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**GENDERED PATTERNS OF ASSET OWNERSHIP AND CONTROL IN EGYPT**

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## GENDERED PATTERNS OF ASSET OWNERSHIP AND CONTROL IN EGYPT

This study, conducted in Egypt, sought to identify the types of assets women and men perceive as beneficial for their wellbeing, and to determine if patterns of ownership and control of assets coincide with one another. A survey was administered to 200 men and 200 women in the Old and New Lands of Egypt. Survey findings were juxtaposed with qualitative information gathered from a total of 120 semi-structured interviews. We found that both women and men considered land and houses to be the most economically and socially important assets but men had very different perceptions of what they considered to be valuable assets for women. Although gold jewelry and livestock were indeed useful assets for women, they were far more liquefiable and easily alienable from women than land and houses. These findings highlight the importance of enabling women to own and control landed property.

Keywords: gender, assets, perceptions, access, control, Egypt

### INTRODUCTION

Productive assets play a very important role in reducing poverty. Researchers like Sjoukje Volbeda (1989) and Hernando De Soto (2000) emphasize that people who own land or homes tend to exert disproportionate influence over urban and rural institutions, including labour and credit markets. A home, however small, offers opportunities to increase incomes through small-scale home-based economic activities. Other researchers emphasize that although inadequate incomes are a major cause of poverty for the rural and urban poor, it is the lack of land, homes and other assets which exacerbates the vulnerability of low-income women and men to economic shocks (Jane Pryer 1993; Robert Chambers 1995). The possession of assets helps households and individuals to cope with vulnerability and to avoid the impoverishment that may be brought on by aggregate shocks, such as droughts or floods, as well as idiosyncratic shocks, such as illness or divorce (David Hulme and Andrew McKay 2005; Cheryl Doss, Carmen Grown, and Carmen Diana Deere 2008). The absence of effective public social protection programs that is characteristic of low and even middle-income countries puts a premium on assets that can be converted to cash (David Hulme and Andrew Shepherd 2003). When people have more assets, they experience less vulnerability and insecurity in the face of risks; conversely, the more assets are eroded, the greater is people's vulnerability (Caroline Moser 2007).

Assets are important for both men and women. They are a source of security and resilience against vagaries in the market, natural disasters, illness, disability, old age, job losses and other threats to wellbeing. Assets are also important for socio-economic advancement and social mobility. Assets can be material or pertain to access to services. For example, in our study we considered owning land, a house, jewelry, livestock and agricultural equipment; having a good job; and having access to public or private irrigation services as assets.

That women are often disadvantaged in access to and control over assets has been demonstrated by research in different world regional contexts. Unequal asset ownership is also widely understood to be an underlying cause of women's social subordination and poverty (Bina Agarwal 1994, 2003; Maria Mies 1998). At the macro level, a growing literature attests that asset equality is positively correlated with economic growth. Asset

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3 inequality, combined with market failures, leads to differential productivity between the asset  
4 poor and the asset rich, which creates poverty and inequality traps (see, for example, Michael  
5 Carter and Frederick Zimmerman 2000; Abhijit Banerjee and Esther Duflo 2003; Christopher  
6 Barrett and Michael Carter 2005).  
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8  
9 There is very little empirical research on women's access to land or non-land assets in the  
10 Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Cheryl Doss, Chiara Kovarik, Amber  
11 Peterman, Agnes Quisumbing, and Mara Bold (2015) found that gender land statistics are  
12 available in only nine of fifty three African countries; none were available for MENA  
13 countries. Further, only three of the seventeen studies reviewed in Doss et al. (2015) were  
14 published in peer-reviewed sources, which point to a gap in the peer-reviewed literature on  
15 gendered-land statistics. Although this may be indicative of a lack of studies that meet  
16 journals' publication standards, it may also arise from the dearth of sex-disaggregated data of  
17 sufficiently good quality to merit analysis and publication in peer-reviewed outlets (Doss et  
18 al. 2015). This paper seeks to make a modest but timely contribution to the literature on  
19 gender and assets by identifying patterns of material asset preference, ownership and control  
20 in Egypt's New and Old Lands.  
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24 In order to understand patterns of ownership, access and control, we included men and  
25 women who are owners and renters of land. Agricultural land, residential land, jobs, farm  
26 equipment, housing, and livestock are some of the assets included in the survey, which was  
27 administered to 100 unrelated men and 100 women in the Old Lands of Egypt, which were  
28 originally mainly irrigated by the inundation of the Nile River. Another 200 surveys of 100  
29 unrelated men and 100 women was carried out in the New Lands, which became cultivable  
30 after the construction of the High Aswan Dam in the 1950s. Survey findings were combined  
31 with qualitative data from a total of 120 semi-structured interviews conducted with women  
32 and men in both areas. The findings from interviews added complexity and depth to the  
33 reasons for men's and women's preferences for assets, accumulation of assets over the life  
34 cycle, market trends that explain preference for specific assets, and intra-household decision-  
35 making over asset acquisition, use and sale.  
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39 We begin this paper with some background literature on the significance of asset ownership  
40 for men and women. This is followed by description of the case study, methods used to  
41 collect data, study findings, discussion and conclusions. Our findings describe the types of  
42 assets that women thought were best for women and men to own as well as those that men  
43 thought were best for men and women to own, and underlying reasons. Actual patterns of  
44 asset ownership and control as well as control over income from the sale of assets are also  
45 presented and discussed.  
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## 47 **GENDER AND ASSET OWNERSHIP**

