legal contexts agreements and covenants regulating water issues. There are many international laws, conventions and instruments ensuring the right to water to the Egyptian citizens, to which Egypt is a signatory and is whereby committed before the international community in general and before the Egyptian citizens and farmers in particular ... As for the Egyptian legal framework regulating water, it is mainly represented by Law No. 12 of 1984 on irrigation and drainage which suffers many deficiencies in provision and enforcement – boosting corruption and unfair distribution of water quotas. The said law prohibits any works to be pursued on state lands unless through an authorization and license of the Ministry of Irrigation and Water Resources ...

The Second Section of the report illustrates the aspects of water crisis in the Egyptian countryside. Water problems are not stereotypical of the countryside villages only, they occur in the newly reclaimed lands as well. The fresh graduates who receive pieces of land to be reclaimed suffer from the unfulfilled promises by the government to provide sufficient water resources. In the villages, the farmers in some instances resort to using drainage water in irrigation due to the shortage in water supplies ...

The Third Section undertakes case studies of two Egyptian villages, namely: El Rahawi in Giza and Eastern Ghayada in Beni Sweif, the case studies highlight water problems in these respective villages. The case studies highlight the water issues in these villages and other relevant problems e.g. agricultural lands acquisition after the enforcement of Law No. 96 of 1996, problems of public services, the education, health and transportation services as well as problems with the Agricultural Development and Credit Bank and other state agencies ...
The Fourth Section of the report includes recommendations and the role of governmental and national foundations in improving the situation of water issues in the Egyptian countryside:

Potable water:
- Provide a pure potable water network supply in all villages and estates throughout the whole day.
- Water companies should establish water salination plants, pump water to the underprivileged villages and improve neglected water plants in the villages.
- Maintain that potable water is not mixed with drainage.
- Put an end to selling impure water to the poor in the villages.

Irrigation water:
- Provide sufficient water quotas to the various crops.
- Fair distribution of water through supervision and monitoring by the Ministry of Irrigation and Water Resources.
- Increase the numbers of supervisors.
- Establish plants for water treatment to be used in land reclamation outside the Delta.
- Lining canals and irrigation passages.
- Cleansing branch canals through the land improvement equipment.
- Remove grass and wastes from the branch canals.
- Supervisors should efficiently perform their roles in monitoring irrigation violations.
- The state should dig more wells in the villages in need.
- Agricultural guidance agencies should assume their role of raising the awareness of the farmers on methods of water usage.
- Raising the awareness of the farmers of untraditional irrigation methods.
- Highlighting the hazards posed by throwing wastes in the canals.
- The NGOs and municipal councils should lobby to urge the government to provide the necessary services.

Drainage:
- The state should build drainage networks in all villages and end the use of storages.
- The government should remove all trenches resulting from the accumulating drainage water causing several diseases.

The LCHR also demands NGOs to work with farmers in aim of reinforcing and supporting farmers rights in clean and adequate drinking and irrigation water, in addition to raising their awareness and guiding them about the dangers of using polluted (contaminated) drinking water, the good use of irrigation water and reusing agrarian drainage water in in the irrigation process to protect citizens health and stop wasting water resources.

We hope that political parties and forces in Egypt consider water problems among their priorities and programs during the upcoming period. The LCHR demands all NGOs to work together in implementing the report recommendations to guarantee a humane and decent life for everyone.
First: The Egyptian and International Laws Related to Water Issues

Water is the pivot of any agricultural economy. For Egypt, the Nile is the vein of life and the basis of the agricultural system. Therefore, Egypt depends primarily on the river Nile as the main resource of water. There are other eight African countries sharing water quotas from the river Nile. At the regional level, Egypt and the Nile countries are subject to numerous conventions regulating the quotas and distribution of water among the respective countries.

