

AN-ACG-076

**Supporting
Egypt's
Processed
Foods
Export
Industry**

**A Series on
Women in
Development:
Egyptian
Women in
the Food
Processing
Industry**

**Prepared By
Agriculture-Led
Export
Businesses
(ALEB)**

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CTO Mr Tarek Shata**

Prepared by Abt Associates Inc.

Douglas A Anderson - Team Director / Marketing & Management
Dr Manal Karim – Associate Consultant
Ms Amal Nawar - Translator & Facilitator

And

The Mitchell Group

Ms Renee H Yates - Women in Development Consultant

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Egyptian Women in the Agriculture Food Processing Industry Agriculture-Led Export Businesses (ALEB)

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I Introduction

The purpose of the ALEB gender study is to ascertain the constraints Egyptian women face in the food processing and support industries (including participation in trade associations and other service entities) This report is the first part of an on-going two-year assessment of Egyptian women's issues as they relate to the Project's goals The data and analyses will be incorporated, as appropriate, into the major tasks of the ALEB project At the conclusion of the study, recommendations will be made to 90 individual Egyptian private companies to assist them in developing their company policies, technical assistance requests and strategic action plans

This first report consists of a review of the existing research and programs on Egyptian women in the agriculture sector, the identification and justification for the selection of 15 companies for the initial survey, a sample survey questionnaire, which was tested at the headquarters and factories of five Egyptian food processing companies, coded interviews with "focus" groups of female company employees, preliminary observations of issues related to women, and training possibilities, and a proposed work plan for the continuation of the gender study The issue of associations will be addressed during Part II

The report was prepared by Renee H Yates, women in development consultant, in Cairo, Egypt, and Washington, D C , August 7 – September 18, 1999, under the direction of Mr Douglas Anderson, ALEB Task 3 team leader Dr Manal Karim, ALEB Cairo staff, and Ms Amal Nawar, research assistant and translator assisted her

II Background

The Agriculture-Led Export Business (ALEB) project is part of the Growth through Globalization (GTG) strategy which is intended to improve the competitiveness of Egyptian food processing companies and related service providers The purpose is to identify and carry-out interventions that increase market-led, Egyptian private sector exports of targeted processed food products while supporting the sustainable development of private sector firms and associations providing services to food processors

The activities of the ALEB project have been divided into five major tasks The five tasks are to

- (1) Expand and Make More Widely Available Targeted Export Marketing and Product Information
- (2) Increase Access to and Expand Processing Technologies and Product Improvement Services
- (3) Strengthen and Expand International Marketing, Management and Technical Skills
- (4) Enhance Association and Private Sector Export Services Supporting Export Development and Policy Dialogue
- (5) Expand and Enhance Private Sector Strategic Alliances Supporting Exports

USAID recognizes that improving the productivity and earnings of women are key to sustained economic growth in Egypt, as women are often the primary food

producers who devote much of their time to acquiring the basic necessities of life for their families. Work place conditions directly affect worker productivity, profitability, efficiency and ultimately, the well being of Egyptian families. An important USAID concept, therefore, is to improve the environment in which women work by reviewing gender-sensitive issues and eliminating constraints women workers are facing in processing and food export-oriented enterprises.

Another concern is the high unemployment rate in Egypt, which has been officially estimated to be eight percent, but may be as high as 18%. Skill shortages are a problem in a broad range of sectors, and in some industries, such as agribusiness and tourism, middle management and certain technical skill shortages are widely seen as the critical constraints to revenue and job growth. Consequently, the ALEB has included a gender assessment among its activities to provide guidance to the team on appropriately working within each task to promote women in the agribusiness sector to improve their skill levels, status and income.

A Related Projects and Previous Research on Women in Egypt

The ALEB project is one of over 15 USAID-sponsored activities designed to assist Egypt in developing its export industries, each focusing on a different sector concerning itself with assistance at the company level. Among the sectors being assisted are apparel, fresh fruit, vegetables and processed foods, leather products (especially footwear), furniture and software. The ALEB project is one of the "Growth through Globalization (GTG)" partners that are coordinated by USAID's GTG Monitoring and Evaluation Unit in Cairo. Other GTG partners are the Agribusiness Linkages for Egypt (AgLink), Amcham's BusinessLink Project (BL), Centre for International Private Enterprise (CIPE/FEI), Egyptian Centre for Economics Studies (ECES), Egyptian Exporters' Association (ExpoLink), International Executive Service Corps (IESC), Presidents' Council, Agricultural Policy Reform Program (APRP), Agricultural Technology Utilization and Transfer Project (ATUT) and the Development Economic Policy Reform Analysis Project (DEPRA).