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49 Landed property is the most prominent form of capital accumulation and the most important  
50 indicator of status in much of the world. Writing about Bangladesh, Ian Smillie (2009: 41)  
51 notes: "Those with land are not just better off; they are important. Those without it are  
52 nothing." As in much of the rest of the world, private ownership rights in landed property  
53 also hold a very privileged position in the MENA region. Land provides social status,  
54 opportunities to participate in public life, access to credit and a stable source of income and  
55 food security (Agarwal 1994; Bipasha Baruah 2010; Doss, Grown, and Deere 2008). Because  
56 women are known to be disadvantaged in land and property ownership in much of the world,  
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3 improving their access to such resources has become a major endeavor for many  
4 development organizations. Much research also points to discrepancies between women's  
5 ownership of and control over resources (Agarwal 1994; Doss et al. 2015; Sarah Gammage,  
6 Naila Kabeer, and Yana van der Meulen Rodgers 2016). Both scholars and practitioners have  
7 applied themselves to understanding how best to enable women to acquire these assets and to  
8 assert control over them (see, for example, Agarwal 1994; Shahra Razavi 2007, 2009; Baruah  
9 2010). These efforts are commendable but land is an extremely scarce commodity and it is  
10 unreasonable to expect that all women (or all men, for that matter) will be able to inherit or  
11 buy land, or receive land through state-led redistributive measures. It is important to  
12 simultaneously pay attention to non-land assets and complementary strategies to empower  
13 women. Based on fieldwork conducted in 2014, 2015 and 2016 in two areas in Egypt, we  
14 identify whether and how land and other non-land assets can benefit people in general, and  
15 women in particular.  
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19 Knowledge about women's land ownership is important because of the growing empirical  
20 evidence that securing women's property rights contributes to lower poverty and  
21 vulnerability, environmental sustainability, and investments in the next generation (Erica  
22 Field 2007; Klaus Deininger, Aparajita Goyal, and Hari Nagarajan 2010; Amber Peterman  
23 2011; Neha Kumar and Agnes Quisumbing 2013). It is also widely accepted today that access  
24 to land increases women's abilities to participate in decision-making and control financial  
25 resources.  
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28 At five percent, the MENA region appears to have one of the lowest rates of women's  
29 landownership in the world (FAO Gender and Land Rights Database 2016). Women's access  
30 to land in Egypt has been described as "alarmingly low" and "lagging behind" (United  
31 Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) 2007). Even by law, women in Egypt  
32 are entitled to inherit only half the amount of natal property that their brothers do but in  
33 reality most women do not even end up owning this limited share. Deep-seated cultural  
34 norms ensure that in practice brothers control the shares of their sisters, and women's  
35 ownership is just nominal (UNECA 2007). Brother-sister relationships are socially and  
36 culturally very important in the region (Jennifer Olmsted 2005). Brothers are expected to take  
37 care of their sisters in case of adversities such as deaths of fathers or husbands. Women  
38 themselves refrain from claiming their land rights to maintain good relationships with their  
39 brothers (Georg Stauth 1990; Annalies Moors 1995; Olmsted 2005; Dina Najjar 2013).  
40 Women are expected to marry and access land in their husbands' homes. Women's  
41 willingness to surrender their share of natal property to their brothers even without any  
42 pressure put on them to do so has also been noted in South Asia by Srimati Basu (1999) and  
43 Baruah (2010) and identified as a mechanism by which women maintain affectionate  
44 relations with their natal family in general, and with brothers in particular.  
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49 There is also very little research on non-land assets owned by women in the MENA region.  
50 One exception is research conducted by Annalies Moors (2013), which examines the multiple  
51 meanings that wearing gold and owning gold holds for women in Palestine. Moors explains  
52 that gold contributes to economic security and provides a means to store wealth while also  
53 signifying kinship relations and societal status. In Nablus, women receive most of their gold  
54 through marriage, mainly as dowry from their husbands' families, but also from their own  
55 families as wedding presents. She describes how women's preferences for different types of  
56 gold (Italian, Gulf and *Baladi* (local)) reflect class, status and claims to modernity. Gold is an  
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3 important part of the everyday lives of women in Nablus, and the MENA region more  
4 broadly, and additional research is needed to understand its significance in more nuance and  
5 complexity (ibid).  
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7 As with gold, limited research has been conducted on gender and livestock ownership in the  
8 MENA region. Malika Abdelali-Martini, Boubaker Dhehibi, and Aden Aw-Hassan (2014)  
9 studied male and female cheese producers' dependence on middlemen for their sales of dairy  
10 products and access to loans in the Khanasser region in Syria. The authors recommend the  
11 provision of microcredit and marketing information to cheese producers to eliminate the costs  
12 of middlemen. No other gendered insights are offered.  
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15 This study seeks to understand asset preferences of men and women and the gendered  
16 distribution of asset ownership in the New and Old Lands of Egypt. Additionally, by  
17 exploring asset sales and control over expenditure of resulting income, we gain a sense of the  
18 patterns of control over these assets. Most of the existing research on women and land in  
19 Egypt is based on data collected in the 1990s. Much has changed since then. Our research  
20 asks what can we learn from looking at gender and assets in Egypt in more recent years.  
21 Since most studies tend to focus only on land ownership, we also pay particular attention to  
22 preferences for different types of non-land assets. Additionally, we try to understand if  
23 patterns of women's and men's ownership of assets coincide with control over the same  
24 assets. And finally, we try to understand life cycle changes for women and men in the  
25 preferences and accumulation of different assets. We employ discussions in the global  
26 literature on these topics to contextualize findings from our study on gender and assets in  
27 rural Egypt  
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### 31 **DESCRIPTION OF STUDY AREAS AND METHODOLOGY**

  
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33 We aimed for maximum diversity sampling (Michael Patton 1990) in our study. We collected  
34 data in two areas which have common socio-cultural, historical and economic ties but differ  
35 significantly in socio-cultural norms, economic and political context for women's land  
36 ownership. We worked in the Noubariya area (the Intilaq settlement) in the New Lands, and  
37 Kafr Sheikh (Sidi Salem) in the Old Lands (Figure 1). The New Lands are desert lands that  
38 have been reclaimed since the Revolution of 1952 in Lower Egypt and the building of the  
39 High Aswan Dam. The Intilaq settlement in Noubariya was only reclaimed in the 1990s by  
40 the Mubarak Resettlement Scheme under the Ministry of Agriculture and Land Reclamation.  
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43 **Insert Figure 1 here (half page or less).**

44  
45 While the Intilaq settlement in Noubariya has a 20 percent land ownership rate for women,  
46 the Old Lands of Sidi Salem in Kafr Sheikh are known to have a much lower land ownership  
47 rate for women of four to six percent (USAID 2010; FAO Gender and Land Rights Database  
48 2016). Our fieldwork revealed that the World Food Program provided food aid to settlers in  
49 the Intilaq settlement in Noubariya on the condition that women receive twenty percent of the  
50 distributed land titles. Settlers accessed land and housing in nearby villages. Each distributed  
51 parcel of land was either 2.5 or 5 acres. Settlers who held a university degree or diploma were  
52 allowed access to 5 acres of land and a homestead in a nearby village. The rationale provided  
53 for this in the Mubarak resettlement scheme was that endowing educated unemployed people  
54 with land might motivate them to take up farming or to open businesses in order to support  
55 themselves. Other settlers, typically farmers who had been evicted from other areas, were  
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3 given 2.5 acres of land each and a house in nearby villages. This latter group of farmers had  
4 previously been awarded land in other areas in the 1950s when President Nasser introduced  
5 land distribution schemes by imposing land ceilings on landowners. A few decades later,  
6 President Mubarak introduced laws in the 1990s to return some of this land to the original  
7 owners (Ray Bush 2007). Some of these farmers who had previously been awarded land in  
8 the 1950s but evicted in the 1990s were compensated with desert lands in Noubariya. Plot  
9 sizes are smaller in Kafr Sheikh, averaging less than an acre. Consequently, farmers in Kafr  
10 Sheikh tended to farm on multiple parcels of land (two-three on average).  
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13 In addition to diversity of study locations, we ensured that both qualitative and quantitative  
14 data were collected from different types of respondents: women who independently own land  
15 in Noubariya; women who manage land in Kafr Sheikh (they may also jointly own it);  
16 women who help their husbands farm in Noubariya; women who help their husbands farm in  
17 Kafr Sheikh; men who rent land in Noubariya; men who rent land in Kafr Sheikh; men who  
18 own land in Noubariya; men who own land in Kafr Sheikh. The purpose of such a sampling  
19 approach was to cover as many different forms of ownership, use and access as possible  
20 specific to the two study locations. Since the forms of ownership, access and use are  
21 somewhat different in the two communities, we could not ensure exact parallelism in the  
22 categories (see Table 1). However, our sample does include all the different forms of  
23 ownership, access and use that exist in both communities.  
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27 We were guided by previous research on gender and landownership in designing our study in  
28 Egypt. Doss et al. (2015) conducted an extensive review of women's land ownership in  
29 Africa and encouraged researchers to include male and female land owners, holders,  
30 operators and managers in studies on gender and land. Additionally, they highlight the  
31 importance of distinguishing between men's and women's sole ownership, joint ownership,  
32 or both sole and joint ownership of land. In their findings, these researchers also emphasize  
33 discrepancies between reported, documented and titled ownership because these distinctions  
34 have consequences for selling, bequeathing or using land as collateral (Doss et al. 2015).  
35  
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37 A survey administered to 402 respondents (202 men and 200 women) provided quantitative  
38 findings which were then juxtaposed with 120 qualitative interviews (Table 1).  
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41 **Insert Table 1 here (half page or less).**

42 The survey was administered in thirteen villages in Kafr Sheikh and thirteen villages in  
43 Noubariya. The survey questions included the following: what are the most important assets  
44 for women and men to own and why; who owns the land, house, agricultural equipment and  
45 livestock in your household; and who controls these assets. Control was defined by the ability  
46 to make the decision to sell the asset. The survey included questions about who makes  
47 decisions about land use, particularly those related to the choice of two main crops in  
48 Noubariya (fruit trees and wheat) and Kafr Sheikh (rice and wheat). The survey did not  
49 include questions about gold ownership and control. These are sensitive questions in the  
50 MENA context and therefore better explored in interviews. Respondents were also asked in  
51 the survey about who was responsible for spending income derived from agricultural  
52 enterprises such as crop production, meat production, and milk and dairy sales. Both men and  
53 women were asked these questions. We did not aim for our survey results to be statistically  
54 significant but rather to identify patterns in perceptions about preferred asset ownership,  
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3 actual asset ownership and control, and control over income derived from use or sale of  
4 assets.

