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Evaluating Housing Policy in Egypt During President Sisi's Term

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Abstract

The study addressed the housing crisis in Egypt, focusing on the efforts made by successive governments, especially during the era of President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi since he assumed power in June 2014. During this period, Egypt witnessed an unprecedented urban renaissance in the field of housing, as housing policy became one of the priorities of the Egyptian government within Egypt's Vision 2030. The efforts are attributed to confronting the increasing population growth, which is expected to reach 150 million people by 2050. The study addressed the challenges associated with population growth and its impact on limited resources, in addition to the decline in tourism economy revenues since 2011. The study also examined the need for a partnership between the state, the private sector and the local community to transform housing plans into tangible results that meet the needs of low-income people. It also discussed the importance of housing as a basic human right and its role in achieving social security and stability. The hypothesis was based on the fact that rapid population growth constitutes a major obstacle to government efforts to solve the housing crisis, especially with the limited available resources.

Keywords: Housing Crisis, Population Growth, Egypt Vision 2030, Subsidized Housing, Low-Income People, Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, Community Partnership, Natural Resources, Housing Policies.

Introduction

Although the governments and official systems in Egypt have been interested since the fifties of the last century in subsidized housing projects in various ways and methods, especially for the low-income group, they did not witness the actual implementation on the ground of what was targeted for them until the arrival of the current president (Abdel Fattah El-Sisi) to power in early June 2014, as Egypt witnessed during the first eight years of his rule a major urban renaissance in the field of the real estate sector in its various fields, to the point that experts and concerned institutions described it as an unprecedented renaissance in the modern history of Egypt.

This achievement comes in line with making housing policy a top priority for the Egyptian government since 2014 until now. This interest coincides with the noticeable increase in population growth in Egypt during the last two decades, as the latest population estimates issued by the United Nations Population Division indicate that the population of Egypt is likely to reach, according to average estimates, more than (150) million people by 2050. This increase in population will negatively and directly affect the available natural resources, especially with the decline in the returns of the tourism economy in Egypt since the events of 2011 after it was the most important source of foreign currency for the state. Taking these challenges into consideration, the Egyptian state has adopted a set of policies and strategies to support housing

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and development projects within the population and development strategy for the period (2015-2030) within the general framework of Egypt's vision for 2030. Believing in the importance of housing as one of the basic human rights and the basis of its security and stability, we have chosen this topic as a field of research.

Research Problem

The research problem lies in the accumulated need for housing in light of the rapid increase in population rates in Egypt and the state's inability to meet their needs in light of the weak resources, even with the existence of successful plans and strategies on paper adopted by the state in theory, as providing affordable housing for people with limited and no income must be done through building a general model of partnership between the state and the local community, including the private sector, to transform strategic housing plans into real, tangible results on the ground, in a way that meets the aspirations of this segment of Egyptian society.

Importance of Research

The importance of the research stems from the importance of its main topic in the lives of societies. Since the beginning of time, man has been searching for a shelter that would cover his nakedness from the eyes of people, protect him from climate fluctuations, and provide him with a decent life. This study sheds light on the dimensions of the housing crisis in Egypt and the role of successive governments under the rule of President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi in adopting housing policies that would end the suffering of low-income people in obtaining adequate housing for a decent life.

Research Hypothesis

The research revolves around proving a basic hypothesis that the huge increase in population density and high fertility rates in Egypt during the past two decades undermines any government efforts or policies to address the housing crisis, especially with the weakness of the state's available resources and its inability to confront this rapid increase in population growth.

The First Topic

The Concept of Housing Policy and its Dimensions

The obligation of states to provide adequate housing for their citizens is an obligation imposed by international law, as all states have ratified at least one of the binding international treaties on the human right to housing, so that this right has become one of the constitutional principles established in modern constitutions, which imposes on the state to follow a specific policy that guarantees the provision of adequate housing for all its citizens, and this is what we will discuss in this section.

