



**The Information Base, Knowledge Creation and
Knowledge Dissemination in Egypt**

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Introduction

There is a natural asymmetry of information between those who govern and those whom they are supposed to serve, much akin to the asymmetry of information that exists between company managers and shareholders. ...Just as such asymmetries give managers the discretion to pursue policies that are more in their own interests than in the interests of shareholders, so they allow government officials the discretion to pursue policies that are more in their interests than in the interests of the citizenry. Improvements in information and the rules governing its dissemination can reduce the scope for these abuses in both markets and in political processes. (Joseph Stiglitz, 2002)¹.

We have come to understand development as more than physical capital accumulation, economic growth and technological know-how (D. North). Stiglitz above quotation belongs to this new understanding of the realities of development. Furthermore, since the 1990s, development has come to mean choice, accountability and societal empowerment (A. Sen). The latter has been understood to entail improving human and social capital of most citizens and increasing the quantity and quality of information accessible to all in order to make accountability a reality. Thanks to the efforts of the UN with its various programs (e.g. UNDP and UNESCO), to the World Bank and the OECD, we now have goals and benchmarks to achieve societal empowerment via education, access to information and a knowledge society (examples of such documents which have been influencing the international debate are *The Right to Tell*, *Arab Human Development Reports* and *Education for All*).

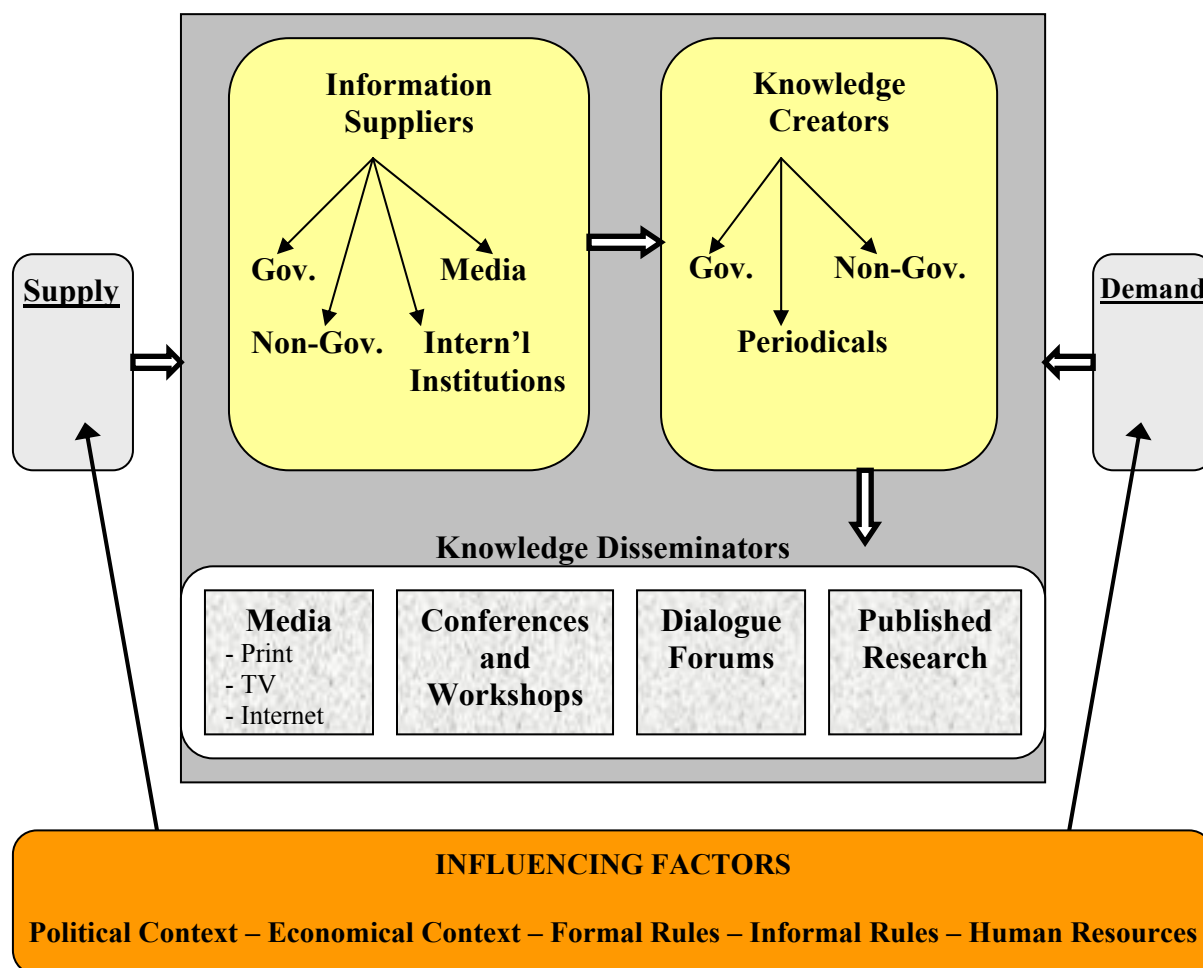
But that is easier said than done. In fact, to improve choice, accountability and societal empowerment, one needs to take a look at the supply and demand of information as well as at the knowledge networks in the Arab context. It then becomes clear that there are formal and informal rules that govern the sharing of information, as well as its quality. These rules are often influenced by political and cultural contexts. The same applies to systems of knowledge creation and knowledge dissemination.