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6 Twenty-eight enumerators (fourteen men and fourteen women) were trained to conduct the  
7 survey. All enumerators had a master's degree or PhD in social sciences from universities in  
8 Egypt and were experienced in conducting surveys. Men interviewed men and women  
9 interviewed women. Women participants were reported to be difficult to recruit because of  
10 their heavy productive and reproductive workloads. Women were interviewed in their homes,  
11 sometimes while preparing meals. Men were reported to be relatively easier to recruit. Men  
12 were mostly interviewed in the agricultural cooperatives they visited to get fertilizer and  
13 seeds.  
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16 Since women did not own land in some villages in Noubariya, the enumerators were  
17 instructed to compensate by including more women landowners from villages that do have  
18 higher levels of female landownership. Many men who are residents of farms in Kafr Sheikh  
19 have day jobs on a permanent or temporary (seasonal) basis in other areas but their wives  
20 tend to live in Kafr Sheikh. When we arrived to conduct the surveys, we found that these  
21 women were not simply helpers but active managers of the land that their husband owned.  
22 We decided to re-categorize them as such in Table 1, which is why we ended up with more  
23 than fifty women managers and fewer helpers in Kafr Sheikh.  
24  
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26 The interview questions were aimed at understanding in-depth reasons for asset preferences,  
27 asset accumulation for men and women over their lifecycles, and household decision-making  
28 with regard to asset use and acquisition. The ease with which assets could be sold for cash,  
29 rented or used as collateral was also explored. In addition to the qualitative interviews  
30 outlined in Table 1, in each of the twenty six villages, one key informant (a male or female  
31 village leader) was interviewed to understand the local landownership rates and patterns for  
32 women. They turned out to be a reliable source of information about landownership since  
33 many of the respondents were engineers or presidents of agricultural cooperatives with  
34 extensive knowledge about cooperative memberships, which landowners tend to access more  
35 often than renters.  
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## 39 FINDINGS

40 There were similarities and differences in the assets men and women preferred to own. Gold  
41 and clothing were identified as important assets exclusively by women. Jobs, on the other  
42 hand, were consistently identified only by men as being a very important asset. Both men and  
43 women considered land, agricultural equipment, livestock, private enterprises and access to  
44 cash to be high value assets. However, men and women seemed to prioritize them for  
45 different reasons and from highly gendered perspectives. There were also variations between  
46 the New and Old Lands. Ownership and control often did not overlap: in other words,  
47 individuals often owned an asset but did not necessarily control it and vice versa. Women  
48 who owned land or houses solely in their names almost always controlled these assets jointly  
49 with their husbands but the reverse scenario did not always appear to be true. However,  
50 livestock owned solely by men was often controlled jointly with or solely by their wives. We  
51 present detailed findings from our research under the following headings.  
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### What Women Thought Women Should Own

Female respondents in Kafr Sheikh identified a preference to own the following assets: gold (27 percent), houses (20 percent), poultry (18 percent) and agricultural land (17 percent). In Noubariya, female respondents' preferences were as follows: agricultural land (32 percent), houses (21 percent), gold (11 percent) and livestock (8 percent). Twice as many women in Kafr Sheikh identified gold as the most important asset for women. It is important to remember, though, that there were very few women who actually own land in Kafr Sheikh so they are less likely to be familiar with the benefits of land ownership for women and more likely to identify an asset (gold) that women are traditionally familiar with and value.

There were also noteworthy differences in the two regions in the value assigned by female respondents to agricultural land (17 percent in Kafr Sheikh versus 32 percent in Noubariya). Almost twice as many of the women interviewed in Noubariya identified land as the most important asset for women to own. This can probably be attributed to familiarity with land ownership for women in Noubariya. Many women who owned land in Noubariya farmed it, bought additional property with the income, and paid for their children's marriages. More women in Kafr Sheikh (6 percent versus 1 percent in Noubariya), however, identified residential land as a preferred asset for women. In Kafr Sheikh, residential land is much more expensive than agricultural land. On the other hand, most land in Noubariya is agricultural land and fruit tree production is very profitable in this area. This is in sharp contrast to Kafr Sheikh where men often take on day jobs due to insufficient farming income and small landholdings. Women in Noubariya expressed much lower preference for owning poultry (18 percent in Kafr Sheikh versus 2 percent in Noubariya). In Noubariya, livestock ranks higher (fourth) than poultry (tenth); in Kafr Sheikh, livestock ranked fifth and poultry third. This may be because livestock is both more expensive than poultry and households in the Noubariya were better off than households in Kafr Sheikh.

### What Men Thought Women Should Own

There were notable differences between male and female respondents' perceptions about the most important assets for women to own. Men identified gold as the most important asset for women to own in both communities (57 percent in Kafr Sheikh and 48 percent in Noubariya). This was followed in Noubariya by poultry (14 percent), houses (12 percent), agricultural land (10 percent) and livestock (6 percent). In Kafr Sheikh, gold was followed by poultry (9 percent), agricultural land (7 percent), livestock (6 percent) and houses (4 percent). Although men did not identify it among the top five important assets for women in either community, more men in Kafr Sheikh (4 percent) identified residential land as an important asset compared to men in Noubariya (0 percent). This is probably because residential land is much more expensive in Kafr Sheikh than in Noubariya.

More men in Noubariya (10 percent versus 7 percent in Kafr Sheikh) identified agricultural land as an important asset for women. Similarly, more men in Noubariya identified houses (12 percent versus 4 percent in Kafr Sheikh) as important assets for women. This can again probably be attributed to both the visibility and the positive experiences of women owning agricultural land and houses in Noubariya. Men in Noubariya are more familiar with women owning agricultural land and homes than men in Kafr Sheikh.

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3 Both men and women gave similar responses to the underlying reasons for preferences. Gold  
4 and clothing were described as a source of beauty and pride for women. Gold was  
5 additionally emphasized as a source of security and savings. Women and men explained that  
6 women often sell gold in times of financial crisis and then rebuy it when they are able to.  
7 Poultry and livestock were preferred for meeting nutritional needs of families, bolstering  
8 household incomes and improving living conditions. Personal vehicles were identified as  
9 important assets for shopping for household requirements and enabling mobility for other  
10 reasons.  
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12  
13 Houses and land were preferred for their ability to provide security in the event of adversity.  
14 Agricultural and residential land were preferences because they created or consolidated  
15 sources of income and conferred social status. Homes were identified as useful assets because  
16 they could be sold to provide for important life events (such as marriages of sons) or be  
17 inherited by children. Some women, in Kafr Sheikh mostly, emphasized a house as the most  
18 important asset for women because it enabled them to live separately from their in-laws and  
19 not be controlled by them. Cash savings were valued as assets because they enabled families  
20 to spend on children, secure their futures, and invest in income-generating projects.  
21 Agricultural equipment and electrical appliances were preferred for their ability to alleviate  
22 manual labour and save time for women. Such equipment could sometimes also facilitate the  
23 creation of income-generating projects. Small enterprises such as grocery stores, tailoring  
24 services, clothing stores and hairdressing salons were occasionally identified by women as  
25 important assets.  
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### 29 **What Men Thought Men Should Own**

