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**CONFRONTING WASTE
A TURNING POINT IN EGYPTIAN ECONOMY**

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INTRODUCTION

Many are the pivotal elements of the Egyptian force. We have a distinguished geographical position; fine climate all year round; the River Nile and its lakes; stretched coastal lines along the Mediterranean and Red Sea, which provide an abundant fish wealth; the Suez Canal with its strategic importance; main ports on the Mediterranean and Red Sea, which allow a basic international multi-media transport axis; archeological treasures, which represent nearly one third of the world monuments, and which are capable of polarizing 80% of the worldwide tourism movement, in addition to lovely tourist diving areas in Sharm El Sheikh, Hurghada and all along the Red Sea, as well as therapeutic tourism in Safaga and other promising areas; abundant human resources that could be turned into a positive strategic commodity at both local and international levels, once they are well developed; many industries, commodities and products that are widespread all over Egypt; new cities and an infra-structure that has greatly developed within the past few years; universities and specialized research centres in all walks of science and knowledge.

We have Egypt with all its ancient civilization and magnificent heritage. All these are riches lacking in many a developed country.

Hence, Egypt's economic problems do not evolve from having limited resources but from lack of managing available resources.

While discussing policies, tools and means of transfer of the Egyptian economy, in order to achieve a productive breakthrough that can secure for Egypt an appropriate status at the threshold of the 21st Century, I wanted to present this study, in order to shed light on one of the important determining factors in economic development.

This factor has great and grave impacts on the Egyptian economy. It is “Waste in Egyptian potentials and resources”.

This factor should be confronted by one and all, in order to raise productivity rates and achieve the aspired economic development.

First: Difference between Loss & Waste:

Difference is great between loss and waste of resources and potentials.

Loss is what we lose involuntarily, such as water lost at Lake Nasser, due to upward evaporation, or underground leakage, or through the African cleft intercepting the Lake.

Waste is potentials and energies lost, but that could be stopped, yet we do not stop it, either due to negligence, or ignorance.

Second: Important Value of Waste:

It suffices for illustrating the economic importance of waste to know that the economic receptacle needed to achieve a net profit of EGP 1000 is not less than EGP 50,000, invested between fixed assets, know-how, manpower training & employment, management of human resources, raw materials and capital, provision of energy sources in different forms and, finally, the set-up of a sales & marketing body, which entails raising awareness of consumers on commodities, before putting them on the market.

However, achieving an EGP 1000 profit through confronting waste entails no material costs.

Consequently, doubling the achieved profit through stopping the haemorrhage of wasted resources and potentials is a goal that supersedes many economic objectives, whether at the institutional level or state level.

Third: Features of Wasting Our Most Important Resources:

1- Human Resources:

Unemployment in all its forms:

- (a) Plain Unemployment and high rates of unemployed individuals among university and higher- & medium institute graduates. Plain unemployment means that there are individuals capable of and wanting to work, but unable to find jobs. Hence, their time is wasted.

Since time is the only resource that can neither be saved nor retained, therefore plain unemployment represents a major unseen waste.

It is well known that large numbers of graduates are employed many years after their graduation. Thus, it is normal to find their productivity low upon employment, due to lack of retention of studied material over their long period of unemployment. Moreover, unemployment has negative repercussions on graduates and their families. In short, plain unemployment has a great negative impact on national productivity.

- (b) Masked Unemployment is the large numbers of employees, getting wages and salaries without adding anything to the GNP. In other words, large sums are lost, which could have been used to enhance investment. Masked unemployment undermines the investment capacity of the state. Undoubtedly, the fall in state investment capacities causes a rise in the size of masked unemployment. This is one of the axioms of

life – any failure (or success) harbours elements that both feed and bolster it.

(c) High Illiteracy Rates that add to all this the waste represented in the high illiteracy rate within the Egyptian society, with all its repercussions.

(d) Waste of Talents, represented in wasting talents of youth by setting a system for enrollment in universities and institutes that does not take into consideration the real talents of youth. This kills the creative and innovative skills of the majority of students, who represent the future of our nation.

