

CHAPTER VIII

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THE PROSPECTS OF RURAL RECONSTRUCTION

It is clear from the preceding examination of the problems connected with rural land uses in the Nile Delta that population pressure on the land is the most important problem confronting any scheme of rural reconstruction. Any policy for rural development and remedies must be based on this consideration.

The Population Problem

The best approach to the population problem is to examine the rise of Egypt's population in the light of the population density, level of employment, and level of consumption. The inhabited part of the Delta which is the only part that should be considered at the present time, has a population density of over 500 persons per square kilometres, most of whom derive their income from agriculture.

As regards employment, it is well known that while there is a little overt unemployment in the Delta villages there is an enormous amount of hidden unemployment as has already been mentioned.

In view of this it may be said that as much as one third of the present rural population is surplus in the sense that there is no adequate employment for this surplus population within the present agricultural framework. In other words, the same output could be obtained with only two thirds of present rural population.

Any attempt at raising the standard of living presupposes either an enormous expansion in production or a reduction in the population.

Several partial means of lessening the population pressure have been suggested, including emigration, industrialization and birth-control.

It is reasonable to envisage fairly large-scale emigration to Syria where geographical and agricultural conditions are very similar to those prevailing in the Delta. This seems to be even more feasible now that the two countries

have been amalgamated in the United Arab Republic. Syria could absorb about 39% of the surplus population in Egypt - see appendix no. 7.

The Sudan also provides an outlet for the Egyptian emigrant, but its potentialities should not be overrated.

Internal migration to the sparsely populated north of the Delta or to the New Valley area in the Western Desert could also ease the congestion of some parts of the country. The acceleration of reclamation works and the extension of cultivation could absorb large numbers.

Industrialization, unfortunately, offers little hope of absorbing Egypt's surplus population, for although industry can make an important contribution to the national income, it is doubtful whether it can even absorb the normal increase in population, especially as the death rate is likely to decline because of improvements in the health services and other related developments.

Birth control even if adopted on a fairly large scale would only succeed in slowing down the rate of growth of the population, rather than arresting it. In England where birth control has been practised on a large scale since about 1890 the population is still slowly increasing, and in less developed countries like Japan birth control has succeeded only in slowing down the rate of growth to a small extent.⁽¹⁾ Birth control in fact tends to be practised on a large scale only in urban, literate communities enjoying a high standard of living.

In the Delta, there have been certain developments which may facilitate the ultimate spread in birth control. It is possible that a vigorous propaganda campaign might arouse some response, but there is no reason to expect a basic change for a long time to come.

Prospects in the High Dam Scheme

If, as is claimed, the High Dam Scheme will make possible the reclamation of two million feddans, this means that it will bring work to about 400,000 families by giving 5 feddans for each family to cultivate. If we consider the number of

(1) Essawi, 'Egypt at Mid Century' Oxford Univ. Press, London 1954, page 245

persons per family as four, then the scheme will absorb about 1.6 million people in a period of 15 years, at the rate of over 100,000 persons per year which is the equivalent of 25% of the annual increase of the whole population of the country.

Therefore, if this scheme and the Syrian emigration scheme were to be executed over the same period of 15 years, they would absorb the equivalent of 64% of the annual increase in the population. The remaining 36% must then be absorbed by the industrialization schemes.

In fact, if the annual increase in the number of population can be absorbed either by immigration to Syria, ^{and} by the two million feddans provided by the High Dam Scheme or by industrialization as mentioned above, the population problem will not be completely solved because of the existing surplus of about 4 million rural inhabitants. The situation needs further investigation and research with a view to devising other long-term schemes. The Second Valley scheme, which has already been discussed or the Sinai Desert Reclamation scheme might provide more possibilities for solving this acute problem of population pressure on the land.

Integration of Agricultural Redevelopment and Industrialization

To achieve the integration of agriculture and industry the production of cotton must be increased, both by expanding the area and by raising yields. There should be no question of holding up cotton expansion for the sake of wheat or other cereals, which can be produced more effectively in the Syrian region. At the same time efforts must be made to increase dairying and fruit and vegetable production, especially the latter.

Agriculture can be prosperous only if it is integrated in an industrial system which at once draws off some of its surplus labour and buys its produce.

