

SCRIPT: “What Is It Like To Live In Poverty In Egypt?”

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This audio documentary aims to explore poverty in Egypt, how is it defined, why it exists, what are the conditions of poor families, what is it like to live in poverty, what are some of the efforts that are done to reduce it and how it can be reduced or alleviated.

One day I was coming back from Tanta by train.

*NAT SOUND: FADE IN: Train station sounds (00:00-00:05)*

Tanta is about eighty four kilometers away from Cairo and is considered Egypt’s fifth largest populated city.

Alright alright back to my point, I was going back to Cairo when I saw a little boy sobbing in the station.

*NAT SOUND: FADE OUT: Train station sounds*

I went after him to see what’s wrong when his older brother told me that he is crying because he doesn’t want to work as a beggar anymore and he just wants to go back home. All they needed was twenty pounds so that they could buy a train ticket and go back to Alexandria. They ran away from a cruel stepfather and a submissive mother. He would hit them and he forced their mother to take them out of school because they couldn't afford their education. Families living in poverty send their kids to work rather than school. They believe that if the kids work they will increase the family's income .These kids are brought to the world stripped off their basic needs and rights.

*ASHRAF EL SHERIF (AS): “Poverty I would say it's the lack of access to basic needs. I believe the most basic level is the access to basic needs, primary education, health care,*

*housing and other basic services like housing conditions like rights and so on.” (18.7 seconds)*

That was the perspective of Associate political science professor Ashraf El Sherif now Ali Awani, the Director of the Gerhart Center for Philanthropy, Civic Engagement and Responsible Business will tell us what he thinks poverty is.

*ALI AWANI (AA): “It's really about exclusion it's about people being not included in the mainstream of things. So they are not included in proper education they're not included in proper nourishment, proper housing.” (15.6 seconds)*

The World Bank measures poverty quantitatively. That is like numbers and stuff. It suggests that if you earn one dollar and ninety cents per day you are extremely poor and you are moderately poor if you earn about less than three dollars a day.

Almost twenty eight percent of the Egyptian population is currently living below the poverty line, according a survey in twenty fifteen done by CAPMAS the only agency that tracks statistics in Egypt. This is considered the highest poverty level since the year two thousand.

The incident of the two boys seems to come out of an Egyptian movie about slums but unfortunately it did not. It's just an example of the many Egyptian families that live in poverty.

*(AA): “This is more of a drama not really amusing but it just tells you how poverty is bad in certain areas of Egypt. When you look at attendance of school children for example in areas like مغاغة for example in Minya which is really poor a family would have for example a certain number of children they cannot afford to give them breakfast. All of them in the morning. So they basically give shifts and the child that can get breakfast in*

*the morning can go to school because they will have the stamina to sort of afford going through the whole day. The child that does not get breakfast stay at home.” (36 seconds)*

Volunteers in Action (VIA) is a community service club at A-U-C, they have been around since nineteen ninety six. Hanin Qandil, who acts as their literacy program head, has direct contact with some Egyptian families who live in poverty.

*Hanin Qandil (HQ): “Another family we dealt with she's a woman called Mashallah in Meet Oqba.” (5 seconds)*

*Meet Oqba* that Hanin just mentioned is a neighborhood in *Mohandessin*. It's one of the areas where VIA's team goes to aid different cases that they know need help.

*“(HQ): We knew about this case because some of her neighbors told us that she is very sick and her husband was also very sick and we went to see the case. We thought Mashallah and her husband is the only two cases that we would work on. But what we discovered when we visited them that Mashallah is living with her husband and daughter who got divorced and living with her with her three kids and her sister and her husband died in an accident and she also has her daughter who is not married and son was not married.” (39 seconds)*

Okaay, let's slow down a little bit and get our math right. Mashallah, her husband, their daughter and her husband, three kids, Mashallah's sister and her son and daughter. All in one apartment!?

*(HQ): “Basically they are ten people living in one room.” (3 seconds)*

A ROOM?

*(HQ): “I don't know if a room or what. It's just like these four or 50 meters all of them or 60 meters all of them live in this area. And then they just gain their income from their son*

*and daughter of her sister and money because they work with it. It's really really in a very small amount of money two to cost like a family of 10 people.” (9 seconds)*

Mashallah and her family’s struggle is unimaginable for many people, Egyptian or not.

Overcoming poverty is obviously a struggle as well especially in a developing country like Egypt.

*(AS): “I think experience has taught us that what Egypt needs is a comprehensive transformation which hits the roots of the thing so we don't need poverty alleviation we need poverty reduction policies. Poverty reduction policies would never happen except with big major restructuring of the political economy in this country the priorities of the public policy process which sets the public policy public policy for investments of production of distribution of exchange. Poverty is part and parcel of other problems which need also structure big structural transformations.” (24 seconds)*

Professor Ashraf provided an insightful solution that is really good but would need a lot of time.

*NAT SOUND TICK TOCK (00:00-0:01)*

Some efforts have been done though as the Ministry of Social Solidarity has announced the first stage of two programs, Takaful and Karama, Solidarity and Dignity, in twenty fifteen. These programs offer financial support to the poor required that they will commit to sending their children to school.

*(AA): “The idea about Takaful and Karama is that you give needy people that your money to help them manage their lives. Now this money is given in exchange for their children going to school. So if you actually give them the money to sort of satisfy their immediate needs food shelter et et cetera in return for kids staying in school you're doing*

*both things at the same time you're fulfilling immediate needs and at the same time you're getting good education hopefully to young children. And that's how you break the poverty.” (39 seconds)*

Thankfully, Doctor Ali cleared up our understanding and gave a quick assessment. However, salaries in Egypt are generally low. According to CAPMAS, the average weekly wage for employees in both the public and private sectors reached eight hundred and six Egyptian pounds in twenty fourteen. The wages are unrealistic compared to the working hours and the job requirements and it must be way harder for poor families.

*(AA): The other thing is creating jobs and getting jobs. A decent job is a job that is not exploitative that pays reasonable ration for a decent type of work. So you need to create more jobs.”(12 seconds)*

Lucky enough community service clubs like VIA exist in A-U-C. They financially support as well as develop the personalities and abilities of poor families. Such initiatives are important as they raise awareness about the conditions of poor families and try to satisfy their needs.

*(HQ): “We are also covering the kids of Meet Oqba all that giving them sessions called the JD sessions sessions about ethics just to develop the kids ethics to them to be a better generation than what they are living in because they're really living in a very very bad situation. And those kids have problems to enter school too. We try our best to cover their educational cases to enter school easily.”(29 seconds)*

Situations like that train station incident can teach us to be more thankful for all the things we often take for granted. The economy of Egypt has suffered alot especially after the devaluation of

the pound and that raises the question of whether the poor will only get poorer or will something change?

**PAUSE**

This audio documentary was produced by Nouran Allam for the audio production course at the American University in Cairo, taught by Professor Kim Fox in Spring 2017. Special thanks to Ali Awni, Ashraf El Sherif, Hanin Qandil for their interviews. Music used from Jamendo music. NAT Sound collected at *Ramses* station.