The systems of information provision and knowledge creation in the Arab region are influenced – albeit in opposed ways - by four macro factors. One is the international processes known as globalization which entail the pressure (disproportionate at times) to free the movement of capital, goods, ideas and labour. This is more often than not a factor conducive to more and better information and to knowledge creation (via knowledge sharing and knowledge transfer schemes). The second macro factor which may be also conducive is the actual economic reform processes underway in the Arab states. These reforms entail- at

¹ Joseph Stiglitz “Transparency in Government” 2002 In: [The Right to Tell: The Role of Mass Media in Economic Development](#). WBI publication, p. 27-44 (27-28).

least in theory – economic liberalization, transparency and accountability. But as this process of economic reform is slow, if not half-hearted, the conducive effect it may have on information and knowledge is equally slow and weak. The third macro factor, which oft dilutes the positive effects of the last two factors, is the political nature of Arab states. These are state dominated and non transparent systems in which processes of accountability are still nascent. Thus the Stiglitz effect referred to the above quotation is well present. The last factor, namely illiteracy and bad quality education, certainly adds fuel to the fire.

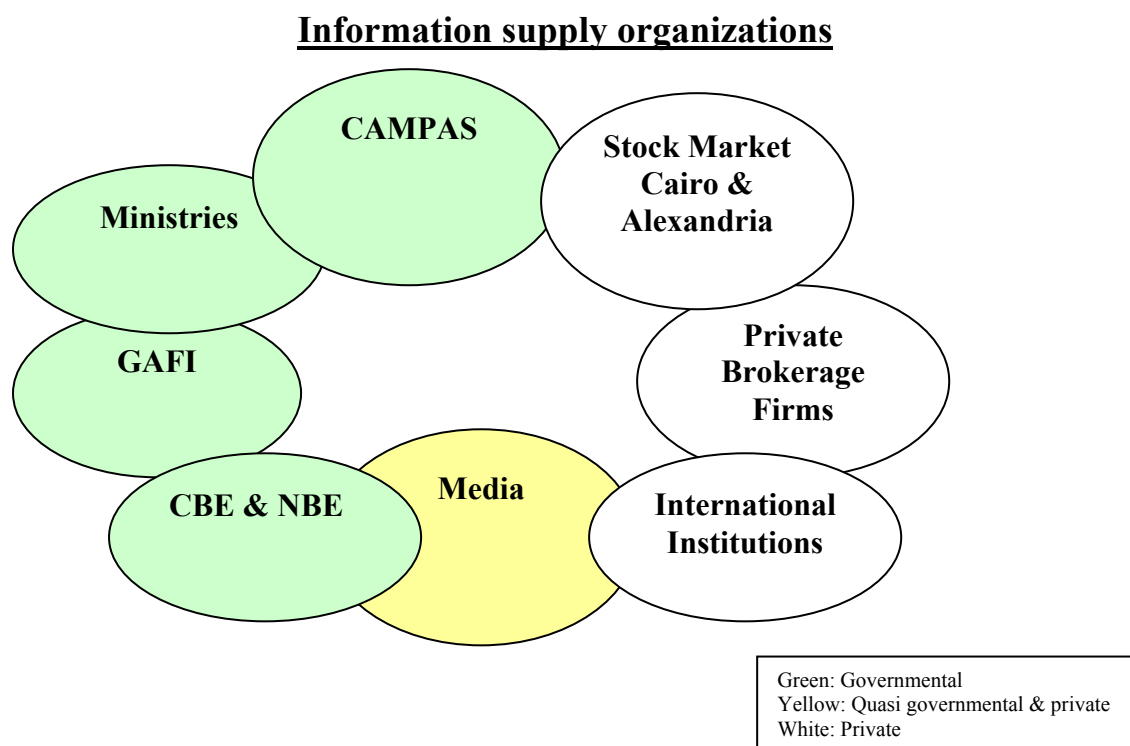
In this paper, we investigate the systems of information supply, knowledge creation and dissemination in a rudimentary manner. More research on these issues is certainly needed in the months to come. The following diagram summerizes our approach. The research has been largely done with the help of interviews with numerous individuals working in the field either as producers or consumers of both information and knowledge. The paper summerizes several positive developments taking place as well as identifies a number of weaknesses which require action.