The First Requirement

Definition of Politics and its Development in Egypt Before 2014

Housing policy is an essential part of the state's general policy, as it plays a pivotal role in providing adequate housing for citizens and ensuring the achievement of social justice. This concept is linked to a set of plans and programs that aim to address housing issues, which have developed over different periods of time in Egypt. In this section, we will discuss the definition of housing policy and the most important features of its development in Egypt before 2014.

The First Branch

Definition of Housing Policy

Housing policy is part of the general policy of the state and means “all plans, programs, laws and regulations approved by the government, for the purpose of establishing projects or housing units, or re-regulating non-existent situations, which reflects positively and negatively on society and of course on the development process.”

Housing policy includes a large group of programs that may conflict or complement each other, as there is no unified formula that governs housing policies and is applied at any time or place. Rather, there are broad frameworks within which one can move, and one can benefit from previous real-world experiences and studies that highlight the advantages and disadvantages of the programs included in these policies and attempt to adapt these experiences to the circumstances of each society individually, according to the prevailing political, economic and social considerations in it.

It is also known as “texts issued by official bodies that include the general directions of the state regarding housing and development issues, and determine a set of direct and indirect interventions and measures through which the government works to achieve quantitative or qualitative goals and implement social, economic and demographic changes.”

The Second Branch

Review of Housing Policy in Egypt Before 2014

The housing sector in Egypt has witnessed significant interest from the state since the nineties of the last century, and the limited-income category has taken the largest share of this interest, as the government announced its responsibility for establishing economic housing projects and subsidized housing, while as for medium and excellent housing, the state has placed this task on the shoulders of the private sector.

Based on this, the state has actually implemented a number of housing projects to support low-income people and youth, including the Mubarak Youth Housing Project in 1996, the Future Housing Project in 1998, and the National Housing Project during the period (2005-2011), during which the state provided more than 500,000 housing units for the above categories. .

Most of these projects were concentrated in desert areas and lands unsuitable for agriculture due to the lack of potable water and electricity. The government's goals were focused on achieving purely political goals, by employing these projects in the election campaigns of President Mubarak. However, after the January 2011 revolution and its results, which were reflected in all political, economic and social aspects in general in Egypt, in light of the spread of chaos and security chaos, with the presence of many imbalances in various fields, including the urban field, as a result of the spread of random expansion in construction and the excessive increase in slums.

Perhaps the most prominent thing witnessed during this stage with regard to housing policy is the inclusion in the new constitution of 2012 of a text obligating the state to provide suitable housing for all citizens as a guaranteed right according to what is stated in Article (68) thereof, and to work on adopting a clear national housing plan based on social justice and encouraging cooperative housing initiatives.

The former president (Mohamed Morsi) announced the social housing project, which is the largest in the history of the republic in terms of the housing sector targeting low-income people, as it included the construction of one million housing units throughout Egypt, which is currently being worked on, but the work to complete it completely has become a matter of doubt for many specialists due to the financing difficulties resulting from the deterioration of the economic situation in the country and the withdrawal of many companies from their promises to implement it in light of fears that the government will not be able to pay. .

The Second Requirement

Dimensions of the Housing Crisis in Egypt

The housing problem in Egypt is one of the most important challenges facing the government and society for decades and it has been and still is the main obstacle to development. It can be said that the housing problem in Egypt is defined in three basic dimensions:

The First Branch

Population Growth

It is one of the most important dimensions of the housing crisis and one of the most prominent factors influencing the state's population policy, as the rapid increase in the population, which has reached about (2.5) million births annually, undermines any government efforts made to achieve comprehensive and sustainable development. The crude birth rate according to the 2017 census reached about (26.8) per thousand, with a fertility rate of (3.5) births per mother, which is a very high fertility rate according to global indicators, compared to a low death rate of about (5.7) per thousand. .

This problem is the main reason for the imbalance between development rates and population growth rates. The wider the gap between them, the lower the standard of living for the family and the individual. This problem is not limited to the rapid increase in population growth only, but other aspects related to migration and composition enter into its formation. It can be said that it affects all aspects of population dynamics variables and their resulting consequences. .

