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## Farmers’ Engagement in Local Cooperatives, the Maker or Breaker of Sustainable Agricultural Development

MOHAMED EMAD MOKHTAR AHMED<sup>1</sup>, HEBA MAGDY ABD EL MONIEM ALOUSH<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*The American University in Cairo (AUC), Psychology, Egypt*

<sup>2</sup>*The American University in Cairo (AUC), Public Policy and Administration, Egypt*

### Abstract

Sustainable agricultural development is a key for poverty reduction in less developed countries. Though Egypt has been acquiring rural developmental funds from international and local donors for more than 50 years, the “per-capita income” is only slightly increasing and, accordingly, rural quality of life is not significantly improved in many Governorates. Local Cooperatives (LCs), in each Governorate, should primarily bridge gaps between farmers, donors and large corporations. The sequential role of the LC starts by getting funds from large Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO’s) and inject them in learning activities for farmers, who, in turn, could transform learning into tangible results and finally generate profit through providing products and services to beneficiaries. This qualitative study investigates the case of some LCs that could not function and, accordingly, were losing their credibility with both donors and farmers, and compromise their developmental role. The study revealed some reasons why LC’s fail to engage farmers in one of the mega developmental projects funded by large NGO’s that have projects located at the Nile Delta of Egypt. This project included big multinational organisation, producing dairy products. These projects worked on empowering farmers who raise cows to milk and to provide quality supplies of dairy raw materials to dairy manufacturing organisations. The study analysed the challenges that were threatening the effectiveness and sustainability of such projects, among which are the following: a) The LCs’ failure to identify their objectives based on developmental mindset (due to over-emphasis on acquiring additional funds to keep operating, jeopardising their essential role of empowering farmers); b) The failure to put farmers in direct connection with beneficiaries and technical support agencies fearing to be excluded from such networks; and, c) The failure to work properly on raising farmers’ awareness on value chain-related areas, which is essential for achieving sustainability in the supply and demand processes. The study suggested to activate farmers’ engagement, in the LCs, to be rural development-oriented rather than for repeating or increasing donors’ funds.

**Keywords:** Egypt, farmers’ engagement, local cooperatives, Nile Delta, sustainable agricultural development