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31 Men in both communities (70 percent in Kafr Sheikh and 60 percent in Noubariya)  
32 considered agricultural land to be the most important asset for men. This was followed in  
33 Kafr Sheikh by car (6 percent), agricultural machinery (6 percent), cash (5 percent), livestock  
34 (5 percent) and private enterprises (5 percent). In Noubariya, land was followed by private  
35 enterprises (13 percent), agricultural machinery (7 percent), and car (6 percent). More men in  
36 Noubariya than in Kafr Sheikh identified private enterprises as valuable assets. This is  
37 probably because Noubariya is a newer settlement with more potential for entrepreneurial  
38 projects. Many still go to settlements in the Old Lands, including Kafr Shiekh, to buy  
39 clothing and other materials. Access to modern irrigation (drip irrigation and light sprinkler)  
40 was only reported as an asset in Noubariya. A small percentage of men in Kafr Sheikh (3  
41 percent) identified residential land as an important asset for men to own; men in Noubariya  
42 did not identify it at all. As previously explained, residential land in Kafr Sheikh is an  
43 important but rare asset.  
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### 47 **What Women Thought Men Should Own**

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49 Women also agreed that agricultural land was the most important asset for men to own (51  
50 percent in Kafr Shiekh and 56 percent in Noubariya) albeit not as highly as men did (70  
51 percent and 60 percent). In Kafr Sheikh, vehicles (cars, tuk-tuks, motorcycles, pickup trucks)  
52 at 13 percent, private enterprises at 10 percent, and both livestock and jobs at 8% were  
53 identified as the other most important assets for men to own. In Noubariya, preference for  
54 agricultural land was followed by vehicles at 27 percent, and private projects and houses both  
55 at 7 percent. Jobs were mentioned in Kafr Sheikh but not in Noubariya because the plots of  
56 land are small in Kafr Sheikh and farming, as previously mentioned, is not a profitable  
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3 profession. Men in Kafr Sheikh supplement their income from farming with other jobs and  
4 enterprises. As with women, livestock was also deemed an important asset for men. The only  
5 difference was that men were mostly involved in cattle fattening for meat and women with  
6 milk and dairy products. Vehicles were identified as more important in Noubariya (27  
7 percent) than in Kafr Sheikh (13 percent) because the New Lands (of which Noubariya is a  
8 part) is far less well served by public transportation than the Old Lands (Kafr Sheikh). Both  
9 men and women valued poultry as an asset but for different reasons. Men primarily valued  
10 poultry for income generation and women for household subsistence and occasional  
11 additional income.  
12

13  
14 The reasons provided by men and women for the most important assets they thought men  
15 should own were very similar and predictable: income, security, stability, social status.  
16 Vehicles were also valued for transporting crops. Residents of Noubariya in particular also  
17 valued their vehicles for visiting their original hometowns, often in the Old Lands.  
18 Agricultural machinery was deemed important for optimizing agricultural operations,  
19 improving production, and for renting out to generate income. Private enterprises such as  
20 cellphone sale and repair shops, bakeries, grocery stores and fish farms were identified as  
21 important sources of employment and income.  
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#### 24 **Ownership and Control of Assets**

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26 Although we ensured that we included both male and female landowners in our survey, we  
27 were fully aware of the fact that many more men than women owned land both in the  
28 surveyed households and the communities they were drawn from. Many men in Noubariya  
29 also owned land in the Old Lands as part of their inheritance. Male renters in Kafr Sheikh  
30 often also owned small parcels of land (less than one acre) in the same or other communities.  
31 We explained in our methodology that although women in Kafr Sheikh rarely owned land,  
32 many were *de facto* land managers. Our findings reveal that on average, women in Kafr  
33 Sheikh hold 8 percent of the land titles while they hold 17 percent in Noubariya.  
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36  
37 In both the Old Lands of Kafr Sheikh and the New Lands of Noubariya (occupied largely by  
38 descendants of formerly evicted tenants), the land is still titled in the name of the original  
39 owner, whose grandchildren or great-grandchildren may now be cultivating the land. Some  
40 four of the thirteen villages surveyed in Noubariya are occupied by former evicted tenants.  
41 Either the land is being cultivated by direct descendants of the original owners, or it is being  
42 rented from the actual owners or descendants of original owners.  
43  
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45 Women tended to identify land owned solely by themselves as belonging to both themselves  
46 and their husbands but men were less likely to identify their wives as co-owners for land to  
47 which they solely held title. Men were much more likely to identify male relatives (a brother,  
48 for example) as a co-owner rather than a spouse.  
49

50 There is more collective ownership of land in Kafr Sheikh because land is often inherited by  
51 more than one family, often in undivided parcels. In Noubariya, there is less collective  
52 ownership; most land is owned by individual families, and in the case of former evicted  
53 tenants, to a single extended family. Even in such extended families, often only one person (a  
54 man, more often than not) is appointed by the agricultural cooperative to be responsible for  
55 the land.  
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3 A very similar gendered scenario presented itself when we asked questions specifically about  
4 who controlled land (what to do with the land - sell, rent, farm, bequeath) instead of just who  
5 owned the land. Women tended to control land jointly with their husbands and in some cases  
6 even handed over control to their spouses over land that they owned solely. Men were less  
7 likely to identify their wives as co-controllers of land to which they solely held title. Men  
8 were much more likely to identify a male relative (again often a brother) as a co-controller  
9 rather than a spouse (see Table 2 for details of control over land).  
10  
11

12 **Insert Table 2 here (half page or less).**

13  
14 We also tried to understand who makes decisions about land use. The survey respondents  
15 were asked to explain who makes the decisions about which types of rice (in Kafr Sheikh)  
16 and tree varieties (in Noubariya) to grow on the land. In both areas, the man of the household  
17 was the most frequently reported answer. More women in Kafr Sheikh reported making the  
18 decision alone than in Noubariya. Also more women in Kafr Sheikh were involved in joint  
19 decision-making about which rice variety to cultivate. Taken together, women in Kafr Sheikh  
20 had more say about which rice variety to grow than women in Noubariya did about which  
21 tree variety to grow. This can perhaps be attributed to the fact that rice is a subsistence crop.  
22 Since women are responsible for household subsistence, they may have more knowledge  
23 about which varieties of rice are more productive or nutritious, and also more control over  
24 decisions about growing them. Most families in Kafr Sheikh do produce and sell surplus rice.  
25 Women tend to make decisions about selling surplus rice solely or jointly with their spouses.  
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29 When we looked at control over income earned from crop sales, we found that men had  
30 significant control over how to spend income from crops even when their wives were the sole  
31 owners of the land. Only eight of the fifty women who owned land solely or jointly in  
32 Noubariya and thirteen of the fifty women who owned land solely or jointly in Kafr Sheikh  
33 reported that they solely controlled income from crop sales on their land.  
34  
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36 Wheat is grown in both areas. Most of the decisions about growing wheat were made solely  
37 by men. Fruit trees, which are perennials, are grown more often in Noubariya so fewer  
38 farmers in Noubariya can cultivate wheat. Fruit trees cannot be intercropped with wheat,  
39 especially after the trees are four years old.  
40

41 In the next few pages, we discuss ownership and control over other specific assets: residential  
42 land; house; agricultural equipment; car, livestock. We also discuss control over income  
43 earned from the sale of crops, livestock meat, dairy, poultry.  
44