First: Spatial distribution of the population:

The Arab Republic of Egypt suffers from an unbalanced pattern in terms of population distribution in geographical areas, as the population is concentrated in a narrow strip around the valley and the delta, in addition to the few oases in the middle of the desert. The populated area represents a percentage not exceeding (10%) of the total area of the republic. The population density in Cairo Governorate is significantly higher than in other cities, while the population density is noticeably lower in border areas such as South and North Sinai, the Red Sea, and Marsa Matrouh.

This imbalance in population distribution leads to increased pressure on facilities and services in a limited number of places with high population density, which results in the emergence of accompanying problems such as poverty, unemployment, malnutrition, illiteracy, the decline in the status of women, and increased risks of exposure to environmental pollution with limited basic services.

Second: Demographic Characteristics:

It is a natural reflection of the imbalance in the population structure, which leads to a decline in

housing characteristics in general, which leads to an increase in fertility rates and age dependency ratios, as the dependency rate rose from (54%) according to statistical indicators for the year 2016 to more than (61%) according to reports of the Egyptian Statistics Agency for the year 2021. .

The dependency ratio refers to the average number of people who must be supported within each family compared to the number of active population. It is also noted that women's participation in work is low and unemployment rates are high among women in particular, as the estimated size of the labor force from the total population is about (29) million people, including (23.7) million males and (4.2) million females. Here, the large disparity in the rates of obtaining job opportunities and their decline for women is noted, as the unemployment rate among females reached about (18%), while the unemployment rate among males reached about (6%) of the total unemployment rate in the Republic, which warns of danger regarding the housing policy followed in the state, which requires finding solutions that are more capable of correcting imbalances and achieving development. .

Based on the above, housing problems and their consequences have been the focus of attention of the political leadership in Egypt during the last decade, especially with the arrival of President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi to power, as he hastened to draw up plans, programs, legislative and institutional mechanisms to confront this problem through national population strategies and attaching them to plans that can be implemented on the ground. We will examine these procedures and the percentages achieved from them in the subsequent section of this study.

The Second Topic

Egyptian Government Housing Strategy After 2014

The repercussions of the Egyptian revolution of 2011 and the removal of President Hosni Mubarak from power were that hopes rose for the crystallization of a new political system that reflects the slogan of the revolution and meets the demands and aspirations of society, especially with regard to vital areas that directly affect their lives, such as housing, health, education, etc. With the arrival of the current president, Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, to power, hopes were raised for adopting a new, more effective and just housing policy after he pledged to solve the housing crisis in Egypt within the shortest possible time, by adopting housing policies that are more capable of meeting the needs and requirements of citizens, and this is what we will discuss in this section.

The First Requirement

Housing Policy Goals in Egypt After 2014

The Egyptian strategy for sustainable development, which is in line with Egypt's Vision 2030, aims to achieve development and justice based on adopting a competitive and diversified economy. The strategy includes several axes, including urban development characterized by dynamism and cohesion, integrating historical architecture with modernity, and redistributing development and population to maximize the use of resources and develop informal areas to ensure raising the quality of life from various aspects. .

The strategy included many plans, points and axes that the government aims to achieve, especially with regard to the housing sector. Below we mention the most prominent of these goals in brief:

The first branch

Improving the housing sector and addressing slums

First: The balance between supply and demand in the housing sector

This is achieved by adopting an integrated information system to manage the supply and demand system for housing units, supported by policies and legislation that work to stimulate the integration of vacant and closed units into the housing market by increasing positive incentives, in addition to setting special policies to encourage the private sector to engage more in participating in housing projects for low-income groups to reduce the financial burdens borne by the state in this regard. .

The government is also working to adopt special mechanisms to activate the role of civil housing cooperatives with the aim of supporting their housing projects and directing them towards new development areas to tighten the system of monitoring their activities, while reviewing the policies, instructions and laws related to the transfer and allocation of ownership of housing units as a mechanism to control the system of supply and demand in the housing sector.