1. THE SUPPLY OF INFORMATION IN EGYPT

J. Stiglitz correctly points out that information is power and is a factor in the manipulation of discourse about economic reform. Arguing that “variables exist that could be monitored in principle, but monitoring is costly and the scope for attention is limited” and pointing out that government “choose(s) to monitor variables that reflect its agenda or the agenda of the special interest that it might be serving, and not to monitor variables that are adversely affected by that agenda,” Stiglitz highlights one of the pitfalls of government domination of the supply of information².

In Egypt, there is a governmental dominance of the supply of information. However, the number of data and economic information generating bodies in Egypt is expanding and the quality of their service is improving. The following is a concise description of the major suppliers.



² Joseph Stiglitz “Transparency in Government” 2002 In: The Right to Tell: The Role of Mass Media in Economic Development. WBI publication, p. 27-44 (29).

1.1. Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS):

CAPMAS is considered the official source of data in the country. It was established according to Presidential Decree No. 2915 for 1964 and since then it has been the official source of collecting and providing data in the country. It has always been headed by a former army major general. It provides two types of data: 1) Field Data and 2) Data collected from other governmental agencies.

1.1.1 Field data:

Such kind of data is collected by CAPMAS and can be classified into two types: a) data produced on the basis of population census and b) data produced on the basis of sample surveys. The census data is conducted by CAPMAS every ten years. Until now, twelve censuses have been conducted (1882, 1897, 1907, 1917, 1927, 1937, 1947, 1960, 1966, 1976, 1986, and 1996). Data from census provide the most comprehensive information on Egyptian citizens. It is available on the national and sub national levels (rural and urban and at the governorates level). On the other hand, CAPMAS undertakes two types of sample surveys, namely, Household sample survey which has been carried out seven times starting 1958 and the latest was in 1999/2000. A recent household survey is being conducted in 2004. This survey focuses on expenditure and income has been included recently. The other type of survey is the labor force survey which is conducted on annual basis and generates data on employment classified by age, gender, marital status, educational attainment, number of hours worked, etc. Moreover it provides data on the structure and distribution of labor force and unemployment.

1.1.2 Data collected from governmental agencies:

CAPMAS collects data from several governmental agencies including the Ministry of Planning, Customs Units, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Tourism, Ministry of Information and Communications, Ministry of Health and Population, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Industry and Technological Development, Ministry of Foreign Trade, Ministry of Transportation, Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Internal Trade and Supply. CAPMAS consolidates the data obtained from such governmental agencies and publish them in bulletins (monthly, quarterly and yearly) and in special publications as the Annual Statistical Yearbook. Its publications can be broadly classified into the following:

- The Annual Statistical Yearbook
- Bulletins of Population

- Bulletins of Labor
- Labor Studies
- Bulletins of Industry
- Bulletins of Agriculture, Fish and Animal
- Economic and Financial Bulletins
- Economic and Financial Studies
- Bulletins of Transportation and Communication
- Studies on transportation and communications
- Bulletins of Internal trade
- Bulletins of Foreign Trade
- Bulletins of Tourism and Hotels
- Bulletins of Education
- Bulletins of Health

CAPMAS has improved to a large extent in making data available. In the early 1990s most of such bulletins and data were difficult to access where there was availability for general public to only visit CAPMAS library and take notes of data they need. The photocopying facilities were too poor and in many cases it was not allowed. Such attitude changed in mid 1990s where a window for selling almost all the publications of CAPMAS on market rates was opened and data dissemination increased substantially. Moreover, CAPMAS started to provide new kind of services concerning data that are demand driven. Hence from its dataset it can prepare customized data in digital and paper format.