2- Waste due to Accumulation in Ports:

Lack of developing ports to keep abreast with worldwide development in maritime transport and loading & unloading technologies, in spite of the continuous rise in size of foreign trade, has led to the accumulation of goods in ports and delay in loading and unloading vessels. Consequently, fines fall upon foreign vessels, payable in foreign currency. This represents a great accumulative waste, together with waste of time, entailing many other negative aspects that are not in favour of Egypt, at the threshold of the 21st Century.

3- Waste due to Current Irrigation System:

An urgent intervention is needed, in order to convert the present overflowing irrigation system into modern drip or sprinkling irrigation systems. It is inconceivable not to exploit the abundance of water

bestowed on us by nature in the reclamation of all possible land, given the surplus of manpower that we enjoy, which is a scarcity in many neighbouring countries.

4- Waste in Drinking Water:

The great increase in wasted drinking water, amounting to 70%, represents the great waste encumbered in costs of purifying water and rendering it potable. This could be evaded, if wasted water is reduced to acceptable international levels (7 – 10%), by applying standard specifications on both local and imported water shutting devices and water connections, and by applying progressive price categories on water consumption.

5- Waste in Use of Loans:

Delay in exploiting available loans is a great waste, represented in freezing the financing receptacles provided by banks, and converting them from active dynamic funds into passive static money. Undoubtedly, misuse of available loans in itself is a reason behind the fall in size of our gross annual investments, as it blocks investments that could enrich our national product and contribute to a faster privatization process, where the public business sector could turn into one capable of promoting the economy, after having been a burden to it for long years.

6- Waste in Lack of Recycling:

Up till now, the state has not yet set up a screening system for waste matter upon disposal, allowing recycling of plastic, aluminum, glass and paper in plants established for these purposes. This matter has a material benefit, as well as secondary benefits that are of utmost importance, such

as environmental protection, higher environmental awareness on behalf of citizens and an active intervention to stop commercial fraud through use of disposed containers.

7- Waste due to Lack of Adequate Maintenance of Equipment & Machinery:

Unfortunately, lack of concern to set and implement precautionary maintenance programmes for equipment and machinery leads to a drop in their efficacy and a rise in their impairment, together with a great negative impact on reducing productivity.

8- Waste due to Use of Worn-Out Equipment & Machinery:

Utilization of worn-out equipment & machinery leads to higher rates of wasted raw material used in productivity operations, and higher energy needed to operate such equipment & machinery, while producing low-quality products. This has a great negative impact on national productivity.

9- Lack of Exploiting Available Potential of “Railways as a Means of Transporting Goods”:

Lack of exploiting part of our available productive potentials ultimately leads to a general drop in productivity. This represents a waste of available resources that would be negatively reflected on our national economy. An example of this is the potential of using the railway system to transport goods. Undoubtedly, the existence of a railroad network in Egypt is a great strategic privilege that is lacking in many other Middle Eastern countries, east and west of Egypt. It suffices to mention that the Egyptian Railway is the second oldest railway in the world, outside Europe, after India.

The Egyptian Railway Authority is functioning with great efficacy in transporting passengers, where it is considered a cheap, systematic and organized means of transportation, connecting cities. However, its performance in transporting goods is quite another issue, with great drawbacks and failures that are evident from available statistics on transport values (ton/km), if compared to land and river transport. Knowing that our railway lines cover 90% of Egyptian cities, where the Railway Authority is equipped with warehouses, utilities and yards, as well as an administrative system, whose cost is totally borne by the state, and knowing that this Authority is capable of receiving and delivering goods, parcels and commodities, as well as collecting fees on behalf of shipping agents, we could hence realize the amount of waste arising from not exploiting this vital utility.