There are many international laws, conventions and instruments ensuring the right to water to the Egyptian citizens, to which Egypt is a signatory and is whereby committed before the international community in general and before the Egyptian citizens and farmers in particular. For instance, it is stipulated in the International Convention on the Economic, Social and Cultural rights that water is of the limited natural resources in the world. It is a basic prerequisite of life and health. Human right to water is an infallible right. Moreover, the Commission on the Economic and Social Rights underscores the significance of guaranteeing sustainable access to water resources for agriculture purposes in order to maintain the right to sufficient food resources.

As for the Egyptian legal framework regulating water, it is mainly represented by Law No. 12 of 1984 on irrigation and drainage enacted on February 22, 1984. The said law abolished the Law No. 74 of 1971. The 1984 Law suffers many deficiencies in provision and enforcement – boosting corruption and unfair distribution of water quotas. The said law prohibits any works to be pursued on state lands unless through an authorization and license of the Ministry of Irrigation and Water Resources.

It is noteworthy that corruption and the lack of planning breach the aforementioned law rendering the enforcement thereof ineffective. The field comments of the LCHR researchers indicate that thousands of farmers had to build waterwheels to push water upwards to irrigate their families after some state agencies block the canals. These farmers were punished as per the provisions of Law No. 12 of 1984. What is even worse is that their lands would have turned into barren lands – even if they would not have been punished, which is even a severer penalty.
Second: Water Crisis in the Egyptian Countryside

Water problems in Egypt range from lack of irrigation water, contamination of potable water, lack of drainage services, etc. In fact, most of these problems are related to governmental negligence, lack of planning schemes, the corruption spread all over the municipal councils and maintaining water resources for certain areas at the expense of others. The main persistent irrigation problem is the shortage of irrigation water and insufficient accessibility to the farmers at the end of small canals and the limitedness of water alongside the main canals.

Other problems are due to the length of the main and branch canals – making supervision hard with the few numbers of irrigation inspectors in the various governorates. Other problems are posed by the excessively growing riverbed and bank plants due to the same reason of the length of the canals. Moreover, there are many ruined areas alongside the canal banks due to the wrong practices of the farmers. Accurate statistics on the water needs for the various crops are not available due to the violation of the agricultural cycle\(^1\).

Such problems are not stereotypical of the countryside villages only, they occur in the newly reclaimed lands as well. The fresh graduates who receive pieces of land to be reclaimed suffer from the unfulfilled promises by the government to provide sufficient water resources. In the villages, the farmers in some instances resort to using drainage water in irrigation due to the shortage in water supplies.

Potable water is the second major water problem encountering farmers in the countryside. The villages suffer from the lack of pure water supplies or it either reached them contaminated. Most of the villages face problems of cease of water supplies due to technical problems. The state does not properly assume its role in providing solutions for such issues. Rather, in most cases, corruption prevailing in the municipal councils and the intervention of the members of the Parliament to their own personal benefits help hindering solutions.

Among the grave aspects of the issue of potable water is its contamination in many villages through getting mixed with drainage waters. A blatant example is all villages of Atfeeh center which lack any potable water supply due to the fact that waters get mixed with drainage water. This draws attention to another major problem i.e. drainage crisis. Many villages do not have drainage networks and tubes – leading to health problems. The inhabitants of the villages file complaints continually to the officials at the governorates; however, the complaints are flagrantly neglected.

Administrative corruption gives rise to another major problem in the countryside, namely: unfair distribution of irrigation water. Farmers do not get the water quotas necessary or suitable for their agriculture purposes. The unfair distribution of water entails crops losses affecting in turn economic development on both the short and long runs. Shortage of irrigation water results in ruining crops, spoiling lands, increasing unemployment among farmers and augmenting hostile instances among the farmers. In some areas, the civil society exerts concerted efforts to help implement projects to solve water problems – the role that is supposed to be assumed by the municipalities.

