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STRATEGIC VISION FOR MAINSTREAMING GENDER DIMENSIONS IN WATER MANAGEMENT FOR FOOD SECURITY AND FOOD SAFETY FROM CHILDHOOD TO GROWNUP

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Abstract - The world is facing serious challenges, mainly are; food shortages, environmental pollution, lack of clean potable water, poor sanitation, illiteracy, unemployment, violence, crises...etc. These are witnessed with a world population slightly exceeding 6 billion and it is anticipated that by the year 2050 the population will reach over 9 billion. Accordingly, the world leaders are deeply concerned with poverty alleviation, securing basic human needs from food and clean water. The developing countries, of the south, are indeed the victims of such severe sufferings.

Most developing countries during recent years raised the gender issue as an important subject of high social profile. The roots came from some north developed countries to south developing ones through donors' projects where socio-economy issues were focused. Local experts of sociology, socio-economic and community services have appreciated such trend and started activation. However, the broad scopes of disciplines, different levels of targeted groups, specific fields of gender interests and lack of clear vision and understanding to the tools and procedures to introduce the subject, were inhibiting the common consensus of understanding. Although it was clear that gender deals with marginalized group, to change unfavourable behavioural attitudes, beliefs and traditions into equity and mutual respect, yet rejection of change is the norm of most third world communities. Also, there is a common mistake among some active workers in the gender field, in which women are the gender subject. Indeed this is not always true; the subject is much wider and concerns marginal groups in the social community. Street children who suffer mal nutrition, illiteracy and all sort of abuse are a sad example.

Egypt is no exception in facing these problems and has been heavily involved with reform programmes to accelerate the economic, social and technological developments in order to cope with improvement changes and comply with the increasing demand for the uprising population. The template for rescue is the full participation of the community individuals, man and woman, in the economic productivity policy and the optimum use of natural resources. Also, conservation of the environment and development of the sense of ownership of the natural resources and national assets are basic fundamentals of food security and sustainability.

Egypt introduced the gender concepts and objectives aiming at initiating and empowering each and every marginalised group to share in improving the social standards by strengthening the national productivity and food security for the equal benefit of the community. Street children, boys and girls, represent severe uprising gender problem which is the focus of this paper.

The water sector is no doubt the backbone of Egypt's development. Agriculture consumes about 85% of the total water resources and involves more than 50% of the labour force. Farming society have inherited some old habits and traditions towards not only women and children, but also towards other marginalised groups based on family origins from South, Middle or North of Egypt. Gender experts are working hard to change attitudes, but their focus was and still is the grownup sector mostly women and girls groups. This could be the introductory phase for transplanting new ideas, ethics and attitudes among the social community with the least possible rejection. However, after achieving some promising results, there should be still other dimensions to be considered, namely the marginalised childhood who could become either productive or destructive members in the society.

This paper presents the second important step that must be taken with special attention and great care not only from the government but also from the civil society, private sector and individuals. The author strongly believes that gender analysts must search hard in the grass roots of the chronic social problems and try to introduce non-traditional solutions. The author's vision is to tackle complex social problems from bottom up and set clear objectives to be reached in future. The gender issue of special interest is basically to suggest mitigation measures to relief miserable living conditions of street children, who pay the price of uncommitted family crimes. The result is poverty, hunger, illiteracy; severe abuse from the harsh community, and finally frustration.

Also, the paper presents the problem from the perspective of the impacts on the environment, due

to lack of clean water and sanitation, malnutrition due to very limited food availability, and the health decline and epidemic diseases that are susceptible to poor living conditions.

The paper concluded by a proposed comprehensive action plan, gender oriented, to help such marginalised sector, through basic education and vocational training, to become productive and constructive in the community.

INTRODUCTION

Realisation of the gender concept and ideas will lead to recognition and identification of different marginalised groups representing some cases that are really requiring special attention to attain the basic human rights and the social equity. Referring to the developing countries, one might rank the women status as a top priority case, due to the relative high rate of illiteracy, finance men dependent, and less health care and others.