CAPMAS undertook another role of provision of licenses for any researcher (public or private) if they wish to undertake any field survey. This has been the case since its inception and is not in line with the free market ruling and democracy as any questionnaire that is submitted to CAPMAS can be completely refused or questions from it eliminated without mentioning the reasons. In one year Egypt was not considered for the Global Competitiveness Report as CAPMAS authorities refused to give license for the survey undertaker, where in other years it has approved giving such license, sometimes with eliminating questions that are not necessarily related to security.

CAPMAS follows the Ministry of Planning in theory, but in practice it is considered a completely independent body.

1.2. Central Bank (CBE) and National Bank of Egypt (NBE)

The CBE publishes several bulletins (on monthly, quarterly and yearly basis) that cover a wide range of economic indicators with special emphasis on monetary and fiscal indicators. Most of its statistics are available on its website: www.cbe.org.eg

In many cases data published by the CBE do not coincide with data published by CAPMAS. This is mainly due either to the usage of different methodologies or different sources. For example the foreign trade data differ significantly as CAPMAS depends on customs whereas CBE depends on banks' data.

The NBE is one of the large four public banks. It has a large research department and produces like the CBE data related to financial, monetary, and some other economic indicators.

1.3. General Authority for Investment and Free Zones (GAFI)

GAFI is responsible for publishing data related to investment with its different classifications. However, in reality CAPMAS has not been successful in making such data available. Its website is www.gafiinet.net

1.4. The Agency of the Stock Market of Cairo and Alexandria

The Agency of the Stock Market of Cairo and Alexandria issues a monthly bulletin on the performance of the stock market and related data. The data is considered to be of high quality and provides important information on the performance of firms, number of mergers and acquisitions in the Egyptian market

1.5. Ministries

Ministry of Planning

Ministry of Planning is the main source of data for CAPMAS concerning several economic variables as GDP and investment. It publishes by itself several bulletins, however its main publication is the Five Year Plan and Annual Plan. Most of the statistics it publishes are available on its website: www.mop.org.eg

Ministry of Foreign Trade

The Ministry of Foreign Trade has been successful in disseminating several bulletins and publications related to the economic sphere. Besides publishing Quarterly Economic Digest which contains an overview of the performance of the economy and the major economic indicators, it publishes the different regional trade agreements that Egypt has been a member of and several documents related to the World Trade Organization. Moreover, it publishes an annual report on the performance of the Stock Market and quarterly Foreign Trade Data bulletin. Most of the data it publishes is obtained from CAPMAS, however in many cases is supplemented by other sources to provide comprehensive data sets. The data published can be accessed at www.moft.org.eg

2. GENERAL PERCEPTIONS OF GOVERNMENT SUPPLIERS OF INFORMATION³

- The availability of data improved extensively over the last decade. In many cases this has been a demand by domestic society (researchers, private sector) as well as a conditionality of providing more transparency by external donors (international organizations as well as bilateral donors).
- Data has in general improved in quantity, extent of details and accessibility than in the early 1990s. Monthly economic digest of the stock market authority is good and useful. Data from the ministry of trade is most useful and is accessible in hard copy and electronic form on the web⁴.
- The methodologies used in collecting data are still in many cases not updated and lacks full transparent. Hence analysis depending on data must take such issue in consideration, and in many cases such methodologies are politicized to reveal certain figures.
- Data from the Central Bank comes out quarterly and monthly in bulletin form, which includes raw data as well as qualitative description. Some journalists voiced their concern that by the time they obtain this information it is outdated especially that they perceived the information as less available in hard copy and more on the web, which they seemingly visit less frequently than expected in the age of ICT.
- When data are issued, they have a long lag. For example, a publication on industrial activity in 2001 will stop the data time series at 1998.