The GTG partners are working on a range of studies, some of which focus on women. Recently, an APRP research team carried out a workshop in the spring of 1999 which concerned improving women's opportunities in agriculture. The team concluded, inter alia, that there is a need to find better ways to recruit female laborers, that the private sector should be encouraged to provide part time jobs and flexible working hours for female workers and that more market information on women is needed. One of the purposes was to identify policy reforms that promote the participation of women in the development of Egypt's agricultural economy and women's share in the economic benefits generated by liberalization. Focus group discussions, in-depth interviews with members of industries within agribusiness, as well as key personnel in government institutions, and site visits to key agribusiness businesses in the Delta, Upper Egypt and the New Lands were included in APRP's comprehensive study.

B How a study of women in the food processing industry will add to the body of knowledge on Egyptian women in agriculture

While there is an abundance of research on women in the agriculture sector, without knowledge of the specific situation of the women at each Egyptian company, the aggregate data can be difficult to use in determining the planning, training and technical assistance requirements of individual companies

The aggregate data and studies serve as useful guidelines in identifying trends and general issues. They often do not, however, provide insight as to how to work within a specific company, where the circumstance of the women in the company often depends as much on the personality and viewpoints of the owner, as on the profitability of his company

This study will collect company-specific data that will be incorporated into company training programs, technical assistance and action plans. The targeted companies will be encouraged to appreciate the relationship between improving the work environment and opportunities for the women in their company and growing as an export company. Since women make up over 50% of the labor force in many of these companies, the gender activities will help to create jobs, consistent with USAID's SO1 activities. The recommendations from the study will also be considered by the other four Tasks groups under the ALEB project

III Research Methodology

A. Selection of Companies

The Egyptian Chamber of Food Industries Members Directory, dated January 1998, lists a total of 452 Egyptian companies involved in "food and food by-products preservation." Ninety 90 of those and other companies have been identified for participation in the Project by the ALEB Task 3 team, based on their potential for export growth in the processed food industry in Egypt. A Rapid Industry Analysis (IRA) carried out by an ALEB team in May 1999 revealed market trends and trade opportunities in the European Union member countries for Egyptian companies that process fruits and vegetables for export. The companies were selected after taking into consideration these findings, the need for the Project to focus on a specific "industry cluster", access to key Egyptian company officers and the availability of groups of Egyptian women to interview

The companies are located in the four major food processing centers of Egypt, i.e., Cairo, Alexandria, 6th of October City, and 10th of Ramadan City. They produce products in the nine categories of frozen vegetables and fruits, dehydrated fruits and vegetables, fruits and vegetable juices and concentrates, jams and preserves, dairy products, processed meat/fish products, biscuits, confectionery and pastry products, bagged, canned and glass (value added) packed vegetables, pickled, etc., including tomato products, and dry blends, soup mixes, bouillon, dry sauce mixes and baby food

Fifteen of the companies have had an ALEB diagnostic review and all of the companies will participate in a diagnostic review or "SWOT" analysis before the gender survey and interviews begin at their company. This approach will enable ALEB to build on its existing body of data, utilize its company contacts and to incorporate the findings of the gender study more easily into the other ALEB project components

B Research Tools

Two basic research tools will be used. A survey questionnaire will be used to collect baseline data for both men and women on company facilities, educational level of employees, age and marital status, length of employment, salaries and wages, working hours, availability of transportation and training opportunities on-the-job and off site, and length of employment. The quantitative data from the survey will be analyzed to determine if there are important statistical relationships between these factors and the companies' productivity. (See Sample questionnaire in Annex.)

To assess the causes of constraints, and gather qualitative data, formal and informal interviews with focus groups of women will be used. Groups of women in administration, management, and in the factory will be sought for their views.