This was the reason for the introduction of the gender topic in the developing countries; women status in the society was a good clear example for the gender case. But once many experiences were carried out, the gender issues became more and more understandable, their logic were accepted and social objectives deemed obvious to achieve good balanced community and healthy environment. With respect to gender and water, it is worth mention that water is life, which concerns everyone of the society. Therefore, it must be made clear that water is the responsibility and business of all. In this respect, we all have to know that one-third of the world population has no access to clean water, one half live without sanitation and accordingly 50% of the world population suffer water born diseases. The expected result is poor health conditions in most developing countries and food shortages due to water scarcity as well as very slow development progress in general.

The puzzling question regarding the effective starting point for gender analysis and appropriate approach to investigate the roots of the gender problems is how to tackle the problem? Up down or Bottom up? According to the writer's practices and experiences, both directions are concurrently needed to the society. Most of the gender experts efforts were directed to the women social problems, which is by default the symptoms rather than the hidden roots and reasons. The general procedure is normally applied to understand the gender issues and it is useful to deal with grownups who express their problems. But at the same time, the attention should include the childhood sector thoroughly in order to discover the sources of the gender problems which help to search for practical and applicable solutions to be adopted by the government, NGO's, civil societies, private sectors and others.

The story of street children is becoming very sad as well as serious. The true challenge for the developing countries, as far as gender is concerned, is to tackle such extremely complex problematic gender problems. It is the hidden roots of some gender problems, the producer of crimes, terrorism and many other serious problems. The writer is introducing an attempt to approach the street children, who really deserve every attention, a touch of sympathy, volunteer and kind dedicated efforts. This is the motivation and driving force to the author to put every gained experiences innovative thoughts and ideas on the track for tackling such complicated social problem. This considerable number of marginalised group deals with water one way or another.

PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION

Referring to the current population of Egypt, about 75 million inhabitants, it is expected that by the year 2011, 2016 and 2021 the total population will be about 80, 85 and 91 million. These inhabitants are concentrated in about 5% of the total land area. This situation puts a heavy burden on public services and has caused massive migration to capital cities mainly Cairo and Alexandria. Although the national authorities are committed to tackle poverty, around 23% of the population still lives below the national poverty line. Despite the free education, 60% of adult females and 36% of adult males are illiterate because the system remains unable to accommodate the population growth.

The street children problem is not new to Egypt, but for the government and public recognition, it is only very recent. It has increased during the last few years, not only in the capital cities, but also in towns and villages to a serious extent so that it could threaten the social solidarity, national stability

and even communities' security. It should be mentioned that the problem exists in most countries of the world. Their problem and plight has been publicised for only a few countries though, Brazil being the most covered in international media, followed by Haiti. Even Canada has some street teens that have been on TV documentaries few times. It is hard to tell how many children are living on the street in Egypt, but one thing is clear, their numbers are very large and almost certainly growing. With the difficulty of quantifying this phenomenon, studies estimate that there are more than 2.000.000 homeless children in the country, most of them in the cities of Cairo and Alexandria (according to 1/1/2005 statistics, Cairo resident population is almost 8 millions, while Alexandria is about 4 millions).

Definitions and Statistics

Street children are excluded, rootless, vulnerable and invisible because of armed conflict, poverty, HIV/AIDS, discrimination and inequalities. They are now labelled "vulnerable to delinquency" according to Egypt's Child Law (law 12 of 1996), which includes all persons under the age of 18 who beg, sell or perform on the streets money, collect rubbish, engage in "immoral product", lack a stable place of residence, associate with suspected persons, and lack a legal source of income or support.

There are no official or reliable statistics on the magnitude of the problem of street children in Egypt. The high mobility of street children also complicates the validity of any survey. The closest indicator is therefore the number of children arrested: of the 42.505 children arrested in 2001, 10.958 of them were charged with being "vulnerable to delinquency".

With regard to the age of children on the streets, random NGO samples suggest that 13 years is the average. A quarter of the street child population is believed to be less than 12 years old, with 2/3 between 13 and 16 years old and only 10% over 17.

Obviously, the number of street children is increasing, and with their negative attitudes towards the community, they will have a negative impact on water use and the environment.