Second: Combating The Phenomenon of Slums and Unsafe Areas

The phenomenon of slums represents a global problem that is almost absent from societies, including advanced ones, as these dwellings are a source of many political, social, economic, security and environmental risks. In Egypt, slums are divided at the national level into three categories according to the danger they represent, namely unsafe slum areas, which include four levels. The first level includes areas that threaten the lives of their residents, including (areas exposed to rock slides between mountains, areas exposed to floods, and areas exposed to railway accidents), followed by slums with unsuitable housing, including (buildings constructed using construction waste, dilapidated or cracked buildings that are about to collapse). The third level includes slums that pose a threat to public health, including (areas that lack clean drinking water or sanitation, and that are under the influence of heavy industrial pollution), followed finally at the fourth level by areas that lack stable possession, such as state lands, central authorities and endowments.

With the multiplicity of reasons and the many factors that contributed to the emergence and exacerbation of this problem, the policies, strategies and plans adopted by previous governments, whether the policy of neglect, development and growth, or the policies of removal and demolition, failed.

Since assuming the administration of the state, President (Sisi) has been keen on developing cities and villages, raising the slogan "Egypt is free of slums", aiming to build new cities to accommodate the rapid increase in population growth, pointing out that the problem of slums represents the most prominent challenges facing the Egyptian state in light of its vision for the year 2030, calling for concerted efforts and joint cooperation between the various parties to achieve this goal, as Alexandria Governorate, for example, includes approximately (200 thousand) housing violations, and that a radical solution to this problem requires providing one million ownership apartments. He also estimated the actual need to resolve the slums file in all governorates of the republic at approximately (4) trillion pounds.

Third: Raising Construction Capacity in New Urban Communities

This is done by motivating contractors through programs that aim to increase the quality and

speed of implementation, in addition to integrating the legislative aspect of these programs within other relevant laws to prevent conflict and obstruction of procedures. On the other hand, working to develop the role of the Contractors Union to implement programs to support the construction capacity of contracting companies. .

Achieving this goal also requires increasing the effectiveness of supervision over the regulation of the market for raw materials used in construction and building works to prevent any monopolistic practices and increase competitiveness between different companies, and improving the supervision system over contracting works to ensure that contractors and companies adhere to quality standards and reduce corruption in works and supervise their implementation.

The Second Branch

Developing Urban Communities and Supporting Different Groups

First: Establishing New Urban Communities

In light of the current government's efforts to implement development and renewal plans for old areas, it is also working to implement and establish new urban communities, social housing, or new cities with different roles to redistribute the population, including cities centered around major urban centers, new cities that represent an extension of existing urban communities, and others that represent regional urban centers. .

A number of slums have also been opened successively since 2020 after the completion of development operations, such as the Rawdat Al-Sayyida area in Cairo, and the Beshaer Al-Khair project in Alexandria Governorate, which had been suffering for years from living in dilapidated buildings without any real solutions from previous governments. These areas witnessed a different approach by building an integrated urban community.

Second: Supporting Low- And Middle-Income Groups

Government policies include supporting the citizen or the housing unit to enable those with low or medium income to obtain suitable housing through real estate financing or facilitating housing for the needy groups, through a set of interventions that aim to control the housing markets for these groups and balance the units offered in the market between the above groups and provide different methods of financing.

Third: Improving Rental Markets

Making rental housing markets more flexible and efficient under the new rental law by balancing the rights and obligations of both the landlord and the tenant, creating model contracts, simplifying contract registration procedures with minimal fees, reducing and clarifying the imposed tax, providing means to resolve disputes outside the courts, and implementing rapid eviction of tenants when necessary, in addition to raising awareness and adopting an electronic system for registering rental contracts, as is the case in many countries. In the event that a law is enacted to gradually increase rent, procedures will be put in place for the benefit of the poor and those with limited income to support and protect poor families seeking long-term rental contracts. .

Fourth: Stimulating the introduction of vacant or empty housing units into the housing market.

This goal seeks to achieve economic efficiency in the exploitation of resources, as it is

unimaginable to have this unused amount of closed and empty units, which amount to approximately (23%) of the total number of residential units according to 2017 statistics, which were built with huge investments by their owners. Therefore, keeping these units empty or vacant without use represents a major economic loss. Therefore, this goal can be achieved by applying incentives to owners with the aim of offering vacant units in the market and reducing licenses for unfinished facilities.