IV Issues and Preliminary Observations

A. Key Issue Traditional Egyptian Attitudes

Traditional attitudes toward Egyptian women in the labor force are well documented. The notion that "two women equal one man" still appears to prevail today. Women play important economic roles in both urban and rural areas, but their contributions in the labor force are frequently ignored, or obscured in the aggregate data. The women themselves are rarely aware of their role as economically productive individuals.

Although the Egyptian labor laws require that men and women receive equal pay for the same job, in reality, women are frequently relegated to the least-skilled, lowest paying jobs and their chances for advancement are much less than men's chances. "As a result there is a widening gap between the average wages for males and those for females. This is especially true in manufacturing industries where tasks are strictly gender-defined."¹

Many women are recruited from rural areas to work in the food industry as laborers. Their tasks require repetition, patience and few skills and there are usually no attempts by management to up-grade their work or train them to operate productive machinery. This situation is somewhat different for women with university or secondary-level education. These women are usually located in offices at the company's headquarters and they work as secretaries, bookkeepers or assistants to supervisors or managers. A few are charged with supervising other women on the factory floor, but rarely have a direct say in management decision-making.

The goal of educated and uneducated women in the labor force is marriage. Career ambitions are usually secondary concerns, and women work for money until they find a husband who will support them. Working women may receive little or no help with housework or children if they work outside the home. They are required to function in dual or multiple roles, often without adequate support.

¹ Paper on "The Situation of Women in Egypt," prepared by the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS), (Women and Child Research Unit), The United Nations Children's Fund, UNICEF Egypt
(No date indicated)

services such as day care for their children, convenient transportation, or the option of part-time work

While these generalizations still pertain to the situation of Egyptian women, changes are coming and the situation may vary markedly from company to company. Also, Egyptian and other feminists are actively pursuing policy and other improvements for women in Egypt. The challenge for ALEB is to find a way to work constructively within this environment.

B Corollary Issues

A number of corollary issues will be explored during this study. One such issue is the role that contract labor plays in the recruitment of women for factory work. In addition, the programs of women's associations and non-governmental organizations (NGO's) will be reviewed to determine if there are appropriate lessons and models that can be transferred to a company setting to benefit women.

C Gender Approach to Training and Technical Assistance

Based on the small number of companies, literature and WID professionals consulted to date, Egyptian women are shy in mixed sex groups and reluctant to interact freely with foreigners. One can surmise that the causes may relate to the fear of losing their jobs, or of antagonizing the managers and supervisors, be they men or women. It is for this reason that ALEB's first job is to convince the men at each company of the merits of considering seriously interventions that will help develop their company's human resources, of which women often represent a large percentage. The ALEB training and technical assistance interventions, therefore, should be made in the context of activities whose objective is to improve the international competitiveness of their company. Stand alone gender awareness or other training and TA focused exclusively on women is not recommended in that such an approach may further instill traditional beliefs.

An alternative approach would be to discreetly integrate women's issues into the mainstream training and TA as they relate to critical company issues such as packaging, distribution, quality assurance, and reliability of input supplies. For example, ALEB might approach its in-company TA from the perspective that it is, in part, because women in the EU markets of Germany, Italy, Portugal, Spain, etc., have begun to work in larger numbers outside the home that Egyptian processed foods enjoy greater potential in Europe. It could be pointed out that women are the major consumers in Western importing nations and women's preferences in packaging, taste, type of processing that is desirable (frozen or dried vegetables, for example) often governs what, and how much a family purchases. This point could ultimately be related to the wisdom of including a female on the company's marketing management team.