Factors Pushing Children onto the Streets

There are strong reasons for this phenomenon and many of these unfortunate children have to deal with high rate of family divorces (broken families), pressures linked with poverty, absence of parent's love and care, people and drug abuse, and violence...etc. Homeless children originate mainly from run away from home, children escaped from houses where they were placed as domestic workers, from institutions or brothels, orphans, and parents kicking out their children, depressions, frustrations, loose family ties and control, as well other abusing factors. It should be noted that some of these children comes from a wealthy background, attends private schools and is therefore living proof that violence against children is not confined to the poorer echelons of Egyptian society and drug addicts.

Indeed when run away from home, kids get together they will become subject to criminal gangs who commit different types of crimes where street kids are badly forced and used against the law order. In order to explain the problem outer boundaries, it is important to mention that the focused group of the homeless children is most likely part of the illiterate sector of children who did not have any chance of education, and or from those who dropped the education by leakage from school and turned to aimless children.

Relationship between Marginalised Street Children and Water Management

Resources, in general, are used in the production of goods and services to meet the human desires and needs; whereas, economic resources are limited in quantity, thus they should be used efficiently. The use of resources in production activities requires skilled human input and proper techniques of production, which are the tools and mechanisms, operated and managed by the human element. Accordingly, in order to optimise the productivity, the proper mix of resources must be determined. For the agricultural sector, for example, water and land are the dominant resources beside seeds, fertilisers and other inputs, but labour force and skilled work force are the human

resources governing the process. In most cases, street children in villages are used in agricultural activities and water projects. Meanwhile, other marginalised groups are misusing water and are polluting the watercourses and shallow groundwater. This applies to illiterate village women.

Simply, we cannot discuss water management without talking about gender-marginalised groups who are part of the users and affecting the environment. The illiterate farmwomen are causing excessive water losses and have no health awareness about water born diseases; they transfer these bad practices to the future generation where some of them end up in the street.

Communication and Flow of Information

Communication in general is the way of life at work, home...etc, normally in a hierarchal system in parallel lines from top down or bottom up with possible horizontal communication. Bottom class needs can be transferred one or two steps up but most of the time do not reach the top, to decision makers; the authorized people in specific, thus for gender marginalized groups it is almost impossible to reach top levels. This creates frustration / violence / community destruction especially among the young marginalized groups, who have no promising future hope or a way to raise their voice.

Gender and communication draw the attention about the need for qualitative changes in the economy and oppose the view that more growth, technology, science and progress would solve the ecological and economic crisis. This requires new paradigm based on a multidimensional approach that incorporates ecologically sound, traditional, grassroots, women, street children, disabled (marginalised groups) and people-based knowledge systems. The paper focuses on solving the problem of marginalised groups, namely street children (boys and girls). Adding important voices of these marginalised groups will lead to democratising knowledge and technology. In fact, considering the marginalised groups' participation and needs is critical to the democratisation of communication. Also, the active involvement of the community or group in using communication is needed to produce their own messages and to engage audiences in critical thinking. Thus information require a channel to flow through.

MARGINALISED GROUPS AND PROPOSED COMMUNICATION MODEL

It is important to develop a proper communication system, which will introduce the problem to both sides the authorized agencies and organizations from one hand and the street children from the other hand. The model assumes a monitoring steering committee (SC) formed by members of the government authorities concerned, the civil societies, the NGO's, the NCW (national council for women) and the private sector. The SC is assisted by a professional technical secretary skilled to manage networking systems.

The steering committee is the receiver of data and information from one side, and the conveyer of facts on the ground to the top planning and decision makers' authorities.

A Community Boards will be established under the supervision of a Coordinating and Steering Committee, which will be an internal committee from both the steering committee and the technical secretary. To study the market needed labours for small industries and the investment sectors. In addition, a recruitment and Coordinating Centre will be established and supported by firms and investors to provide vocational training programmes for the employee they are going to hire.

The special marginalised groups is another more complex problem and diverse, hence special analysis and search for suitable solutions could be the topic of another special research paper. It is extremely challenging problem facing the government in future, bearing in mind, that street children today are the source of crimes, terrorism, and unmarried mothers.