³ All information on general perceptions are based on a number of 20 structured interviews with academicians, ministry advisors, and journalists who primarily cover economic affairs from al-Ahram Weekly, al-Ahram al-Iqtisadi, al-Alam al-Yom, al-Ahram Daily, al-Ahali, al-Sharq al-Awsat, al-Akhbar and Akher Sa'a.

⁴ According to a former advisor to one of the economic Ministries the wide distribution was a conscious policy of the Minister. However, the Ministry was paying heavily for the mostly free distribution with the consequence that the Ministry was considering to step down free distribution or to fix a charge on its publications.

- Some interviewees complained that the data they obtain is not disaggregated enough to help them create a picture of the micro level or the provincial level. They said that they complement this type of non-disaggregated data by other sources such as the Egyptian Human Development Report or the Census.
- Data is not standardized; for example, information suppliers often use different currencies (US\$ and Egyptian Pounds and different time periods). Many of the CAPMAS datasets are not in line with international classifications. Moreover, there is a lag in production of data which affects analysis and decision making; in many cases data for many economic variables will stop at least two years behind the current year.

New Trends to Improve Information Supply

It was reported in the al-Ahram al-Iqtisadi that the Egyptian government intends to reform its supply of information by July 2005 in order to reduce contradictions and to bring Egyptian information collection and reporting closer to international standards. This reform would entail:

Making the collection of information on exports and imports the sole mandate of the CAPMAS organization, instead of the current situation in which three state organizations collect such information, namely CAPMAS, Customs Authority and the Central Bank of Egypt.

Improving the indicators of wholesale and retail trade as well as the basket of items upon which the inflation rate is computed.

Source: al-Ahram al-Iqtisadi, November 1st, 2004, p. 9.

3. A NEW TREND IN THE SUPPLY OF INFORMATION: PRIVATE BROKERAGE FIRMS

Government dominance of information is experiencing some changes. Private firms such as EFG-Hermes, a leading investment banking institution, provide regular reports on the performance of sectors and data on the market shares of the different firms registered in the Egyptian Stock Market. The data of such institutions is often highly valuable as there is no substitute for it. A number of researchers and the business community depend heavily on such data.

4. CREATORS OF KNOWLEDGE

Information alone is not useful for the policy process. It has to be analyzed, trends have to be discerned, options for action with trade offs have to be identified and various approaches to problems analysed and assessed. These latter activities belong to the realm of knowledge creation, i.e. they go beyond information collection. As opposed to information, knowledge

creation and dissemination has a multiplicity of sources in Egypt, albeit not all of good quality.

4.1. Governmental Creators of Knowledge

4.1.1 Magalis Kawmia Mothkasisa (Specialized National Councils)

The specialized national councils produce a number of reports on several issues of concern to the Egyptian society. The heads of the specialized national councils are appointed by the President. Such councils act more or less like the Shura Council (second chamber of Parliament) in terms of advising the government. In the last period, their role has been minimized, especially after the activation of the role of the Shura Council and the appearance of several private think tanks. It can be classified as a quasi governmental body. Though they house some good veteran researchers, their resources are limited and the incentive structure of salaries and non financial rewards is very poor. Most importantly, these councils are weakly connected to the global or regional networks of knowledge.

4.1.2. Information and Decision Support Center (IDSC)

The IDSC is a quasi governmental body that has been established with the mandate of helping the government policy makers and especially the cabinet to undertake decisions in the field of socioeconomic development. It has been established in the 1980s and has varied over time in the type of studies and information it provides. Its main role is analyzing carefully the data and producing indicators and forecasts. It provides studies and reports on daily, monthly, quarterly and annual basis. Moreover, it undertakes special studies. It depends mainly on CAPMAS data but also on other data sets that it purchases from abroad. Its website is www.idsc.gov.eg

4.1.3. Parliament and Shura Council

Parliament's Houser of Representatives undertakes a number of studies that are circulated in-house only and made available for the members of different committees either to help them to understand a specific issue or to monitor the performance of the government. The Shura Council, on the other hand, undertakes several studies that are made available for the public, though not widely circulated. The different committees in the Shura Council depend on the Shura Council staff to produce such reports that tackle different economic issues. In

many cases, such reports are really informative as they gather information and data and put them in a comprehensive format that is easy for the reader to understand.