Another idea might be introduced in the context of computer/internet training. Some companies have complained that training is often wasted on women who leave the labor force for marriage shortly after the company has spent resources on training them. ALEB might suggest the option of telecommuting by Egyptian women who marry and need to be at home to care for children. This suggestion could lead to a discussion of part-time schedules for women with the provision of related transportation and daycare services. (ALEB may consider making laptop computers available to eligible married Egyptian females through the CIP.

program This may provide an incentive to Egyptian managers and reduce their concerns of wasted training efforts on women)

An indirect approach aimed at integrating women's issues into mainstream company management decisions will require careful tailoring of instructional materials and sensitivity to the reaction of ALEB's corporate men and women clients A gender-sensitive person should review the training material in order to identify opportunities to introduce women's issues indirectly, and convince company managers of the merit of these issues

Realistic training opportunities that incorporate gender awareness issues should be made available by ALEB to both male and female employees at all echelons of the Egyptian company The Egyptian associations to which the 90 companies belong should be considered by ALEB for membership training, TA, U S tours, etc that incorporate gender awareness issues

V Work Plan

Part I of this study will be completed in January 2000, following the data collection and analysis of fifteen Egyptian food processing companies (Part II will add 75 companies to the baseline study, which will be conducted over a 2 ½ - year timeframe) The tasks indicated below were accomplished during the start-up phase in August 1999

- 1 Familiarization with the ALEB project and the activities of Task 3, background literature review and introductory meetings with USAID officials, related USAID project activities, WID organizations and WID programs in Egypt (Nine persons were consulted)
- 2 Development of an appropriate research strategy, a survey questionnaire to collect baseline data, techniques for interviewing focus groups, and determination of the food processing companies that would be contacted It was agreed that the 15 companies where Team 3 had already conducted diagnostic analyses and is in the process of carrying out SWOT analyses would be visited This approach facilitates the work by enabling the use of existing contacts and documents It also will make the integration of final conclusions and recommendations into the TA and training provided by Team 3 easier at the end of the project
- 3 Field trips to five companies to test the baseline data questionnaire and "focus group" interview techniques In each case, it was necessary to visit both the headquarters of the companies where the administration is located and the factories, where many of the women are working Four out-of-town trips were necessary to reach the appropriate persons at these companies (two trips to Alexandria, one trip to El Neanaiea, one to Sadat City) The questionnaire and interviewing approach were tested at five companies The questionnaire has been revised once and there may be additional changes as research techniques are refined
- 4 Preparation of Part I report

Data collection and analysis for the 15 companies will continue through January 2000 The next steps are

- A** Distribution and follow-up on questionnaires for 15 companies (September – December 1999)
- B** Conduct of formal and informal interviews with “focus groups” of women professionals and laborers at 15 companies, including processing factories (December – January 2000)
- C** Analysis of data and determination of appropriate ways to incorporate findings in the policies, training plans and technical assistance requests of the initial 15 companies (December – January 2000)

Annexes

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- 4 Sample Letter of Introduction**
- 5 Sample Questionnaire**
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Annex 1

Persons Contacted

(Private Company Participants listed in Addendum, Volume III)

Persons Contacted

**Study of Egyptian Women in the Agriculture Food Processing Industry
USAID – funded Project No 263-0264**

- 1 Mr Tarek A Shata, Export Development Division, USAID, Cairo, Zahraa El Maadi, Cairo, Egypt, (Tel 516-5505, Ext 2084, Fax 516-4652, mobile 010-1444185)
- 2 Ms Nihad Hassan Rageh, Export Development Division, USAID, Cairo (Tel 516-5505, Ext 2082, Fax 516-4652)
- 3 Dr Yomna El Sheridy, President, Business Women of Egypt 21, 18 Hayaet El Tadrees str , Dokki, Cairo, Egypt, Tel (02) 361-8546/ Fax 02-336-0453/337-9042, Email ccbceyom@internetegypt.com
- 4 Ms Dalia Bayoumi, Executive Associate, USAID's Growth through Globalization Monitoring and Evaluation Unit, World Trade Centre Hilton Residence, Suite 193
- 5 Mr William Fisher, Chief of Party, Price Waterhouse Coopers, Monitoring and Evaluation Unit, Growth Through Globalization Project, U S Agency for International Development, World Trade Center, Hilton Residence, Suite 193, 1191 Corniche El Nile, Cairo, Egypt (Telephone 202-580-2193, Fax 202-580-2197, Email wfisher206@aol.com)
- 6 Ms Dianne Sutherland, Agricultural Technology Utilization & Transfer Project (ATUT/USAID Project #263-0240), RONCO Consulting Corporation, Tel 20-2-569-3234/5/6/7, Fax 202-569-3238, Email ronco@internetegypt.com)
- 7 Ms Aziza M Helmy, Senior Program Specialist, Strategy Coordination & Support Directorate, Gender and Development Advisor, USAID, Mansour Bldg , Zahraa El Maadi, Cairo, Egypt, Tel 202-516-5505, Ext 3972, Fax 202-521-8501, Email ahelmy@usaid.gov)
- 8 Ms Mona Mortagy, Executive Director, Business Women of Egypt 21, 18, Hayaet El Tadrees St , Dokki – Cairo, Tel 202-361-8545 – 361-8546, Fax 202-336-0453
- 9 Ms Sawsan El-Messiri PhD, Consultant, Gender & Development Specialist, 52, Musadak St , Dokki, Cairo, Egypt, Tel 3358441 – 3603347, Fax 3600574, Email smessiri@soficom.com.eg