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\(^1\) Findings of the Workshop sponsored by Care International in Sohag, August 2005
Third: Case Studies of Two Egyptian Villages

This part of the report illustrates the field studies conducted by the LCHR researchers in three Egyptian villages, namely: El Rahawi in Giza and Gabal El Nour in Beni Sweif. The case studies highlight the water issues in these villages and other relevant problems e.g. agricultural lands acquisition after the enforcement of Law No. 96 of 1996, problems of public services, the education, health and transportation services as well as problems with the Agricultural Development and Credit Bank and other state agencies.

A. El Rahawi village = Giza:

El Rahawi is a small village affiliated to the Giza governorate, Imbaba center. The inhabitants amount approximately to 12 thousands people. The space of the village is estimated by around 3 km². Most of the village farmers deserted agriculture and started working in digging wells as the daily wage for it is a bit higher than that of agriculture. The public services in El Rahawi, as in all the Egyptian villages, are characterized by unavailability and negligence.

Impacts of the enforcement of Law No. 96 of 1992 on El Rahawi farmers:
The enforcement of Law No. 96 of 1992 had grave implications on farmers productivity and standards of living in El Rahawi. Prior to the enforcement of the said law, El Rahawi farmers were relatively stable with their simple crops produces to meet their basic needs. However, after the implementation of the said law, the lands were withdrawn from the farmers after rendering them barren. The lands were sold as lands for building – resulting in the shrinkage of the agricultural space in El Rahawi. Moreover, the village’s farmers had to migrat either to work in other neighbor villages or to quit agriculture for good and pursue a new job to guarantee honorable life for them and their families.

Irrigation water problems in El Rahawi:
El Rahawi village best exemplifies all water polluters. The village is divided by El Rahawi drainage canal teeming with all types of human, industrial and agricultural fasces. It ends up by moving all such wastes to the river Nile. It would be argued that the most important problem of the village is related to irrigation water. The El Rahawi irrigate the lands through digging wells which are so expensive – this is despite the fact that they are so close to the Nile. However, the cost of digging wells is lesser than depending on the Nile. The Nile current in this area is too low and it needs expensive machines to raise the waters to the fields. Some farmers irrigate their lands from the contaminated El Rahawi drainage canal.

Other major drainage problems in El Rahawi village are evident through the fact that there is no drainage network in the village. Drainage is maintained through digging underground containers. When such containers are full, certain trunks are summoned to remove these wastes against huge financial amounts incurred by the farmers in addition to their daily burdens.

Testimonies:
LCHR researchers had many interviews with the inhabitants of the village to discuss the aforementioned problems. These interviews provide testimonies in farmers words on the daily dilemma they are facing regarding irrigation and potable water and drainage, especially El Rahawi drainage canal.

Among the most important testimonies collected by LCHR, is that by Saber Shindi, 50 years old, wells contractor. He is one of the most cultivated in the village. He and his sons have a great
knowledge in agriculture and politics as well. He says: “the village space does not exceed 3 thousands feddans. Half of the space was dedicated to buildings after enforcing the law regulating the landlord-tenant relationship. The farmers evacuated the lands. Some travel seeking job opportunities abroad and other started working in digging wells, which is as serious. Agricultural lands in El Rahawi are irrigated through wells; that’s why you can find most of the farmers digging a well to share in irrigating their lands by turn. This is despite the fact that we are by the banks of the Nile. However, the Nile here is too lo and raising water is too expensive.

Potable water reaches the village through the water salination plant which was established through collecting the cost from the farmers. This water is not pure as it is so close to the El Rahawi drainage canal. Some people buy potable water from the neighboring villages, however the majority are too poor. They drink the plant water and many of them already got infected with kidney and liver diseases. There are no drainage channels in the village. It is conducted through digging storages to be emptied from one time to the other – another expensive process”.

Saber further talks about pollution and the economic and social implications on the village. He adds: “El Rahawi village is a contaminated one, on ground, underground and even the cattle are getting weaker. Also the lesser crops are planted, the lower is the family income. Our main problem the drainage canal. None of the officials provide us with assistance. We contact civil society institutions and the media on our own to try to find solutions. We call for drying the drainage canal or diverting its direction because it is the root cause of the pollution we are living in. some of the farmers go as far to irrigate their lands by the contaminated waters of this drainage canal which ends by throwing all its contents in the Nile. We also call for providing job opportunities for the youth of the village and establishing a hospital for the village. There is not a single hospital in the village, however, there are some private clinics”.