10- Waste in Raw Materials:

There is a great loss in raw materials used on many productive sites:

- ❖ Waste due to use of low-level technologies
- ❖ Waste due to untrained labour
- ❖ Waste due to unawareness of labour
- ❖ Waste due to lack of plans and studies
- ❖ Waste due to absence of discipline

11- Waste in Energy:

There are several features of waste of all kinds of energy:

- ❖ Extravagance in using electrical power
- ❖ Wasted energy through badly maintained equipment and machinery
- ❖ Wasted energy in means of communication, due to traffic jams in many places
- ❖ Waste of available solar energy and lack of its exploitation as a source of clean and cheap energy

12- Huge Waste in Agricultural Commodities:

Here, waste is represented in stages of harvest, collection, packaging, storage, transport and distribution.

13- Waste in Making Use of Scientific Cadres:

Egypt is full of universities and specialized scientific research centres in all domains. Every day, we hear of scientific degrees granted in all branches of science & knowledge. Still, exploitation of these resources remains very humble, with the majority of these degrees locked up in drawers, which is a great waste.

14- Waste in Exploiting Housing Units:

There are many built houses that remain uninhabited for years, at a time when the country is suffering from a crushing housing problem. Here, the state could have a say in the matter. A banking mechanism could be set up to financially supervise the movement of building and construction, on one hand, and the process of owning and re-selling units, on the other. This could take place through fluctuating interest rates on loans, upwards

& downwards, thus creating a motivation towards building and ownership and evading the state of accumulation that ends in stagnation.

15- Waste in Lack of Environmental Protection:

Wherever we look, we encounter many features of waste, concerning environmental protection and resources, at a time when the world is totally absorbed in protecting the environment and its resources. It is a well-known fact that the cost of remedying damage is by far higher than the cost of prohibiting its occurrence.

16- Continuous Waste due to Traffic Jams & Poor State of Means of Transportation:

Traffic jams and the poor technical state of many means of transportation lead to daily disorders. Purchase and installation of spare parts is a great loss of time. Undoubtedly, all this raises material costs, as well as time, psychological and nervous stress on all vehicle owners, drivers and passengers.

Traffic jams lead to wasting a great deal of time to go from one place to another. Hence daily cycles of means of transportation are delayed and their optimum use is not attained.

Consequently, many employees arrive late to work, suffering a great deal of psychological and nervous stress, a matter that is reflected on their relations and attitude towards the public. All this has its negative impact on our national productivity. The same problem arises on their way back from work, and this is negatively reflected on their family relations. Thus, their problems increase and their productivity decreases.

17- Great Waste of Human Rights & Entailed Economic Waste:

(a) Negligence in purifying our drinking water, with the pretext of economizing, without taking into consideration the consequences of infecting the citizens with serious diseases. This entails treatment costs, importation of medication and reduced productivity of workers that could sometimes reach a standstill. Also, pupils in schools and university students, who fall sick, become incapable of studying and absorbing, with ruptures in their educational process. Hence, negligence in purifying drinking water, with the pretext of economizing, is a “big” mistake. Not only is it a violation of one of the basic human rights of obtaining clean potable water, but also it encumbers the state with much more than what it saves from omitting purification.

(b) Declining Egyptian health levels is due to several reasons, mainly steady lack of nutrition, particularly animal protein that is essential for human life & health. This is in spite of vast stretches of fresh and salty water, lengthy coastal lines, old and new lakes, and large seas full of fish. Also, Egyptians suffer from lack of medical services at reasonable rates, within the reach of the majority of the populace. Medical progress is slow and health conditions are bad on many work sites. Furthermore, the environment is being polluted clearly and excessively.

Undoubtedly, the deteriorating health conditions of Egyptians are reflected on a great unseen waste in productive potentials.