Annex 2
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- 3 "Women in Egypt," Unofficial USAID paper
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- 5 "GTG Link", Vol 2, No 2, published by the GTG Monitoring and Evaluation Unit in association with the U S Agency for International Development, June1999
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Annex 3

Companies to Be Contacted

**Confidential
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Annex 4
Sample Letter of Introduction

August 24, 1999

Sample Letter

Subject Agriculture-Led Export Businesses (ALEB) Gender Study

Dear XXXXXX

Let me take this opportunity to thank you for your support and assistance to the ALEB team as it pursues its analysis of your company's operations. Another component of our analysis concerns the specific role of women in your company and, once again, I must ask for your assistance in facilitating our collection of data in this area. We will be seeking the same data from 14 other Egyptian food-processing companies, and all of the company-specific information that we collect will be strictly confidential.

In the United States, women often play an active role in company management, as well as in clerical, administrative and processing operations. We have found, in fact, that women are very good employees in certain managerial and professional categories, such as accounting, marketing and quality control. We have also learned that women sometimes have problems in the workforce, which are different from those of men. Knowledge of those problems and the active pursuit of solutions to them can have a beneficial effect on a company's overall productivity and profitability. In some industries in Egypt, such as agribusiness and tourism, middle management and certain technical skill shortages are widely seen as the critical constraints to revenue and job growth. It is for this reason that we would like to include in our analyses an assessment of the issues of the women in your company. With these data the ALEB team will be in a better position to work with you on your company's strategic policy plans, technical assistance and training requirements.

I am attaching a sample questionnaire for your information. It would be of great assistance to us if you would identify a contact person with whom we can work to complete this questionnaire, and set up interviews with the women in your company. We would like to talk to women in professional and managerial positions, as well as those who work on a wage basis in your processing factories.

Ms. Renee Yates, ALEB gender consultant, Dr. Manal Karim, Marketing Associate and Ms. Amal Nawar, gender research assistant, will be in contact with you to schedule these meetings, if this is agreeable to you. Again, thank you for your continued support, and we look forward to working with the women in your company.

Best Regards,

Douglas Anderson
ALEB, Task 3 Team Leader

Annex 5
Sample Questionnaire

Agriculture-Led Businesses (ALEB)

Gender Questionnaire

Date			
Company name			
Address			
Contact Numbers			
Telephone			
Mobile/Cell			
Fax			
e-mail			
Is the company member in	Yes	No	
Business Associations			
Legal Status of Company			
No of Employees			
Interviewer(s)			
Interviewee(s)	Name	Title	Gender
1 Products manufactured			
Item #	Item	Company Products (check)	
1	Frozen vegetables and Fruits		
2	Dehydrated Fruits and Vegetables		
3	Fruits and Vegetables Juices and Concentrates		
4	Jams and Preserves		
5	Dairy Products		
6	Processed Meat/Fish Products		
7	Biscuits,		
8	Bagged, Canned and Glass (value added) packed vegetables, pickled, etc		
9	Dry blends, soup mixes, bouillon, dry sauce mixes and baby food		