**B. Gabal El Nour – Bany Swief:**

Both villages of Gabal El Nour and Eastern Ghayada are in Beni Sweif governorate and affiliated to Beba center. Both villages suffer from problems in the public services. Many houses do not have electricity connections as well as the problem of transportation. For education services, illiteracy is spread among the inhabitants of both villages. Few of them are holders of vocational certificates and university degrees holders are rarely found.

**Impacts of the enforcement of Law No. 96 of 1992 on Gabal El Nour and Eastern Ghayada farmers:**

By virtue of Law No. 96 of 1992, lands rented to the farmers were withdrawn and the farmers were evicted. Those who could not afford the new high rent payments lost their lands and turned into laborers by daily wages for the landlords. Otherwise, they moved to the city of Beni Sweif to search for other jobs than farming – their lifetime profession.

**Testimonies:**

Shehab El Din Abu Zeid, 37 years old, a daily worker from Gabal El Nour village – Bany Swief. He states that he doesn't have an agrarian land neither by rent nor ownership, he says that in Gabal El Nour village they drink desalinated water from a desalination station, and that this water is not always clear, as they sometimes find dregs in it which cause some diseases, like kidney failure. This water reaches the village for only 2 or 3 hours a day because of neglecting and un-maintaining the desalination station which was built in 1996.
Shehab further talks about water in the agrarian land, as it is very rare because of its' expensiveness and the wide area of reformed agrarian land that consumes a large amount of water specialized for the village, which led to land beginning to loose its' value and production decreased notably. The village doesn't have a drainage system, while drainage in the village is about tanks dug inside the ground, and when these tanks are filled up, special trucks come to empty them, which costs a lot of money. These tanks raise the water level, which have led to the collapse of some houses since the year 2000, and because of the water pollution and saltiness, 20% of the agrarian land area was wasted.

Then he presents the demands of Gabal El Nour people saying that the government must consider the unused underground water and establish a desalination station to use this water for drinking and irrigation, establish a covered drainage network and desalinate wasted water and reuse it in irrigation. The village doesn't have members in the local council. And the village has many other problems, like unemployment, as the village has 12 thousand people in it, only 1000 of them are employed, the people demand governmental working opportunities and loans for small projects.
Fourth: Results and Recommendations

There are millions of people in Egypt who strive to obtain adequate and clean water especially in the countryside, but there aren't enough water resources to satisfy the needs of the people especially the poor people in the countryside.

The LCHR aims from working with farmers to guarantee justice in distributing water to support farmers right in adequate amounts of irrigation water for their agrarian lands, as hundreds of Egyptian villages still suffer from lack of irrigation water and water pollution (when mixed with drainage water), these villages still suffer of shortage in irrigation water because of the unjust distribution, neglecting waterways and not improving water lifting stations. The LCHR also works with farmers to guarantee their right in a fair access to clean drinking water.

In Egypt, the rural society needs more effort to guarantee farmers rights in clean and adequate water and drainage systems. In addition to that, farmers need a lot of awareness and training to be able to obtain their rights. Therefore, an integral system must be established to maintain the sustainability of both drinking and irrigation water and process drainage water.