The Methodology and Mechanism

Having established the infrastructure of the communication system, and formulation of the monitoring steering committee together with the technical secretary, the next step consists in how to collect the data and information extracted from all levels. The steering committee will be supported by

the technical secretary that in turn will be receiving the raw data and information from the focal point. The technical secretary will process, validate and verify such data before saving them in the Data Base (DB). The steering Committee retrieves the Data/Information in order to provide realistic on the ground status to the top planners and policy makers for policy consideration. The outcome is authorisation of plans and policies which the steering committee turns them into action plans and implementation programmes. It should be mentioned that the D/I collection requires a trained staff of workers to be selected from promising individuals. This selective group will receive informal education on data sampling from the field, distributing questionnaires and teaching the targeted individuals to fill it, and finally, guiding them to enter these data electronically in the system. Indeed this process is essential to be decentralised, and then integrated in the centralised D/I level for the technical secretary of the SC. The process must be continuous to comply with the dynamic changes in the community. The technical secretary carry out the evaluation to measure the social changes before and after the implementation of the action plans which will be implemented at the field level. The principle concept is to develop the sense of ownership of the established network for the benefit of the gender-marginalised groups. Also, on the other hand, the analysis will lead to performance indicators to help spot the points of strength and weakness of the communication system.

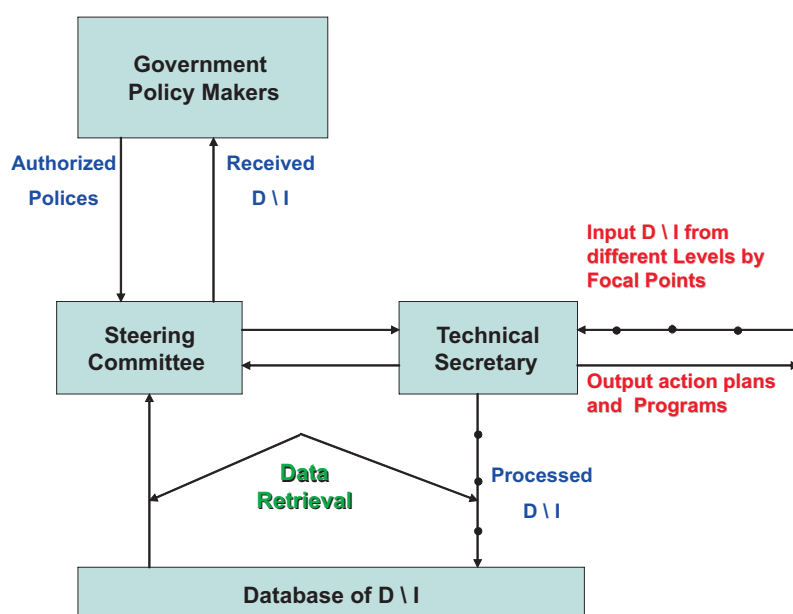


Fig. 1. Organization structure of D/I flow and policy formulation

Fig. 1 shows the process framework of the policy making that involves the actions required for street children problems mitigation in general. The integrated input D/I have to be prepared and processed in order to end up, after a long cycle, as output action plans and implementation programmes. This will include the required budget and skilled work force, to deal with the mitigation measures. It must be noted that the SC includes all the women and social organisations that are represented by the private sector and government authorities for the study preparation of realistic solutions that are transferred to the top level in order to be fully considered in the national plan and policy formulation. The core of success is the gathering of realistic data and information from the field and suggesting practical solutions accepted by the marginalised groups. The full details are subject to site-specific conditions and a pre-feasibility analysis study.

Therefore, summarising the steps to be taken in order to identify the problem dimension, the following must be taken into consideration:

1. Analysing the total number of children within the age group from 6 to 12 years old, in categories:
 - a) schooling,
 - b) not at school but with their families,
 - c) neither schooling nor with the family.

2. The anticipated amounts of biological and other sources of pollution to the environment can be estimated to a reasonable level of accuracy.
3. The number of young mothers and orphan babies can be traced from the social societies working in this field. Therefore, field visits and interviews are needed.

Framework for Problem Mitigation

Realising the fact that "homeless street children" is a fact increasing diversified problem that creates serious consequences on the society, the development and even the political stability, hence unless there will be short and long term mitigation strategies, it will evolve from a problem to a crisis. This problem, accordingly, must be everyone responsibility in the community within a framework of non-traditional measures in order to achieve effective and efficient results at the national level. The approach must be comprehensive, practical and applicable in a modular form. The basic human needs for such marginalised group must be guaranteed in a decent humanitarian manner, reasonable accommodation and boarding, minimum health care, and then complimented with basic education and social attention.