This policy is directly linked to the procedures for the rental market improvement policy, loan and grant programmes to encourage, complete and market units at affordable prices, as well as the demand for these units by qualified poor families.

The Second Requirement

The Role of the Private Sector In Implementing the General Housing Policy in Egypt

Since 2005, the Egyptian government, represented by the Ministry of Housing, has been working to establish 500,000 housing units over a period of (6 years). It has moved towards involving the private sector through participation contracts with different legal formulas and systems. However, this project did not begin to be implemented on the ground until the end of 2014, through the mechanisms for implementing the project units in the new cities in exchange for allocating plots of land to the companies implementing these projects pursuant to the Cabinet's decision in this regard for the year 2016.

Where concession rights were granted to the implementing companies in return for implementing these projects by allocating lands for investment activities that are equivalent in value to the housing projects that will be implemented and delivered with social housing activity, provided that the area of land allocated for social housing is not less than (30%) of the area of the investment project and this is included in long-term partnership contracts with the investing companies based on the provisions of Law 67 of 2010 regarding the participation of the private sector in infrastructure projects, services and public facilities. .

“Some believe that integration between the government and the private sector is very much needed today, where each party provides what it has to benefit both parties, which ultimately achieves the provision of social housing for citizens,” he pointed out, noting that “the private sector usually seeks profit, and it can achieve profits during this initiative through the medium-income housing units that it will build in the project, in addition to the fact that the private sector's participation in the project will achieve more credibility for it, and contribute to the marketing and fame of the companies implementing social housing.”

Based on the above, the Egyptian Minister of Housing made a statement in which he pledged that the ministry would completely withdraw from the construction system by 2025 and leave it entirely to the private sector, while maintaining oversight, guidance and direct supervision from the state. This is something that many concerned parties and circles in Egypt warn against, and which see the private sector's participation in social housing as a type of trade in low-income people and their needs, especially with the existence of precedents for the private sector's intervention in building social housing units, which caused a significant increase in the prices of social housing units in light of the state's weak administrative and legislative oversight of the entities implementing these projects, which increased the severity of the crisis and did not achieve any of the housing policy goals except for the financial benefit for the investing companies.

According to the Egyptian Minister of Housing, at the beginning of 2023, the state is currently implementing housing projects in partnership with the private sector (67 contracts) on an area of 13,000 acres in fourth-generation cities, with investments worth 1.1 trillion pounds, of which the state's share is 311 billion pounds. These projects provide about 200,000 job opportunities. The city is also being developed by relying on modern technological methods to build an infrastructure that supports the concept of sustainable development, in terms of providing safe resource consumption and making the environment less polluted, thus achieving the state's goals in developing new residential cities.

The Second Branch

Evaluating Housing Policy in Egypt After 2014

The process of crystallizing the dimensions of the housing problem in Egypt clearly after 2014 is one of the most important developments in the housing sector since the fifties of the last century, as the housing sector in Egypt suffered from accumulated neglect and the absence of planning and effective coordination between all parties concerned with this file, in addition to the failure to allocate the necessary funding to address this file during the past decades.

As a result of the aggravation of this problem until it became a phenomenon that threatens the security of Egyptian society due to the increase in the number of slums, the absence of urban planning and the distortion of city centers, President (Abdel Fattah El-Sisi) has sought since his arrival to power to end this file radically, as housing policy in Egypt since 2014 until now has been characterized by seriousness and the desire to achieve an unprecedented urban renaissance in the history of modern Egypt, especially in the housing sector and urban communities, which have received priority in the plans of the Egyptian state in light of a national strategy for urban development for Egypt's vision (2052) adopted by President El-Sisi with the aim of raising the quality of life for the Egyptian citizen and achieving adequate housing .