4.2. Non-Governmental Creators of Knowledge

4.2.1. Egyptian Center for Economic Studies (ECES)

ECES is a non profit organization that has been established in 1992. It is the only pure economic private think tank in Egypt. It is financed by the private sector as well as the USAID. It produces several policy oriented studies that are subcontracted to Egyptians and non Egyptians to tackle several economic issues. Moreover, it undertakes other activities including the publication of the business barometer which is a survey conducted for 210 industrial, construction and tourism firms on biannual basis to investigate the status of the market and provide different indicators. It has other publications and is the most well know think tank in Egypt on the international arena. Most of its publications are available on its website www.eces.org.eg

4.2.2. Center for Economic and Financial Research and Studies (CEFRS)

CEFRS is a quasi governmental research center that is hosted by the Faculty of Economics, and Political Science, Cairo University and has been established in 1984. It follows the same lines of ECES in terms of publications and events. It undertakes other activities related to capacity building in the field of training and acts as a policy advocacy center. It is self financed and depends on fund raising for its activities. Its website is www.cefrs.eun.eg

4.2.3. The Economic Research Forum for Arab Countries, Iran and Turkey (ERF)

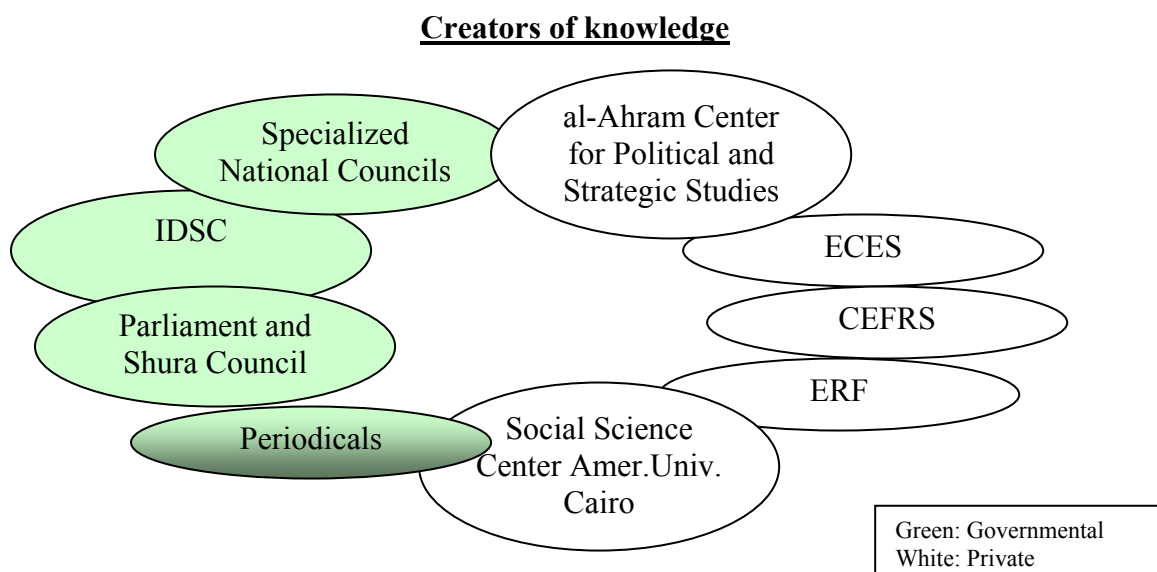
The ERF is more of a network of Arab researchers that has been established in 1994. It is financed by a number of UN organizations including the World Bank, UNDP, and International Development Center of Canada. It publishes a huge amount of research on policy oriented economic matters in the form of working papers and books. Moreover, it publishes the economic trends report on annual basis which provides an overview of the economic conditions in the MNEA region. It has large data sets which makes it available for researchers. Its website is www.erf.org.eg

4.2.4. Social Research Center, American University in Cairo

A research center housed and financed by the American University in Cairo. SRC conducts research on a wide variety of socio-economic issues related to Egyptian development and produces its results in English. This fact reduces its readership to those comfortable with the English language.

4.2.5. Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies

It is affiliated to al-Ahram Organization (newspaper and publishing house) and undertakes several economic, political and strategic studies. It is worth mentioning that the provision of such data and information has experienced an unprecedented growth over the last decade and such centers and institutions helped to bridge the gap between policy makers and researchers, which in turn helped in providing more transparency and exchange of views among the Egyptian society.