(c) Waste of Ethics & Morals Due to Grave & Growing Housing Crisis:

Hypothetical speculations in real estate and land have led to a rise in prices of housing and construction, amidst the absence of laws and regulations that are capable of setting a sound relation between landlords and tenants. Has this not contributed to driving hundreds of thousands, and maybe millions, to open-air areas, without any shelter, clean water or even electricity? Has not this fabricated crime driven the poor and helpless to sleep in dozens in a single room or courtyard? Has not this tragic phenomenon touched the bashfulness of young girls and boys, as well as children? Has it not killed within them many values and sanctities? Is not this a direct reason behind the emergence of slum areas, in which crime, sin, perversity and homosexuality thrive? Is not all this a waste of our most important resources, namely the human element, which is the backbone of productivity, development and future industry? Furthermore, violating human rights of Egyptians is in fact the main cause behind the state of indifference and negativity that is prevailing, as well as the sense of alienation arising among returning expatriates and newcomers.

I have herein reviewed some aspects of waste, as examples, not exhaustively.

It is true that there are many intricate reasons and causes behind all that, but we are surely capable of confronting the situation. It might not be easy, but, still, it is not impossible. The Egyptian society has succeeded in achieving the October victory. This was achieved through organizing and exploiting all potentials and capacities. Hence, all this waste could be confronted.

Fourth: Confronting Waste:

The matter calls for prompt action in adopting an integrated group or bundle of policies, plans and programmes, set and implemented by all society institutions and sectors, given that the responsibility remains collective and shared.

The matter calls for an effective role on behalf of the Egyptian media with all its channels, in order to raise an integrated awareness on waste in all its forms and damages to man and society.

The matter calls for an effective role on behalf of men of religion in mosques and churches, emphasizing that all celestial religions and laws forbid waste.

The matter calls for concerting all efforts vis-à-vis waste and a thoroughly studied and well-planned comprehensive mobilization.

Only then could we confront waste.

I, hereby, display the most important axes of confrontation, together with policies and objectives:

1. Raising awareness on features of waste and its negative impacts on man and society, while integrating this topic in scholastic curricula;
2. Establishing a competent agency for confronting waste, furnished with a professional base of trained and qualified labour, in accordance with the needs of society;
3. Alleviating the problem of unemployment by vesting untrained labour with further potentials that would qualify it to work in external markets, in competition with foreign labour;

4. Benefiting from concepts, policies and systems of the Mubarak-Kohl Technical Cooperation Project, in order to raise the overall productivity potentials of society;
5. Improving the performance and spreading of small industries, while setting a national development plan, and raising intermediary industries, as well as solving problems pertaining to such industries, in a manner that would divert the entire Egyptian society towards production;
6. Establishing an Egyptian scientific infra-structure that is capable of stepping into the 21st Century. In this concern, both government and private sector could benefit together from potentials and capabilities of Egyptian expatriates, turning us into producers rather than purchasers of technology. This matter could be rendered easy, given that the state is aware of this objective and has already established "Mubarak Scientific City". Furthermore, Egypt possesses a galaxy of scientists and experts, who are capable of yielding scientific achievements in service of the society, once they are given the chance. Also, this expertise could be exploited in fields of vocational training and re-structuring of companies and factories, given the distinguished administrative know-how of those experts. They could also assist the private sector in selecting the technology appropriate for our society, while absorbing large numbers of manpower and achieving self-sufficiency in many imported commodities, for which local raw materials are available. Use could be made of the successful Indian experience in this context;

Within this framework, Egyptian expatriates could help the private sector by furnishing it with characteristics, sources and applications of imported technologies and how far they suit the Egyptian society, without having to encumber a high societal price. Many Egyptian expatriates are working for big multi-national companies, which could help in purchasing such technologies at reasonable prices. Some of them even own houses of expertise and consultancy offices, which could be very useful in concluding external contracts. Finally, they could contribute to yielding this technology to suit the Egyptian reality, while training labourers on such technologies. All this could protect our national resources from being wasted;

7. Increasing the number of quays in existing ports, particularly container quays, in order to meet needs of present importation, as well as in years to come;
8. Magnifying development activities and equipment of existing seaports, by re-operating quays that are out of use, deepening the buoy, and extending the length of standing quays, in proportion with size and loads of giant modern vessels;
9. Equipping all ports with modern loading, unloading and weighing technologies, as well as integrated laboratories for analysis of imported goods, together with enough areas or silos for storage;
10. Applying operational research systems in scheduling the traffic of arriving vessels to ports, and distributing them on quays, while organizing and monitoring unloading and transportation operations;