2 Company Facilities			
		Yes	No
1	Day care for children		
2	Health clinic		
3	Labor Laws Posted		
4	Environmental hazards		
4 Educational level of management/administration			
		No males	No females
1	No formal education		
2	Primary education		
3	Preparatory education		
4	Secondary education		
5	Technical education		
6	Institute		
7	University degree		
8	Other		
4 Educational level of laborers			
		No males	No females
1	No formal education		
2	Primary education		
3	Preparatory education		
4	Secondary education		
5	Technical education		
6	Institute		
7	University degree		
8	Other		
5 Age of management/ employees			
		No males	No females
1	Under 20		
2	20 - 35		
3	36 - 60		

6 Age of laborers			
		No males	No females
1	Under 20		
2	20 - 35		
3	36 - 60		
7 Marital Status of labourers			
		No males	No females
1	Single		
2	Married		
3	Divorced		
4	Widow		
8 Marital Status of management			
		No males	No females
1	Single		
2	Married		
3	Divorced		
4	Widow		
9 Employment			
		No males	No females
1	Full - time employee		
2	Part - time employee		
3	Temporary/seasonal		
10 Terms of Payment			
		No males	No females
1	Salary		
2	Wage		
11 Rate of Payment			
		No males	No females
1	Rate of Salary		
2	Rate of Wage		

12 Occupational areas			
		Male	Female
1	Clerical/Secretarial		
2	Administrative		
3	Personnel/Human Resources		
4	Marketing/Sales		
5	Finance/accounting		
6	Legal Affairs		
7	Management		
8	Laborers		
9	Maintenance & Engineering		
10	Other		
13 Transportation			
		Yes	No
1	Company bus		
2	Public Transportation		
14 Working Hours			
		Yes	No
1	Morning shift		
2	Night shift		
15 Training			
		Yes	No
1	Foreign languages		
2	Computer		
3	Technical		
4	Marketing		
5	Other		
16 Location of Training			
		On-the job	Off-site
			Overseas
1	Foreign languages		
2	Computer		
3	Technical		
4	Marketing		
5	Other		

17 Number of employees receiving training			
		Male	Female
1	Foreign languages		
2	Computer		
3	Technical		
4	Marketing		
5	Other		
18 Period of Employment			
		Male	Female
1	Less than 6 months		
2	6 months - 1 year		
3	1 - 6 years		
4	6 - 10 years		
5	Over 10 years		

Annex 6

Company Questionnaires (five)

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Annex 7
Company Interviews (five)

COMPANY A
August 29, 1999

There are a total of approximately 100 employees at this company, including management and factory workers. Twenty-five are male and 60-75 employees are females. Women do approximately ninety percent of the company's work.

We interviewed two male general managers, the female production manager, her female assistant, and five female laborers from the factory floor. The female production manager oversaw the work of some 60-75 female laborers who were responsible for sorting okra and other vegetables and feeding them into the cleaning machines and freezers. The production manager is 35 years old, unmarried, but engaged. She has a university education. There is a female in the human resources department of the company who does secretarial work. She was promoted from a laborer on the factory floor after having gotten additional education.

The female production manager said that the minimum age for female laborers is 15 and the maximum age is 25. The female assistant production manager is 24 years old. The laborers range in age from 18 to 20 years old. All of the laborers are single, except 3 or 4 who are married. She prefers not to hire women over 25 years old because of her concern that the women will have too many family issues after marriage. Recruitment is done by word-of-mouth and advertisement on the company's outside gate. Candidates for labor positions are interviewed and selected by the male human resource manager. There is no clear system in place that allows the upward mobility of women, or their direct participation in management decision-making.

She mentioned that day care would be a problem for them and that there are currently no facilities available at the company, or plans to install them. (Day care facilities are not a requirement under the Egyptian labor laws for companies that have fewer than 100 female employees.) There is no health facility on the premises but a hospital is 10 minutes away if someone is injured.

All of the female employees work full-time, they are salaried and have benefits. There are two shifts: 8:00am – 3:00pm and 3:00pm – 10:00pm. There is overtime and bonus pay for work after 4:30pm, and many of the women prefer to work late to earn overtime pay. The company provides transportation to and from work. There are three company buses that pick the female laborers from various convenient locations in the city. About 5% of the laborers are from villages, the rest are from Alexandria.