#### 45 **Residential land**

46  
47 Residential land was mostly owned by men in Kafr Sheikh. Women in Noubariya, on the  
48 other hand, did own residential land because the Mubarak government distributed residential  
49 land to college graduates in an effort to combat unemployment and to make the region more  
50 livable. It was expected that graduates from technical schools or universities would start  
51 businesses and make the area economically vibrant. Many women landholders received land  
52 as a result of this scheme (see, Najjar, 2013, for extended details). Women landholders who  
53 settled in Noubariya often had young children living with them and were therefore less  
54 mobile than men (with or without families) tend to be. Therefore, as expected and hoped by  
55 the government these women and their families started to develop more permanent and  
56 settled lives in Noubariya. Men, on the other hand, sometimes relocated on a temporary basis  
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3 to Noubariya but left their children and wives behind in the Old Lands. As such, many men  
4 did not qualify as settlers in good standing and ended up not receiving residential land.  
5

6 Despite higher rates of residential land ownership for women than men in Noubariya, when  
7 we asked women about control over residential land, we found a similar pattern as the one  
8 previously described for agricultural land, even though women owned residential land  
9 independently, they controlled it with their spouses. Male owners of residential land, on the  
10 other hand, both owned and controlled residential land by themselves, or occasionally with a  
11 male family member but rarely with their spouses.  
12

### 13 **Houses**

14  
15 More women in Noubariya owned houses than in Kafr Sheikh. This is understandable as 25  
16 percent of our overall sample in both areas and 50 percent of women in our sample in  
17 Noubariya were given houses in their names by the government. Women also owned houses  
18 in Kafr Sheikh, since it is more common for women to inherit homes from their parents than  
19 to inherit land. However, when asked about control of houses (decisions about selling, renting  
20 and bequeathing) the same gendered patterns emerged as with agricultural land and  
21 residential land. The only difference is that a small number of women who held independent  
22 titles to their homes in Noubariya indicated controlling it with a family member (brother or  
23 father) rather than a spouse. This finding may simply be reflective of the fact there are higher  
24 numbers of divorced, separated, widowed and never-married women in Noubariya. Had they  
25 been married women, it is unlikely that they would have been controlling the houses with  
26 anyone other than their spouses.  
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31 **Insert Table 3 here (half page or less).**

### 32 **Agricultural Equipment**

33  
34 Most of the agricultural equipment was owned and controlled solely by men. Occasionally  
35 men co-owned and controlled large agricultural equipment such as combines, seeders and  
36 harvesters with other male relatives or friends but never with spouses. Some were able to  
37 access social protection schemes (pension and health care) for their entire families because  
38 the ownership of large agricultural equipment is considered equivalent to holding full-time  
39 employment in Egypt. Water pumps were also mainly owned by men but since people who  
40 own land are more likely to purchase pumps, a few women did also own pumps. Individual  
41 ownership of pumps was more common in Kafr Sheikh. In Noubariya, pumps were mostly  
42 government-owned. Control over pump use is carried out by groups of men or groups of  
43 women and men. This may explain why reported joint control of pumps was higher than  
44 reported joint ownership.  
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### 48 **Car**

49  
50 Cars are mostly owned by men. Some women in Noubariya do own cars, perhaps as a result  
51 of higher levels of women's land ownership in this area. The land in Noubariya is very  
52 productive and many settlers have purchased additional property from the profits from  
53 agriculture. Some have purchased more agricultural land, others have built more houses  
54 and/or bought vehicles. Both men and women in Kafr Sheikh also reported buying cars with  
55 family members and friends in order to start enterprises that involve providing transportation  
56 services. Although cars were more often than not individually owned, their use tends to be  
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3 controlled more collectively, meaning that other members in the family also tend to have  
4 access to it for both personal and profit-oriented purposes.  
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### 6 **Livestock**

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8 Livestock can be owned and reared by the same individual, or owned by one individual but  
9 raised (for meat or milk) by another. Profits are shared between the owner and the person  
10 who rears the livestock. Sometimes both parties owned the livestock but the person doing the  
11 rearing got more of the profits. More men owned livestock than women in both areas. But  
12 almost twice as many women owned livestock in Noubariya than they did in Kafr Sheikh. As  
13 mentioned earlier, more women in Noubariya owned land and households were generally  
14 better off. More disposable income was available to households in Noubariya and gender  
15 norms tend to be more relaxed with regard to asset ownership more broadly.  
16

17  
18 For livestock, more women than men reported joint ownership with their spouse, other family  
19 members or friends. More men than women reported joint ownership with spouses. This is  
20 the only asset for which we observed this trend. This may be because women more often put  
21 in most of the required labour to rear livestock and therefore become *de facto* owners. This is  
22 interesting because women, of course, also often perform a majority of agricultural labour but  
23 are rarely considered owners if there is a spouse in the picture. There is a much stronger  
24 entrenched perception of land and property as male assets. Although more men in Kafr  
25 Sheikh owned livestock, more women seemed to have independent control over livestock.  
26 Livestock is the only asset for which we observed this trend.  
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### 29 **Insert Table 4 here (half page or less).**

30  
31 Far more livestock sales (for meat) were reported in Kafr Sheikh (45 percent) than in  
32 Noubariya (12 percent). This could be attributed to fruit production being more profitable in  
33 Noubariya than livestock rearing. Farmers, especially the graduates, tend to focus on fruit  
34 production and do not grow enough fodder to rear livestock on a profitable basis. Many rear  
35 livestock (one cow or buffalo, for example) for household milk and meat needs. In Kafr  
36 Sheikh most of the livestock sales are controlled quite equitably by men (thirty three of fifty)  
37 and women (thirty of fifty). In Noubariya much of the livestock income is controlled jointly  
38 by women with spouses or family members. Only five women in Noubariya solely controlled  
39 income from livestock sales.  
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42  
43 For similar reasons, more dairy is sold in Kafr Sheikh than in Noubariya. Some 77 percent of  
44 survey respondents in Kafr Sheikh reported selling milk versus 22 percent in Noubariya.  
45 Women almost solely contributed the labour required in milking cows and processing milk.  
46 Although milk income is largely controlled by women in both areas, a small number of men  
47 do exercise complete control over income from milk sales.  
48

49  
50 Given their high birth and death rates, we found it impossible to collect quantitative data  
51 about poultry ownership in Kafr Sheikh and Noubariya. We did collect data about control  
52 over income from poultry sales.  
53

54 Poultry income was largely controlled by women (seventy eight out of 100) in Kafr Sheikh  
55 whereas men (thirty five out of 100) controlled poultry income in Noubariya. This can be due  
56 to limited access to markets (resulting from limited transportation in Noubariya) which put  
57 men in a better position to market poultry. This may also be attributable to poultry production  
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3 in Noubariya being carried out on a larger, more commercial scale, which then becomes a  
4 male domain.