11. Increasing the number of maritime ports on both the Mediterranean and Red Sea, in order to keep pace with the expected increased in maritime transport, particularly after the entering into force of the GATT. This could qualify Egypt to play a vital role in the transit transportation of goods between Asia, Africa and Europe;
12. Conducting quotation studies, based on an integrated and updated structure of data and information, with the aim of rendering service fees in Egyptian ports competitive with their peers in other regional ports;
13. Raising the efficiency of administrative performance in Egyptian ports through selecting a proper administrative leadership, while allowing efficient and continuous training. Rules and regulations are to be updated, in line with the various environmental changes that influence administrative performance. This, together with a sound selection and development of labour, with continuous motivation towards better performance;
14. Making better use of solar energy as a clean and cheap source of energy;
15. Promoting the role of the state in environmental protection through a more effective role of local and popular agencies, together with enactment and application of deterrent laws;
16. Reviewing modes and systems of handling agricultural commodities and products to reduce loss and damage during harvest, storage, packaging, transportation, handling, ... etc.

17. Paying more concern to the Egyptian human being, who is the governing element in all axes;
18. Planning for more effective solutions for the crushing housing crisis. Is it possible that the crisis continues and aggravates, in spite of the many existing empty housing units that have been standing there for years? Definitely, systems in field of building & construction have failed to come up with a solution that meets the needs of landlords and tenants. Ongoing construction of units left empty must be of an economic benefit to landlords, given the rising value of assets that surpasses interest rates on capitals. In other words, leaving things as they are is economically more beneficial than transferring money into real estate or real estate into money, in the absence of an active round that suits all local tendencies and standards in capital management. There could be a missing link, in which the solution to this problem lies;

Specifically, there is a missing role of banks and real estate investment, represented in dealing with fluctuating interest rates that encourage the purchase of lands and the funding of construction, until indications would show a strategic surplus that is not to be exceeded. At that point, purchase of lands and building them is to be curbed, through raising interest rates, while reducing interest rates for real estate owners. This would create an active movement, capable of promoting the use of already-financed capitals, in order to re-pump them in other activities that serve the purchase of lands and building them, while reducing interest rates, in line with the new situation of surplus in funding capitals;

It is also worthwhile to create a mechanism for the banking system, capable of promoting the housing activity and housing sector. Urbanization should also play a vital role in houses and their shifting between old and new landlords. This could facilitate the substitution of a big house with a smaller one, and vice versa. Citizens could then shift easily from one city to the other, without being obliged to be tied down to a house, which in fact is a fictitious tie;

19. Setting up a recycling system, starting from Cairo and Alexandria, to be later generalized. In this concern, our scientists and researchers could study experiences of developed countries in this domain;

For example, the French Ministry of Environment has inaugurated a research centre in Mid April 1996, specialized in recycling plastic through advanced technologies and producing new utilizable plastic materials, a matter that is very economical, besides being a solution for plastic waste materials;

20. Stopping the heated race undertaken by one and all in polluting our River Nile and poisoning its water. What is the idea of spoiling our Nile, which is our source of life and livelihood since eternity? We discharge our sanitary drainage into it. We dispose of our factory waste into it. We throw our dead animals into it. We use it as a huge dumping site. Are we not better off developing, protecting, nurturing, fertilizing and enriching this source of water, instead of turning our drainage networks, canals and ditches into sites infested with germs and viruses and sources of disease and epidemics. Fish lie dead in their environment. People, eating fish,

fall sick. Does all this make sense, while we are on the threshold of the 21st Century?

The World is moving forth, while what we are doing to ourselves and to our environment is many steps backwards. All of us, without exception, are participating in wasting our resources. This is a serious matter that calls for a confrontation and for a comprehensive national mobilization.

Finally, I reaffirm that confronting waste is a goal that supersedes many economic objectives, whether at the institutional level or state level.