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## Under IFI influence, States choices matter for Egyptian and Moroccan families

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2023/03/egypt-offers-cash-families-control-births#ixzz7xL9HOYf4>

<sup>2</sup> <https://egyptianstreets.com/2018/06/09/two-is-enough-egypts-family-planning-program-aims-to-curb-population/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2023/03/egypt-offers-cash-families-control-births#ixzz7xL9HOYf4>

<sup>4</sup> [Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, article 16 : https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-elimination-all-forms-discrimination-against-women](https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-elimination-all-forms-discrimination-against-women)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.thenationalnews.com/mena/egypt/2023/03/15/egypt-pays-women-with-two-children-or-less-in-latest-population-control-tactic/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.thenationalnews.com/mena/egypt/2023/02/07/egypt-could-add-18-billion-to-gdp-if-it-kerbs-population-growth/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2023/03/21/egypt-world-bank-group-launches-new-partnership-framework-to-support-green-resilient-and-inclusive-development>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.republicworld.com/world-news/africa/world-bank-approves-7-dollars-billion-loan-to-support-egypt-reforms-articleshow.html>

The Egyptian Government announced at the end of march that it “intends to pay 1,000 Egyptian pounds to married women with two children or less annually as part of efforts to curb population growth”<sup>1</sup>.

This comes in the context of wider effort deployed by Egypt for several years to curb Egypt’s population growth rates. Policy measures include the “Two [children] is enough” or “<sup>2</sup> Kifeya” campaign<sup>2</sup>, which since 2018 has aimed to invest in family planning services, and a programme of large-scale media and door-to-door campaigns. This project has now taken the step of a financial incentive.

Egyptian State justified this new “birth control” investment as an economic measure since it will need “to double its spending on infrastructure and development projects over the coming 30 years to accommodate the expected growth”<sup>3</sup>. This is indeed questionable with regard to one of women’s reproductive rights “to decide freely and responsibly on the number and spacing of their children”<sup>4</sup>, and its low level also seems to be contested by part of public opinion<sup>5</sup> (equivalent to 90 Tunisian dinars or 29 US dollars per year per family).

Then, is this incentive a symbolic measure ? The birth control leitmotiv in the name of economic growth objectives appears in line with a recent World Bank (WB) recommendation. Indeed, according to the WB in February, “Egypt must intensify its efforts to reduce its fertility rate to reap significant economic benefits”<sup>6</sup>.

Still from the WB side, it finally approved a new Country Partnership Framework (CPF) for Egypt<sup>7</sup> to support national reforms, financed by a loan of 7 billion dollars (USD)<sup>8</sup>. Aiming again at supporting among other matters “effective social protection programs” for “enhanced human capital outcomes”, this renewed partnership will continue to support the Takaful and Karama program toward the most poor and vulnerable citizens, launched in 2015<sup>9</sup>. Targeting and cash transfer measures will still be on the agenda in terms of social protection responses despite the limited or negative impacts of these programs promoted by the IFI in MENA, as shown by research evidence<sup>10</sup> of the Inclusive Social Security Policies Forum (ISSPF).



<sup>9</sup> <https://www.worldbank.org/en/results/2020/11/17/takaful-and-karama-a-social-safety-net-project-that-promotes-egyptian-women-empowerment-and-human-capital>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.developmentpathways.co.uk/publications/smoke-mirrors-mena/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.isspf-mena.com/blog/blog-social-security-in-egypt-is-it-time-to-move-on-from-the-current-19th>

<sup>12</sup> [https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2023/01/17/en-egypte-la-classe-moyenne-craint-de-devoir-choisir-entre-nourrir-les-enfants-ou-leur-payer-l-ecole\\_6158171\\_3212.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2023/01/17/en-egypte-la-classe-moyenne-craint-de-devoir-choisir-entre-nourrir-les-enfants-ou-leur-payer-l-ecole_6158171_3212.html)

<sup>13</sup> [https://www.developmentpathways.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Tunisia-Shifting-the-paradigm\\_v4.pdf](https://www.developmentpathways.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Tunisia-Shifting-the-paradigm_v4.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> [https://www.developmentpathways.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Inclusive-SS-and-Economic-Growth\\_12Nov.pdf](https://www.developmentpathways.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Inclusive-SS-and-Economic-Growth_12Nov.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.morocoworldnews.com/2021/04/340906/universal-social-protection-a-new-perspective-on-social-equity-in-morocco>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.finances.gov.ma/Publication/db/2022/EVALUATION%20DE%20LIMPACT%20SOCIAL%20TAYSSIR%202020-05-2022.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> [https://www.policycenter.ma/sites/default/files/2022-09/PB\\_55-22%20%28Touhami%20Abdelkhalik%20%26%20Dorothee%20Boccanfuso%20%29.pdf](https://www.policycenter.ma/sites/default/files/2022-09/PB_55-22%20%28Touhami%20Abdelkhalik%20%26%20Dorothee%20Boccanfuso%20%29.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> [https://www.policycenter.ma/sites/default/files/2022-09/PB\\_55-22%20%28Touhami%20Abdelkhalik%20%26%20Dorothee%20Boccanfuso%20%29.pdf](https://www.policycenter.ma/sites/default/files/2022-09/PB_55-22%20%28Touhami%20Abdelkhalik%20%26%20Dorothee%20Boccanfuso%20%29.pdf)

With this “two is enough” financial incentive, the Egyptian government seems to have chosen to allocate some social spending to reducing the number of children, rather than better addressing the low child benefits that only 10% of children in Egypt receive<sup>11</sup>. In the current context of high inflation caused by the devaluation of Egyptian currency (a prior action of the IMF), universal family benefits have never been more crucial in Egypt, even for middle-class families who are beginning “to fear having to choose between feeding the children or paying for their school<sup>12</sup>.”

Shifting the paradigms is suitable instead of low-cost investment in social protection in MENA region, such as Takaful and Karama program or even the Aman Social Program in Tunisia<sup>13</sup>. These current social protection schemes leave behind a missing middle, in fact with high exclusion errors, especially in the case of external shocks and social crises. Several ISSPF evidence-based research demonstrated that a “high-road strategy of investing in universal social security” will guarantee not only social security rights, but a more credible way to achieve a sustainable and inclusive growth<sup>14</sup> in the different MENA countries. Morocco on this point made inspiring steps in 2021 toward<sup>15</sup> this aim, notably regarding families and children. After some failures of the Tayssir program<sup>16</sup> which address school dropout by targeted cash transfer to poor families since 2008, the recent

generalization of family allowances includes a form of universal child benefit under 18-age, guaranteed for each of six children of a family<sup>17</sup>. At the end of 2022 year, a report assessed significant impacts of this family allowances generalization in poverty rate and inequalities since 2019, despite the Covid pandemic<sup>18</sup>.

Finally in showing another resource allocation toward families and children, Morocco presents a certain alternative to usual conditionalities or recommendations on social protection promoted by IFI in MENA region. The tragedy of Egypt’s current social crisis is that IFI reforms do more harm than good to ‘human capital’, and push states under financial pressure to neglect their human rights responsibilities. “Enough of these two IFIs” sounds better than “Two is enough”.