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6 We were already aware that incomes earned from milk, meat and poultry sales in Noubariya  
7 would be lower than in Kafr Sheikh (see Table 5). However, we found that the sale of these  
8 items contributed as much as 24 percent of total household incomes in Kafr Sheikh. Although  
9 women in Kafr Sheikh assumed that their contributions to household income were simply  
10 'helping' their husbands better support families, it is obvious from the data that they actually  
11 add up to a significant share (almost a quarter) of total family income.  
12

13  
14 **Insert Table 5 here (half page or less).**

## 15 **DISCUSSION**

16  
17 The preferences for asset ownership reported by men and women might be a reflection of  
18 "adapted preferences," - people systemically convincing themselves of preferences which suit  
19 their predetermined cultural roles (Gammage, Kabeer, and Rodgers 2016). Women and men  
20 are socialized to believe that land, vehicles, and jobs are male assets, and that men should be  
21 family breadwinners. Preferences expressed by women for men's ownership of assets and by  
22 men for men's ownership of assets tend to reflect these socialized beliefs. Women's  
23 preference for livestock and poultry may similarly be a product of social norms that  
24 encourage women to take responsibility for household nutritional security and, to a lesser  
25 extent, for economic activities that are supportive of - rather than at par with or independent  
26 of - their husbands' breadwinning efforts. In both communities, livestock and poultry rearing  
27 operations carried out at commercial scale were always identified as men's assets whereas  
28 smaller subsistence operations were almost always characterized as women's assets.  
29

30  
31 Patterns of livestock ownership seemed to correlate with how dependent the household was  
32 on the income generated by livestock. Women in Noubariya were more likely to own  
33 livestock than women in Kafr Sheikh, probably because livestock was reared for household  
34 consumption in the former community and for sales in the latter. Although more men owned  
35 livestock in both communities, women were more often identified as responsible for rearing  
36 livestock. Selling a cow or a calf was one of the first strategies used to generate cash to deal  
37 with a family crisis or to purchase an item or service. We found that decisions about selling  
38 livestock were made both with and without women's consent. The ease with which livestock  
39 could be sold for cash made it one of the most easily liquefiable assets owned by women. The  
40 wife of a local landowner in Kafr Sheikh explains, "You can sell your livestock while you are  
41 sitting in your house. Merchants come and ask you if you want to sell."  
42

43  
44 Women get livestock as gifts from their parents after they marry and relocate to their  
45 husbands' homes. They may also get livestock as gifts after giving birth to their first child.  
46 Many in-laws in Noubariya were reported to have taken and either sold the livestock given to  
47 their daughters-in-law by their parents, or to have kept the proceeds from the sale of milk or  
48 meat. One married woman saved money from her grocery shop and bought livestock. She  
49 opted to sharecrop the livestock with farmers outside her household to avoid giving her in-  
50 laws control over the income from milk and meat sales. She eventually bought a house with  
51 the income from this enterprise.  
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54 Socialized gender roles can also explain why women who owned land handed over control of  
55 the land to their husbands. Many women and men in Noubariya explained that land  
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3 ownership for women is a source of spousal conflict. There were several reports that  
4 husbands refused to stay in homes or cultivate land owned solely by their wives. Some men  
5 divorced their wives if they insisted on owning land and houses solely in their names.  
6 Ownership titles in the New Lands were offered on the basis that owners actually live on the  
7 land and in their homes. Women who held such titles were often determined to stay to avoid  
8 eviction, or resort to selling their property. Men who were supportive of their wives' property  
9 ownership in Noubariya were often "rewarded" or "compensated" by their wives with  
10 additional property (more land, homes and vehicles) purchased from land profits and often  
11 titled solely in the name of the man. More men in Noubariya than in Kafr Sheikh believed  
12 that land is the best asset for women to own. This is probably because men in Noubariya are  
13 more accustomed to women owning land and they may have also benefited financially and  
14 socially from women's landownership. The informal concessions women must make to  
15 individual men and to an established patriarchal order in order to protect their right to land  
16 ownership speaks to the important but ultimately limited role that policy interventions (such  
17 as titling land in the name of women) can play in altering gender norms and social hierarchies  
18 in the absence of wider political consciousness and awareness-raising about gender equality  
19 (Baruah 2010; Gammage, Kabeer, and Rodgers 2016).  
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24 Although women in our study were, generally speaking, socialized to think of themselves as  
25 homemakers primarily and at best as secondary or supplementary breadwinners, they did  
26 repeatedly emphasize the importance of land ownership for women. A landowner's wife in  
27 Kafr Sheikh explains: "Land is the best asset; it is always there. When a woman owns  
28 livestock or gold, a day will come and she will sell it to resolve some financial crisis her  
29 household is facing. Land is best because it will always stay there." Despite such assertions,  
30 we found that women did not protect inheritance rights of their daughters. Women rarely  
31 inherited land from their mothers in either community. On the rare occasion that women  
32 inherit land, their shares were even smaller than the half shares of their brothers that they  
33 were legally entitled to. Women were occasionally given cash - often well below the market  
34 value of the share they were entitled to, as compensation for giving up their claims to parental  
35 property.  
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39 We found that most of the land distributed to women in Noubariya had already reverted, or  
40 would eventually revert, to sons and not to daughters upon inheritance. This resonates with  
41 other researchers' findings (see, for example, Baruah 2010) who emphasize that even when  
42 women are potentially able to acquire land and property through either inheritance, purchase  
43 in the market, or distribution by the state, they are unwilling or hesitant to assert the equal  
44 inheritance rights of sons and daughters. Most women in Noubariya expressed a clear  
45 preference for sons as inheritors, employing the entrenched logic that a son would support  
46 them in their old age while a daughter would leave the family after marriage. Authors like  
47 Manimala (1983), Susie Jacobs (1998) and Nitya Rao (2002) have also expressed dismay  
48 over how embedded and widespread such attitudes are in other settings in Asia and Africa.  
49 For example, in her landmark account of the Bodhgaya movement in India, Manimala (1983)  
50 documents how land rights for women emerged out of mobilization around a number of other  
51 issues such as domestic violence, alcohol abuse, education, and land distribution to landless  
52 men from a large land holding. She writes that the demand for separate titles for women  
53 surfaced only when landless men given title to land became drunken and violent, provoking  
54 their wives to demand titles in their own names. However, women who received land said  
55 that they would leave it to their sons, thus confirming that land ownership would eventually  
56 revert to male control. Researchers working in the sub-Saharan African context have also  
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3 pointed out that the simple targeting of resources to women does not always ensure equitable  
4 outcomes since resources may then be allocated in biased ways to children under conditions  
5 of strong son preference (Lawrence Haddad and John Hoddinott 1995; Muthoni Wanyeki  
6 2003).  
7