LCHR’s expertise in the countryside confirms that the aspects of the irrigation water problems in Egypt are as follows:

- Water doesn’t reach the end of waterways in some areas.
- The irregularity of water shifts and the low water level in some waterways.
- Conflict and dispute among farmers because of the unjust distribution of water.
- The ruin and impairment of some plantations because of the water shortage in some areas.
- Defect and interlock between the state’s administrational bodies.
- The deterioration of productivity in some lands because of the water shortage.
- Using drainage water in agriculture because of the lack of irrigation water which effects clean plantation in Egypt.
- Using underground water which leads to increasing the farming expenses and the land saltness.
- The nonexistence of waterways and canals that suit some of the expansions in the new lands.
- The increase of social problems and violence in the countryside because of competing for the priority in irrigation.
- The deterioration of the soil and wasting land resources in some areas.
- Clean drinking water doesn't reach most villages in the Egyptian countryside, which force some farmers to use polluted drinking water.

LCHR works with farmers in aim of:

- Reinforcing and supporting farmers rights in clean, adequate and a fair share of drinking and irrigation water.
- Provide guidance in using irrigation water and reusing agrarian drainage water to protect citizens health and stop wasting water.
- Raising farmers awareness about the dangers of drinking polluted water or not having an adequate share of irrigation water or the nonexistence of systems to process drainage water.
- Supporting farmers capabilities in the countryside and establishing rural CSOs concerned with guaranteeing farmers rights.
• Issuing reports and publications to raise farmers awareness and teach them about water rights stated by the law.
• Providing legal aid for the farmers whose rights in clean and adequate drinking and irrigation water have been violated by filing lawsuits before courts and presenting their complaints to the specialized officials at the ministries of irrigation and agriculture to solve water problems in the countryside.

The most important issues undertaken in the LCHR activities:

• The importance of cleaning rural waterways and maintaining waterwheels.
• The importance of increasing the number of dredging machines to clean waterways and drainages.
• The importance of increasing the days of shifts in waterways that suffer of lack of irrigation water.
• Closing some stations and renewing some water lifting machines.
• The importance of increasing the punishment for those who violate irrigation and drainage laws.
• The importance of lining waterways and canals to stop wasting water resources in Egypt.
• The importance and necessity of clean drinking water to reach all Egyptian villages for the protection of farmers health and life in Egypt.
• The importance of national associations in the countryside and rural pioneers to participate in supporting farmers rights in adequate irrigation water to improve their incomes.
• The importance of raising the awareness of agrarian guides and governmental officials about their positive social and economic roles in this field.
• The importance of presenting complaints and filing lawsuits in case state foundations didn't do their role in guaranteeing these rights.
• The importance of coordinating between the different bodies (farmers, national associations, local councils, the ministry of agriculture, the ministry of irrigation) to solve water problems.

The present report displayed some of the many water problems in the Egyptian countryside – necessitating prompt solutions to be provided by the state agencies. The government’s negligence negatively affects the rates of agricultural production, the efficiency of farmers performance and the standards of living of the countryside families. The report also indicated that administrative corruption in the municipalities e.g. bribes to facilitate services to certain areas, etc and the lack of planning monitoring water distribution aggravate the problem.

The report calls primarily for combating corruption in the Ministries of Agriculture and Irrigation, abolishing bribing offered by landlords against the benefit of small poor farmers. It also urges the government to assume its role in planning distribution of irrigation water among the villages and the various areas. It should stop the state of apathy of the government agencies against the farmers who have the right to water by virtue of the Egyptian laws and Constitution as well as the international covenants and instruments.

The following are some recommendations that should be considered by the state agencies to solve the issues highlighted in the report:
Potable water:

- Provide a pure potable water network supply in all villages and estates throughout the whole day.
- Water companies should establish water salination plants, pump water to the underprivileged villages and improve neglected water plants in the villages.
- Maintain that potable water is not mixed with drainage.
- Put an end to selling impure water to the poor in the villages.

Irrigation water:

- Provide sufficient water quotas to the various crops.
- Fair distribution of water through supervision and monitoring by the Ministry of Irrigation and Water Resources.
- Increase the numbers of supervisors.
- Establish plants for water treatment to be used in land reclamation outside the Delta.
- Lining canals and irrigation passages.
- Cleansing branch canals through the land improvement equipment.
- Remove grass and wastes from the branch canals.
- Supervisors should efficiently perform their roles in monitoring irrigation violations.
- The state should dig more wells in the villages in need.
- Agricultural guidance agencies should assume their role of raising the awareness of the farmers on methods of water usage.
- Raising the awareness of the farmers of untraditional irrigation methods.
- Highlighting the hazards posed by throwing wastes in the canals.
- The NGOs and municipal councils should lobby to urge the government to provide the necessary services.