Rural industries must be developed on a large scale through a long-term policy. This type of industry besides being dependent on rural products and labour will also depend on the home market, although a certain amount of export may be possible. An adequate home market can only come into being if a large amount of industry is built up, but industry in its turn is conditioned by the rural

market which in its present form cannot absorb more than a very small output of industrial goods. This is why the establishment of Rural Industrial Centres will act as a transition step towards larger scale industry. These centres will help to divert the rural population towards industrialization and to divorce the fellah from his age old bondage to his land. This will, eventually, change the social structure from large rural clans to somewhat smaller sized independent families. This last achievement will create the possibilities for internal migration and external migration, as well as the creation of industrial communities should any large scheme for industrialization be carried out.

The attitude towards industrial locations within the Delta must vary according to the scale of industry to be established. The cottage industries will still function in the villages and small towns as they do now, but in addition each Planning Unit (average population 15,000) will have a small workshop centre sited preferably on a redeveloped site within the country town. In the case of the medium-sized industries these will be best located at the main Rural Industrial Centres each of which will serve a population of about 100,000 and will be most probably sited in a country town or large village, again preferably on a redeveloped existing built-up site. In general it has to be remembered, that the productive agricultural area is so limited in extent and so high in value that it must be safe guarded as much as possible. This means that major industrial expansion should take place :-

1. near the large towns and cities on sites which will do the least damage to agricultural production
2. on land of low agricultural value in the extreme west and east of the cultivated land of the Delta.
3. on land in the north of the Delta near the marsh land which, it is suggested, should be reclaimed for agriculture.

So far as detailed siting is concerned regard naturally must be paid to other locational factors both of a general nature and those related to the efficient siting of the particular industry. These factors will include such matters as:-

- a. Surface relief; b. Water supplies; c. transport; d. market;
- e. Price of land; f. Labour, and g. Power.

Stages of Reconstruction and Priorities

Schemes of development are linked with one another; and in a total plan of development it must need be assured that development in each sector goes on according to its specific, predetermined targets and this is seldom possible without corresponding development in other sectors.

The top priority should be given in respect to protective rather than development measures, otherwise it will be like irrigating a loose sandy desert, all the water will be lost in the ground.

Public health and sanitation measures together with mass education should be included in the top priority scale. Then come the measures providing for stability and security of subsistence and employment, viz. Reform of tenancy, rationalized credit, marketing, fixation of wages, hours and conditions of employment of agricultural workers, colonization and settlement of the landless classes in virgin areas as well as the development of rural public works.

Next in order are the development programmes and means leading towards better land utilization and agricultural production, which form the indispensable economic basis for reaching the targets for improved leisure, culture and happiness.

Finally, it is clear that agricultural and rural reconstruction cannot be assisted or given priority unless they are linked with the development of communications and industrialization which not only reduce economic isolation, excessive dependance upon agriculture and chronic unemployment, but also break down the mental and social inertia of the people.

Large-scale heavy and light industries with their varied products from brick buildings and furniture to radio sets and motor cars for mass consumption will assist this social transition and their priority, therefore, will loom upon the course of planned industrialization. Besides, it is the heavy industry supplying cheap tractors, pumps, and other agricultural machinery and the chemical industry supplying artificial fertilizers, that gives an impetus to scientific agriculture

A network of industries, large, medium-sized and small, established in the countryside through the facilities of cheap power and transport will utilize the industrial crops and raw materials from which the agriculturist's income will appreciably increase, abolish rural idleness and lead to a more equitable distribution of wealth and purchasing power among the urban and rural classes.

The pattern of scientific farming, whether represented by small peasant holdings with State aid, or co-operative effort in various directions, or by large mechanized farms organized on collective lines, will largely depend on the social habits of the people, population pressure and crops and crop rotations, that no economic planner can disregard. On the other hand, there is an inter-relation between the type of farm organization and the progressive ideology of urban-industrial culture; and just as the village community or co-operative farming favours a decentralized type of industrial structure on the foundation of guilds and co-operatives, a State-controlled system of industry favours collectivization in agriculture. The most important thing in planning is to order priorities and envisage the targets in the various fields according to the particular economic stage and social ideology of the people.

Economic planning is largely agricultural and rural planning. The essence of such planning is that developmental activities should be co-ordinated and linked together. Piecemeal and isolated programmes cannot make for success, especially since ancient customs and usage have to be fought down in the villages. Thus in any well-considered rural programme, improvement of agriculture, compulsory education liquidation of adult illiteracy, health services, co-operative selling, consolidation of holdings, better living and social reform should all march hand in hand.