Most of the laborers have no formal education. The new laborers are trained on-the-job for one week to three months in how to sort and clean okra. One man is responsible for the operation of each machine, although the women can operate the machine in his absence. Other types of training are not available through the company. We were told that there was no need for literacy training, although the comment was made that some of the girls needed to be more "cultured," and that some training in "hygiene" may be helpful. The general consensus was that there is little need, and no time for training. The production manager indicated that she would be interested in participating in a business association of women if there was time to do so.

The female production manager reports issues to the general manager. She does not attend or participate directly in company management meetings. (During our closed meeting with her she confided her desire to have a day care center on the premises, as well as a change in the working hours by creating another shift. She indicated that she had not yet brought these concerns to the attention of management because she had to

choose her priorities carefully. When she attended a portion of the ALEB SWOT session concerning the company's strengths and weaknesses, she said nothing.)

The women reported that the company is run in "a very good way" and that there are no problems. The women indicated that they appreciated having a female supervisor because they felt that she could understand their need better than men. The production manager said that she had to spend a great deal of time dealing with personal problems that the girls had. She expressed the desire to have a psychologist at the company to handle some of these personal issues, so that she did not have to take time away from productive activity.

COMPANY B
September 1, 1999

This company is four years old. There are a total of 1200 employees – 13 women at headquarters, 150 men at headquarters, 420 men at the factory, 12 men at the warehouses, and male drivers, carriers and distributors. There are no women working at the factory. The women are secretaries and one is an officer who works on quality control and industry regulation issues. Seven of the women are university graduates and six have secondary-level education. All of the women are between 20 – 30 years old. Six women are married and seven are single.

Concerning the educational level of men, more than 45 of the management staff have university degrees. The other male employees generally have secondary level education. The two general managers are over 55 and the 250 male managers are between the ages of 36 and 60 years. Of the male laborers, 900 are between the ages of 20 and 35, and 25 male laborers are under 20. Approximately 60% of the men are married.

All 1200 male and female employees work full-time. There are some 150 seasonal workers in the summer only. The salaries and wages vary based on the type and quality of work performed. Males in management and sales (salary and commissions) earned the post. Some sales representatives made as much as LE 3,000/ month. Uneducated laborers earned between EL 250 500/ month.

There is a car for managers and a company bus to the factory (which is 1½ hours outside of Cairo). The women working at headquarters are responsible for their own transportation to and from work. The factory has three, eight hour shifts: 8am – 4pm, 4pm – 10pm and 10pm- 6am. There is a restaurant at the factory, a contract with an Egyptian medical company for employees, and the labor laws are posted at the factory. The company offers 15 days annual leave, 7 days in the first 6 months, 21 days after the 1st year to the 10th year, 30 days after 10th year. The company is four years old, and most employees have been there 2 – 3 years. In the case of the women, 2 have been employed 4 years, 2 for six months, and the others about 2 – 3 years.

The company belongs to two associations, Sadat City Investors, and Chamber of Commerce for Food Industries. The company offers training to its employees, both at the company and off-site. Outside trainers from the university and elsewhere are brought in to provide training for 2-4 hours daily. The subject matter has included computer training, sales, marketing, finance/accounting, and English language. Six of the women have received training and one woman has participated in an overseas North American business tour.

During an informal interview with a male factory manager and senior female officer the subject of women's roles in improving the company's marketing prospects and the value of using women in more aspects of the company's work, was discussed. Although the discussion was wide-ranging, an attempt was made to illustrate through economic examples the idea that the strategic integration of women in management decision-making may improve their company's marketing performance and ability to expand its operations. The idea of part-time work was mentioned, as well as the observation that several of the assembly line tasks could be carried out by women, as they do not involve lifting or exposure to hazardous substances, or machinery. Also, it was noted that the buses transporting men from Cairo every day leave at a reasonable hour (such as 6am),

and return every evening (One reason women are not given jobs at the factory is because the location is viewed as too remote for women)

While the ideas were received politely, it was pointed out that the way things are done now in Egypt is best for the family Egyptians want to avoid the high divorce rates, crime and family problems that exist in the United States Most of these social problems were attributed to the freedom and flexibility enjoyed by American women The male mentioned how married women “suffer” when they work outside the home and are also responsible for taking care of the home and children The female agreed, accepting the reasoning that this is “just the way things are done in Egypt ”

Company C
August 26, 1999

There are approximately 300 women and 200 men at this company. Several interviews are summarized here. We interviewed the male owner and General Manager (courtesy visit), the male General Manager of one of the five companies in the group, a male manager of the computer department, and the female office manager. The male managers gave us a tour of the headquarters and one factory and answered most of the questions on behalf of the female employees.