Perhaps the most notable achievement in this regard is the elimination of a large percentage of unsafe slums in various governorates of the republic, after a series of policies followed by previous governments that proved their categorical failure in dealing with this file. The government's measures in the housing file in recent years have received local and international praise, and this can be read through the United Nations reports in this regard, as the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Permanent Housing at the United Nations Human Rights Council indicated that Egypt is taking giant steps towards pledging its commitments to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

In late July 2021, the Egyptian Cabinet issued its decision No. (1779) regarding the establishment of the Urban Development Fund and the cancellation of the Slums Development Fund, which was approved by the former President of the Republic in 2008. This decision came to be in line with the new phase of Egypt after the slums.

Despite the successes achieved by the housing policy in Egypt since President Sisi took office, it is still far from the actual goals of the 2030 strategic plan. Perhaps the most prominent challenges facing the achievement of this goal are the high rates of population, which the Egyptian president expressed as one of the most prominent challenges and the main obstacle to the failure of any development strategy, as a result of the state's inability to absorb this increase and meet its needs. .

On the other hand, the crises that the Egyptian economy has been exposed to after 2012 and the

emergence of the terrorist threat that cast its shadow on the tourism economy, which is the most important resource for the state treasury, in addition to the flight of many investors and capital outside the country and the halting of many housing projects in light of investors' fear of engaging in investments that do not achieve certain financial returns in the short term, which led to the halting of many investment projects in the social housing sector supported by the state.

Conclusion

Through what we have reviewed in the text of the research of data and information about the phenomenon that is the subject of the research based on scientific sources and reliable official reports issued by the relevant authorities, we conclude with a set of results and recommendations according to the following:

First: Results

1- The Egyptian state, led by the current president Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, has succeeded in achieving actual successes on the ground regarding the issue of housing by adopting more comprehensive and clear housing policies that aim to provide decent and appropriate housing for citizens, while paying attention to those with limited income and the middle class in particular, to improve the quality of life.

2- Since 2014 until now, the housing policy in Egypt has contributed to ending nearly 90% of slum areas and finding radical solutions for their residents by adopting social housing projects supported by the state in varying proportions according to each category, thus providing social justice in distribution and enabling all categories to exercise their right to obtain suitable housing in line with the directions of the new Egyptian constitution of 2014 and the goals of the Egyptian revolution in 2011.

3- In light of the state's inability to bear the costs of dealing with the housing file alone, with the decline of the Egyptian economy and the rise in external debt rates and the resulting damages, the government, under the direction of President Sisi, has turned to the private sector and opened the way for it to finance housing projects under the direct supervision and oversight of the government, by signing partnership projects between the public and private sectors in several fields, including the housing field, in a way that achieves benefit for both parties to the relationship.

4- Despite the advanced levels that the Egyptian government has reached after 2014 in the housing file, it is still far from achieving its strategic goals of implementing the right to housing for all citizens, especially those with limited income and the middle class, as a number of economic, social and security challenges stand as an obstacle to ending this file completely, as the current government has borne the brunt of the failed policies adopted by previous governments in dealing with the housing file, which did not go beyond the role of verbal promises and pledges, which made the tasks of the current administration headed by Abdel Fattah El-Sisi difficult despite the advanced levels it has achieved, which have been praised by many international bodies, most notably the United Nations Committee on the Human Right to Housing.

Second: Recommendations

1- The necessity of activating the state's supervisory and oversight role strictly over companies implementing housing projects directed at the poor classes, as field reports indicate that the prices of housing units allocated to the low-income and middle-class groups have risen

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in a manner that is not consistent with the income of these groups.

2- Reviewing the legislation, regulations and instructions in force for expropriation and the owner's right to use, to reduce the phenomenon of vacant or unused residential units, which is spreading in many Egyptian governorates, especially coastal areas, and the resulting major economic and social damage to the state.

3- Following more just policies in distributing housing units to those who deserve them by adopting more effective mechanisms and providing the appropriate legal cover for a more just system that is compatible with the economic and social situation and circumstances of each category of society.

4- Working on legal birth control and determining the number of children per family to limit the population increase in Egypt, which is not in line with the size of the available resources, which hinders any path of development and prevents the full achievement of its goals.

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