Among the embedded serious impacts of the problem is the young girls' status in such marginalised group of boys and girls. Young mothers' problem has emerged and became an irritating social subject influencing the rate of orphans.

Classification of Street Children According to Anticipated Capabilities

The street children are a marginalised group in the community which represents to a typical normal distribution diagram of mental intellectuality for each age group. That is about 2/3 within the average, 1/6 below and 1/6 above average. Therefore, the analysis that will be done by the Committee Boards must take into consideration the screening process to distinguish between the different natural mental capabilities. The result will guide the appropriate methodology to deal with the group age and the level of intellectual capabilities together with social status, attitude, obedience and degree of accepting changes. The most difficult part of this study is the correct actual statistics of the number of street children, their places of existence and parents' history. Thus, it might be useful to set some assumptions and generate scenarios based on some collected data and information relevant to the targeted groups without that it will turn to a timing bomb.

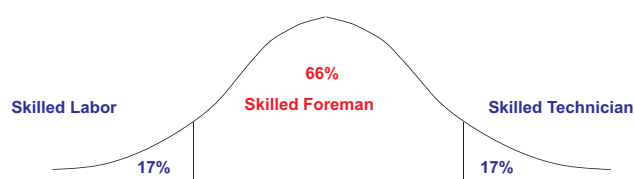


Fig. 2. Normal distribution curve of the anticipated capabilities of the street children

Integrated Efforts to Solve The Problem

The objective is not to achieve full living security and future opportunities, but linking the basic education with specialised vocational training programmes to develop required working skills complying with the needs of the investment sectors, which will lead to open the door for working environment and better sustainable living conditions. Thus the framework proposed includes a number of logical steps and elements which consists on the supervision and management of the overall framework actions on the ground.

The key founders of such framework are mainly the concerned government's authorities, the civil societies, the NGO's, the private sector and investors, and the volunteer individuals who are interested to share the responsibilities and provided social services. The principal concept supporting the proposed approach is to save the street children from the darkness of illiteracy to the brightness of education, and from the fierce frustration to a new hope in a better future.