The office manager has been on her present job for one year and was previously an accountant for three years. Her hours are 8:00 am-4:00 PM which she finds convenient. She is 23 years old, not married but engaged. Her training has been informal and on-the-job. Others tell her how to do things and she took an English course on her own. There are no day care facilities on the premises and a health clinic is "five minutes" away.

We did not speak directly to the female laborers who were sorting okra, feeding the cleaning machines and packaging various fruit juices and vegetables. We were told that there is a company bus that picks up laborers from a central point and that the laborers were not interested in more training. There is a cafeteria on the premises, but not near the factory. The top age of the female laborers is 26 years. The average length of stay is 4 - 5 years, there are health and other benefits for the employees and no worker is less than 15 years old.

Company D
August 30, 1999

This company employs approximately 250 women and 100 men. The family company dehydrates onions, and other seasonal vegetables. In addition to the male General Manager, we interviewed the female factory supervisor of the female laborers responsible for sorting and packing the dried vegetables. Also, we spoke to three female secretaries, and six female laborers (in the presence of their female supervisor).

There are four shifts. Three shifts are for the drying process from 7am – 3 PM, 3 PM – 11 PM and 11 PM – 7 am. The shift for sorting, where most of the women work, is 8 am – 6 PM. The company offers convenient private bus transportation for employees from three pick-up points at 7:30 am. The women reported that they do not have to walk a long way to get to the bus. There are no married women laborers and subsequently no day care facilities. There is a health clinic on premises and we were told that a doctor comes to treat injured persons.

The minimum age for both male and female employees is 12, and the maximum age of the female laborers is 20. We were told that “young girls are better with sorting,” and that girls from villages marry early and leave the company on their own accord. The average length of employment of the female laborers is three years. All of the women worked full-time and were salaried. It was not clear whether they have benefits. It was reported that there are no holidays, no vacations, no leave and that Friday is the only day off. There is one one-hour break per shift.

The company employs approximately 35-50 seasonal laborers, who peel onions or other vegetables. These workers were the youngest employees, appearing to be much younger than 16 years. We were told that the youngest employees would return to school in September and would be replaced by older workers. Most of these young people were female. Their supervisor was male.

The female factory supervisor reported that she is involved in recruiting female laborers and would like to be included in management meetings. There is no opportunity for mobility within the factory, no promotions. One can earn additional pay for overtime and double pay for working holidays.

COMPANY E
August 31, 1999

This company employs approximately 130 men and 90 women on a permanent basis. There are some 150 seasonal laborers who are 80% female and responsible for peeling onions. Most of the men are university-level educated. About 80% of the women finished primary school. About 20 % completed secondary school, and only four are reported to be illiterate. The men range in age from 19-30 and 60% are married. The women's ages range from 18-25 and only two are married. Some of the girls are 16 years old. Most of the laborers are from the surrounding villages.

There are two shifts – men work 7pm – 7am with a 1 ½ hour break and women 7 am – 6 PM with a 1 ½ hour break. There is no cafeteria on the premises and men and women eat separately. Employees generally work near the factory and walk or take public transportation to work. There are no company buses. On-the-job training is provided for approximately one week. Women generally remain at the company for 5 – 6 years, and the men stay for 15 years or more. There is no other training provided and no need for day care facilities, since there are so few married women. We were told that the company has a contract with a local clinic and that the company pays for medicine and other expenses related to injuries at work.

Penalties are imposed (such as reduced salary or suspension) for poor performance, and bonuses are given at the end of the season. Wages and salary are based on production and there is additional pay for overtime and holidays.

The women have begun an organization of approximately 15, who collect money each month for emergencies of its members. The money is used for sickness, marriages, deaths, etc.

The male General Manager appears to care about the interests of his female employees.