8  
9 In their study of women's perceptions of land ownership in the district of Kutch in Gujarat,  
10 India, Gouthami and Meena Rajgor (2008) found an apparent contradiction between  
11 participants' agreement that no other asset but land could bring them the same sense of self-  
12 worth, security, or respect within the village and the women's reluctance to give land to their  
13 daughters. In part, this was due to pragmatic concerns about whether daughters who had  
14 moved away to marry could farm land they are given. However, it was also due to concerns  
15 that in transferring land to their daughters, mothers could place them at risk of reprisals from  
16 in-laws who do not share a commitment to transferring land to women. As in our study in  
17 Egypt, women who hesitated to endow daughters with land may just be taking the practical  
18 step of working with patriarchy in some ways while subverting it in other, perhaps less-  
19 visible, ways. Engaging with such choices will also require us to be guided by a less narrowly  
20 defined sense of logic and idealism.  
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23  
24 Research conducted in non-MENA settings, (see, for example, Namita Datta 2006) affirms  
25 that access to and control over land and housing provides women with security in the event of  
26 marital breakdown. Women in Noubariya who were abandoned or divorced by their husbands  
27 - often for their determination to refrain from selling their property and staying in the New  
28 Lands - relied on their houses and income from the land to raise their children. Some men in  
29 the community commented that such women and their children would have been "lost" had  
30 they not owned houses and land. Women in Kafr Sheikh also identified independence from  
31 their in-laws as a benefit of land and home ownership. In-laws were often reported to be  
32 responsible for grabbing assets of daughters-in-law.  
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35  
36 Our study revealed over less-obvious challenges and limitations related to sale and purchase  
37 of land. Our interviews revealed that it is difficult to sell land in Kafr Sheikh. Selling  
38 ancestral land is considered shameful and therefore something people only resort to in dire  
39 economic circumstances. Even if owners in Kafr Sheikh decide to sell land, there are many  
40 limitations to actually doing so. The seller is expected to consult siblings and to also have  
41 their agreement about the sale. Neighbors must also not only be consulted about land sales  
42 but also given preference for purchasing land. In Noubariya, on the other hand, the initial  
43 stages of settling the land are both easy and cheap – a house and 5 acres of land can be  
44 purchased for a very reasonable price of 15,000-32,000 Egyptian pounds (EGP) ( about  
45 \$2000 USD 2015-\$4000 USD 2015). Some people acquired land in Noubariya but found the  
46 living and working conditions of the desert too hostile. They sold their lands to others, often  
47 from the Old Lands, at very low prices. Frequent buying and selling of land in Noubariya in  
48 addition to improved soil fertility (often as a result of continuous cultivation and fertilization)  
49 meant that prices for some plots of land did occasionally go up significantly. During the time  
50 of our fieldwork (2014-2016), an acre of agricultural land in Noubariya was reported to have  
51 sold for 350,000 EGP (about \$44,000 USD 2015), which is close the price of an acre of  
52 agricultural land in Kafr Sheikh. Our interviews revealed that it was also very difficult to buy  
53 land in Kafr Sheikh. Land prices had skyrocketed particularly in areas that received irrigation  
54 services. "The land is very expensive. Those who own land have probably inherited it from  
55 their father," explained a male land owner in Kafr Sheikh. A women farmer emphasized that  
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3 even the combined total of savings and income from gold and livestock sales would not be  
4 enough to enable a farmer to buy land but it may be enough to finance construction of a  
5 house, if the farmer already owned a plot of land. Doss et al. (2015) discusses the challenges  
6 that arise in defining ownership when the land cannot be bought or sold, due to laws, social  
7 norms or other less-obvious reasons. Such challenges that do not relate directly to ownership  
8 and may differ from community to community in the same country, with implications for  
9 purchase, sale or disposal of property, tend to either be absent or glossed over in other studies  
10 of landownership. We certainly found them to be relevant and deserving of closer attention in  
11 our study.  
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14 As with livestock, we found gold, which male respondents in our study identified as the best  
15 asset for women to own, to be highly liquefiable and alienable from its owners. One male  
16 landowner in Kafr Sheikh told us that his mother's earrings do not stay with her for longer  
17 than a week. She is constantly selling or using them as collateral to enable the family to  
18 manage various cash flow problems and other crises. Similarly, in Noubariya, the husband of  
19 a female landowner told us that his wife had sold and bought back her jewelry dozens of time  
20 in the past and will continue to do so in the future.  
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23 Much like Palestinian women (Moors 2013), Egyptian women acquire most of their gold  
24 during marriage. Both the husband's family and sometimes the women's parents provide her  
25 with gold during the *Shabka* (engagement) ceremony – usually a bracelet, a ring and a  
26 pendant. Girls are often also given gold in their natal homes. When girls are born, their  
27 fathers are obliged by tradition to buy gold earrings. If their parents can afford it, girls may  
28 also be rewarded with a gold ring when they finish intermediate or secondary school.  
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31 In their marital homes, women seldom end up controlling the use and sale of gold given to  
32 them by their parents. Their in-laws are socially entitled to use and sell it. In the first few  
33 years after marriage, women are often unwilling to give away 'her' gold but when children  
34 are born and time passes, the in-laws and even husband can ask her for her gold and she is  
35 more likely to say yes. Many young and middle-aged women expressed anger and frustration  
36 about the gold that had been taken away by parents-in-law years ago and never returned:  
37 "They told me 'we will return it when the apple harvest is sold.' The apple harvest was sold  
38 and I did not get the gold. Then they told me 'we will return it once we marry off our son.'  
39 They married off their son and I still did not get my gold back." Since gold is much more  
40 expensive now than it was a few decades ago (in the 1970s, for example), jewelry is often  
41 loaned for the bride to wear and returned to the jeweler after the ceremony. Given such  
42 changes, its future use and value as an asset for women is difficult to predict.  
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46 Although most study participants considered the appropriation of women's gold by in-laws to  
47 be inappropriate at best and an outright abuse of power at worst, a few interviewees opined  
48 that borrowing gold from daughters-in-laws was simply a strategy people used to ensure the  
49 financial stability and security of the household. They explained that parents-in-law did  
50 always try to return gold to their daughters-in-law, and being able to contribute to financial  
51 security and asset consolidation elevated rather than diminished a daughter-in-law's social  
52 status in her marital home. We did encounter one instance during the course of our fieldwork  
53 of gold being returned to daughters-in-law by their mother-in-law, who had used the gold to  
54 buy land in Noubariya years ago. She returned gold to all three of her daughters-in-law, but  
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3 because the mother-in-law had taken gold from the oldest daughter-in-law first, she paid her  
4 back with interest by giving her two additional grams of gold.  
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6 If threats to a family's wellbeing and security are external to the household, it may be less  
7 important whether a woman has independent ownership of and control over an asset – be it  
8 land, houses, livestock or jewelry. The entire household may be protected as long as someone  
9 within it owns and controls the asset. However, a very different scenario may present itself  
10 upon internal threats to family security such as death, divorce, separation or abandonment. In  
11 the latter scenario, a woman's wellbeing is likely to depend much more significantly on  
12 whether or not she was able to exercise ownership and control over assets. Our findings point  
13 to land and homes as the most economically and socially valuable assets for men and women.  
14 Livestock and gold are also certainly useful assets for women, especially because they can be  
15 sold easily for cash. Because these latter assets are highly liquefiable, it is important for  
16 women to have control over their sale and use.  
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## 20 CONCLUSIONS