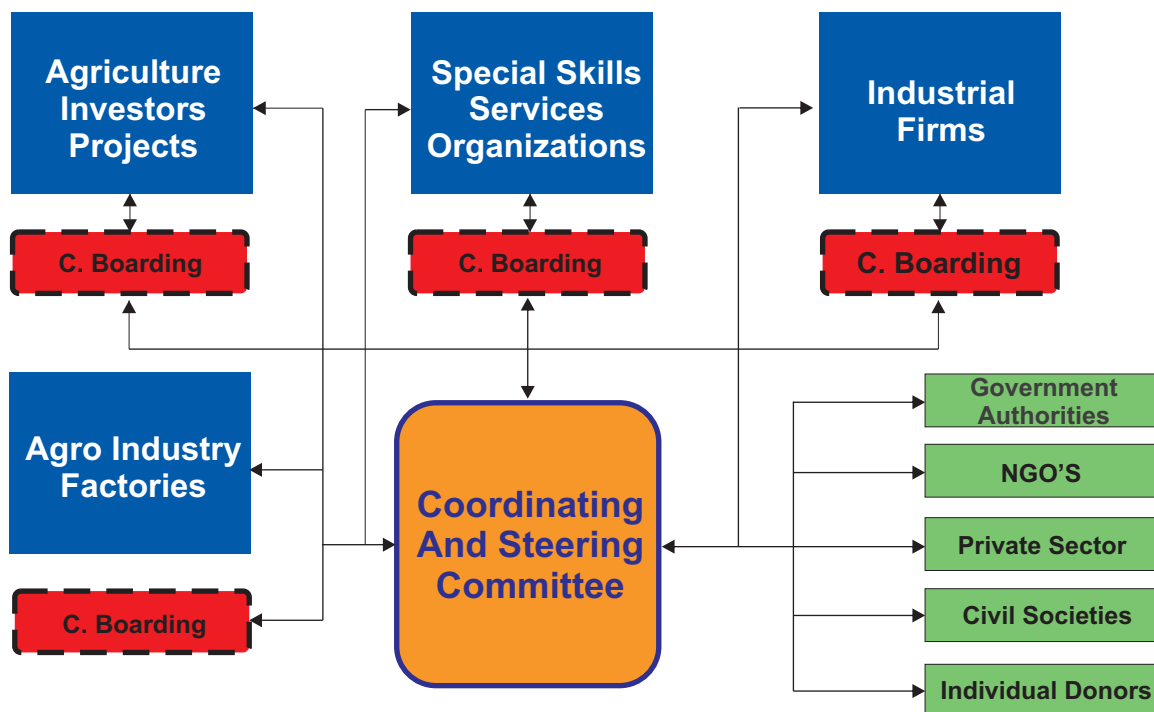


Fig. 3. Proposed schematic configuration of community boards for basic education and vocational training of investment sectors applying technology

Untraditional problems need untraditional solutions and new interventions. We need to empower the street children to help themselves instead of depending on other resources to live through violence. They should be given vocational training and basic educational training that could be useful in the future, to give them skills that allow them to become good citizens, to give them resources to make themselves self dependent (Adage: Instead of giving me a fish teach me how to fish).

The above schematic configuration is derived from the presented D/I flow and Policy Formulation Organization Structure. The Coordinating and Steering Committee represent the Technical Secretary and Steering Committee that is represented by the Government Authorities, NGO's, Private Sector, Civil Societies and Individual Donors. This committee branched into Committee Boarding which will assign the suitable employee to the suitable job according to his/her capability. Then, the role of the private sector, small businesses...etc. comes in providing the vocational and educational training.

Opportunities can be found in the smallest of business through a Recruitment and Coordinating Centre (part of the previous Technical Secretary) that will search the market needs and propose the candidates from street children according to their capabilities. Business can still make money and improve the population at large and has a role to play with government. This Coordinating Centre will also choose from street children socially-minded workers by training to gather information.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Most of our problems related to development, economic depression, environmental degradation and all walks of life poured into human element's actions; interpreted into human attitudes linked together with empowering gender marginalized groups is the solution of the developing countries problems.
- Empowering marginalised groups is not only sustainable but also economical in the long term. We have to stop designing our economy around the well-to-do. We have to design it around the poor because they may drag the country down; we can not do it with some and leave some behind, intelligent businessmen and investors should see it.
- Improving the national economic development is subject to optimum utilisation of available resources including the full power of human resources.

- Marginalised group's access to and ownership of information and communication technology can not be addressed unless reliable and comparative numbers/data/classification are available.
- Marginalised groups are often marginalised because of inadequate infrastructure and the cost of transmitting data.
- To trace the gender problem from the roots to the blooms, an efficient and effective communication system network is required to capture real field data in a wide geographic area.
- It is strongly recommended to handle the gender equality and related problems as one package, and the special marginalised groups (street children, disabled ...etc.) in another separated package, since the nature of analysis and mitigation measures are different.
- The problem is our inability to provide solutions to poverty.
- Lack of real research into the phenomenon is inexcusable.
- Marginalised groups need abilities that enable any individuals of them to deal with the demands and challenges of everyday life. They include decision-making, problem solving creative thinking, effective communication, interpersonal relationships, self-awareness, empathy, coping with emotions and stress.
- Despite the existence of laws and decrees prohibiting violence against children, a lack of awareness, collective responsibility and the appropriate monitoring mechanisms often make it impossible to limit the physical or verbal abuse of children.
- A syndicate needs to be formed to help them help themselves.
- The priorities should be to focus on small children to avoid the transformation of their human inner tranquillity and stability into chronic human violence and destruction.
- Empowering women and eliminating gender discrimination will improve the wellbeing of street children and society (The State of the world's Children 2007 report)
- Starting with psychological health is more important. Comprehensive rehabilitations are needed to orient the children and make them decide to stay.
- Educating street children on the importance of seeking assistance on health issues or other social problems that could be addressed.
- Any solution of this problem should meet their needs in the areas of substance use, sex education, life skills, health education and literacy.
- Advocacy aimed at policy makers and public opinion through all forms of media alert the community and the policy makers to different types of abuse that these children face.
- Projects working in this field should not be in isolation from each other so creating networks through the replication of successful projects in any location is important.

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