Drainage:

- The state should build drainage networks in all villages and end the use of storages.
- The government should remove all trenches resulting from the accumulating drainage water causing several diseases.

The LCHR demands all officials and foundations interested farmers issues to unite in solidarity with farmers in order to implement the report recommendations to guarantee farmers a decent life in Egypt.
Fifth: Annexes

This section is annexed in the Arabic version which indicates the texts of some Egyptian laws related to farmers rights in water. These laws undertake "waterwheels, private and field drainages, division and share of water, waterways, underground water, water lifting machines, irrigation in new lands, irrigation and drainage fees, the dangers of the rise of the water level ... etc"
Land Center for Human Rights (LCHR)
A non-profit, non-governmental organization
Established in 1996 under sections 505 to 537 of the Egyptian civil law and section 69 of the Egyptian constitution

The Land Center was established to defend farmers and advocate for human rights in rural Egypt, since there were no such organizations before LCHR’s establishment in 1996. LCHR aims to address the disrespect and lack of protection of the rights of farmers and the agricultural sector in Egypt, influence the direction of the land market and prices, and study the effects of policies on farmers’ lives and the agrarian economy.

There is currently no legislative structure that addresses workers’ conditions in the agrarian sector; therefore, farmers experience economic, social, civil, and political rights are violated daily. A gap is expanding between rural and urban areas in Egypt regarding the provision of governmental services, which has led to an increase in the violations of rural men and women’s rights in the midst of worsening socioeconomic conditions. Child labor in the countryside has become widespread in the agrarian and other sectors, which has been accompanied by an increase in the rates of illiteracy and school dropouts. Rural women’s rights are violated daily within the family or at the workplace or because of deteriorated socioeconomic conditions.

LCHR defends the farmers and agrarian workers because of poor, agrarian working conditions that are derivative of a lack of work contracts, holidays, working regulations, and the right to organize. LCHR supports and encourages the roles of syndicate organizations, coops, associations, and the rural organizations. It directly confronts the phenomenon of child labor and studies its causes and effects. It works to empower rural women, especially those working in the agrarian sector, so they can confront and challenge the daily violations of their rights. LCHR supports efforts to curb pollution in the countryside and educate farmers about pollution. It also upholds the importance of safe working conditions and providing healthcare and other necessities of life to farmers.

LCHR aims to improve the economic and social conditions to which farmers are exposed in rural Egypt, observe human rights violations that in Egyptian villages, develop citizens’ awareness of human rights culture, and encourage coordination between civil society organizations by supporting their independence and reinforcing the values of democracy and human rights.

LCHR contributes to efforts that seek economic agrarian reform in Egypt that will guarantee farmers’ rights, especially to farm their lands in safety. It also attempts to disclose the views and needs of the Egyptian poor and increase their scope of participation in the decision-making processes that affect them.

LCHR offers legal assistance to farmers when their economic, social, civil, or political rights are violated and issues reports, and collects data about such violations. It organizes training courses and publishes brochures to develop citizens’ awareness of human rights in Egyptian villages. It has formed a network of volunteers and activists interested in making human rights work widespread in Egypt. It organizes symposiums and holds workshops about issues related to rural Egyptian political, social, cultural and environmental conditions. LCHR seeks strong relations with national and international and human rights organizations and development agencies in order to help achieve its goals.

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The Land Center for Human Rights offers free legal support and can receive all complaints related to farmers, agrarian workers, fishermen, women and children’s rights in rural Egypt, and can be reached by contacting:

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For more information, please visit LCHR’s website at: http://www.lchr-eg.org