21 The literature on gender and property suggests that women in the MENA region are  
22 drastically marginalized in land ownership. Our empirical findings based on research in the  
23 New Lands and Old Lands of Egypt suggest that women may not be as severely  
24 disadvantaged in land ownership as generally assumed. As an example, 8 percent of women  
25 in Kafr Sheikh own land. This is almost twice the land ownership rate for women in the Old  
26 Lands (of which Kafr Sheikh is a part) reported in the literature of development organizations  
27 such as FAO and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Our  
28 findings in both the Old Lands and New Lands, where women's land ownership rate is even  
29 higher (17 percent), provide further evidence of the suggestion made by other researchers  
30 such as Doss et al. (2015) that women's marginalization in land ownership may be  
31 exaggerated - often for purposes of political advocacy - in the development literature. Our  
32 findings resonate with others who emphasize that many oft-cited statements about women's  
33 land ownership are gross oversimplifications and are not substantiated by any available data.  
34 Yet, we found, as Doss et al. (2015) did, that the broader pattern that women own less land  
35 than men, regardless of how ownership is conceptualized, is remarkably consistent. We urge  
36 future research on gender and asset ownership to consider various forms of sole and joint  
37 ownership (with, for example spouses, family members and friends) by which women and  
38 men may own and control assets. We simultaneously encourage researchers to be cognizant  
39 that joint ownership does not necessarily imply equal ownership (Cheryl Doss, Ruth  
40 Meinen-Dick, and Allan Bomuhangi 2014; Krista Jacobs and Aslihan Kes 2015).  
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46 Our findings urge us to caution against the dramatization of women's marginalization in land  
47 ownership, and encourages more empirical and nuanced inquiries into women's ownership  
48 and control over land in different world regional contexts. In particular, we found the  
49 literature and statistics on women and land ownership in MENA quoted by international  
50 development organizations to be quite dated. Much has changed in MENA countries since the  
51 1990s (when most of this literature was produced) due to economic liberalization,  
52 globalization and adoption of neoliberal governance regimes. Many of these changes have  
53 had dramatic implications for individual and collective land tenure systems and property  
54 rights, with both positive and negative outcomes for gender equality. Our findings support the  
55 need for additional research to be conducted at the national, sub-national and regional level in  
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3 MENA countries in the contemporary context. This will enable us to understand better the  
4 gendered outcomes of national and global economic policies and trends, and inform more  
5 finely-tuned and contextually-relevant policies for gender equity in land ownership.  
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7 We were certainly not surprised to discover that women were generally disadvantaged in land  
8 ownership in the New and Old Lands in Egypt. However, we also found that large numbers  
9 of men did not have any form of title or deed to the land they occupied because it was still  
10 titled in the name of the original owner, whose grandchildren or great-grandchildren may  
11 now be cultivating it. This draws attention to the observations made by other authors such as  
12 Barbara Cooper (1997) and Cecile Jackson (2003) that many men may also have precarious,  
13 contingent, and anxious relations with land than may appear if we lump all men together, as  
14 the inevitable beneficiaries of patrilineal inheritance. It can also mean that the weak position  
15 of women in land ownership may not always be an outcome of the desire to subjugate women  
16 but may well be a consequence of competition between different groups of men or of the  
17 inability of certain groups of men to acquire control over land.  
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21 Like several other researchers (Archana Parasher 1992; Agarwal 1994; Basu 1999) working  
22 in non-MENA contexts, our findings reveal that while the formal realm of law can and does  
23 play a significant role in optimizing women's entitlements to landed resources, legislation  
24 cannot be the sole vehicle for social change since pro-women social legislation is largely  
25 symbolic when it comes to altering roles and entitlement hierarchies within the family. Our  
26 research and those of others (for example, Olmsted 2005; Baruah 2010) suggest that women's  
27 well-documented aversion to stake claims to natal property was less a consequence of their  
28 ignorance of the law or their inability to appreciate the economic benefits of landed property  
29 ownership and more an outcome of a profound desire to stay connected with and feel loved  
30 by their natal families. Declining shares of parental property in favor of brothers similarly  
31 represents less a mindless subscription to traditional gender ideologies and more an intricate  
32 negotiation of kinship that alienates women from natal property, but also ensures economic  
33 and emotional support from brothers in times of crisis. Like the findings of several others, our  
34 research in the New and Old Lands of Egypt endorses the view that legal literacy and  
35 consciousness-raising initiatives that raise awareness among women as well as men about the  
36 benefits of greater equity and address fears about undoing customary male privileges are as  
37 crucial as policy reforms and state actions that protect women's interests and facilitate their  
38 agency. Gender equity goals can only be partially accomplished through legal measures and  
39 economic interventions, regardless of how well-intentioned and progressive they may be.  
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**Table 1. Overview of survey respondents.**

Type of respondents	Survey	Interviews
Women who solely own land in Noubariya	50	15
Women who manage land in Kafr Sheikh (may also be joint owners)	69	15
Women who help their husbands farm in Noubariya. Husbands may be owners or renters.	52	15
Women who help their husbands farm in Kafr Sheikh. Husbands may be owners or renters.	31	15
Men who own land in Kafr Sheikh	50	15
Men who rent land in Noubariya	50	15
Men who own land in Kafr Sheikh	50	15
Men who rent land in Noubariya	50	15

**Table 2. Different Levels of Control of Land**

	Self	Spouse	Self and spouse	Self and a member or more from the family	Spouse and a member or more from the family	Self and someone from outside the family	Spouse and someone from outside the family	Self, spouse, and someone from outside the family
Men with land in KFS	36		1	10	1			
Women managing land in KFS	7	10	5	17	4			
Men renting land in KFS	5			3		1	1	1
Women who are wives of landowners or renters in KFS	8	6	6	2	1			
Men with land in Noubariya	49							
Women with land in Noubariya	22	8	13	7				
Men renting land in Noubariya						1		
Women who are wives of landowners or renters in	3	17	13	2				

Noubariya							
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**Table 3: Different Levels of Control of Houses**

<b>Respondent</b>	<b>Self</b>	<b>Spouse</b>	<b>Self and spouse</b>	<b>Self and a member or more from the family</b>	<b>Spouse and a member or more from the family</b>
Men with land in KFS	35		1	12	1
Women managing land in KFS	9	9	3	20	
Men renting land in KFS	33	3		11	
Women who are wives of landowners or renters in KFS	15	3	3	3	
Men with land in Noubariya	47			3	
Women with land in Noubariya	21	7	14	8	
Men renting land in Noubariya	18				
Women who are wives of landowners or renters in Noubariya	5	24	14	2	

**Table 4: Different levels of control over income from sales of livestock**

<b>Respondent</b>	<b>Self</b>	<b>Spouse</b>	<b>Self and spouse</b>	<b>Self and a member or more from the family</b>	<b>Spouse and a member or more from the family</b>
Men with land in KFS	41	1	0	6	0
Women managing land in KFS	13	12	20	21	2
Men renting land in KFS	35	6	3	6	0
Women who were wives of landowners or renters in KFS	8	5	8	10	0
Men with land in Noubariya	44	1	3	1	0

Women with land in Noubariya	8	18	13	7	0
Men renting land in Noubariya	43	1	3	2	0
Women who are wives of landowners or renters in Noubariya	3	27	17	2	2

**Table 5: Contribution to total family income from milk, meat and poultry sales**

<b>Contribution to Total Family Income</b>	<b>Milk</b>	<b>Meat</b>	<b>Poultry</b>	<b>Total</b>
Kafr Sheikh	10%	8%	6%	24%
Noubariya	1.25%	2%	1%	4.25%

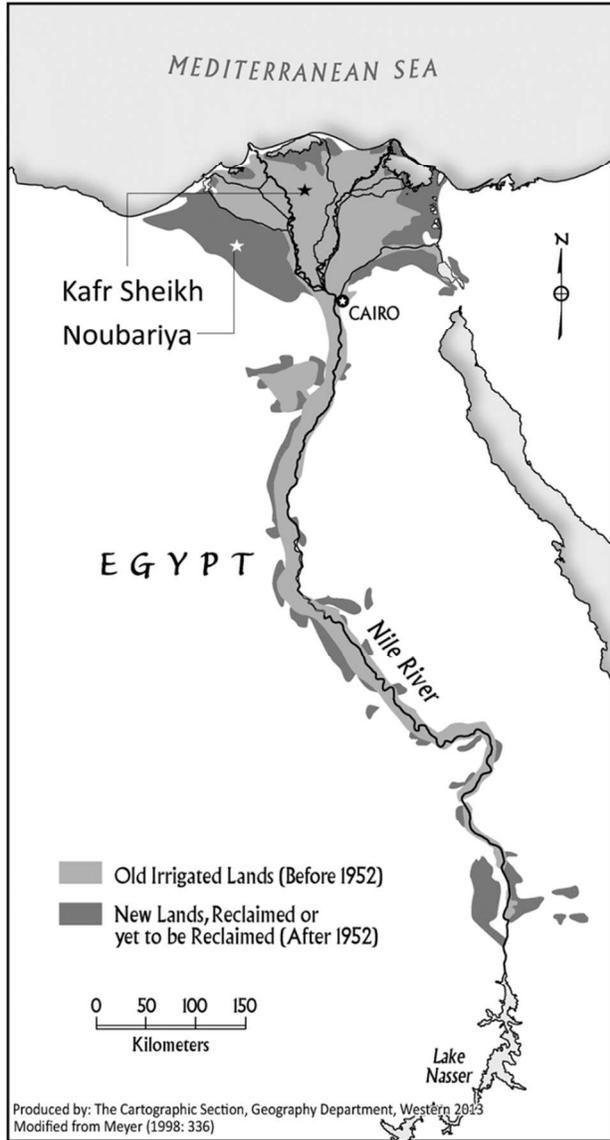


Figure 1. Study Locations in Egypt