5. GENERAL PERCEPTIONS OF CREATORS OF KNOWLEDGE⁵

- There is an evident regional gap in the distribution of think tanks and research centers that provide knowledge. The main reason is that policy makers and the elite reside in Greater Cairo, where all think tanks and the majority of research centers are located. This

⁵ All information on general perceptions are based on a number of 20 structured interviews with academicians, ministry advisors, and journalists who primarily cover economic affairs from al-Ahram Weekly, al-Ahram al-Iqtisadi, al-Alam al-Yom, al-Ahram Daily, al-Ahali, al-Sharq al-Awsat, al-Akhbar and Akher Sa'a.

is not to say that there exists no regional research centers. On the contrary, there are a number of research centers that are affiliated to regional universities such as the Future Studies Center affiliated to University of Assuit. The Future Studies Center publishes a biannual periodical “Future Studies” with refereed political, economic, and political economic articles- albeit the referee process is too local and weak. The same applies to centers affiliated to major regional universities such as the University of Alexandria. However, the reach of the publications of such centers is highly limited. Hence, it is safe to argue that there is a high regional concentration in the centers of knowledge, where most of such centers are located in the capital. As a result, most of the prominent researchers reside in the capital and very few reside in regional universities, with the exception, but not in the economics field, of the two Universities of Alexandria and Assuit.

- A number of think tanks allow free access to their publications either by sending them to policy makers and academics inside and outside Egypt free of charge, or by posting them on the internet. This does not apply to all centers and publications; in most cases they lack human and financial resources and the enthusiasm to follow the latest technology in distribution (via website).
- There is a multiplicity of knowledge suppliers that function within a neo-classical frame of reference. It is difficult to argue, however, that the publications of think tanks or research centers are affected by the ideology of their board members, donors, or executive directors. This means that their publications may reflect a wide variety of arguments without jeopardizing scientific rigor. One evident example is inviting Dani Rodrik for an opening speech in the 10th annual conference of one of these supposedly neo-classical think tanks, where Rodrik is a well known sceptical economist. Even the Social Research Center of the AUC cannot be classified as a neo classical center based on its affiliation to an American institution.
- Ideological affiliation is flexible. In some cases, the center may change its ideological orientation over time, as happened with the al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies. There is a dominant perception that the center has moved from Center Left to the Right in the past ten years.
- The presence of predominantly leftist knowledge providers in Egypt is weak. One of few examples of leftist knowledge creation is the 2020 project⁶.

⁶ The project studies and analyzes specific sectors in Egypt (education, tourism, mineral resources and its development, population and labor force, transport, food and agriculture...etc) each examined and evaluated in an individual study, and different scenarios for the future of these sectors is proposed.

Based on the methodological and theoretical ground rules of this project there is a set of five scenarios that reflect the potential options for the political and social actors in Egypt:

These scenarios are:

- ❖ The business as usual scenario that pertains to the perpetuation of actual trends
- ❖ 3 innovative scenarios: Islamic state, Neo capitalism, Neo socialism

- There are no efforts undertaken by research centers and/or think tanks to evaluate or monitor the impact of the publications.

*In an ad hoc sample of 25 research centers and think tanks,
which are regularly featured in the Egyptian periodical al-Siyasa al-Dawliya (International Relations)
since two years, the following tendencies are noticed:*

- The overwhelming majority of think tanks are in Cairo;
- Cairo University has a concentration of research centers relatively to other universities
- Their activities predominantly include workshops, publications and sometimes training and conferences.
- Workshops offer a good forum to meet policy makers in a cosy and non-threatening environment;
- At least 50% in this sample (which is predominantly in Cairo University) have homepages on the web
- Their language is on average accessible for the average non-specialized reader.
- The better financed think tanks and research networks produce material in English, with irregular Arabic translations of executive summaries. This reduces accessibility to those readers who are not proficient in English.

For a list of these research centers and think tanks see annex 1

6. ECONOMIC PERIODICALS AS CREATORS OF KNOWLEDGE

In Egypt, there are a number of economic refereed journals that are domestically circulated. The oldest and most reputable is *L’Egypte Contemptraire* which is issued by the Egyptian Association of Economists and Lawyers. There is also the *Egyptian Review of the Development and Planning* which is issued by the Institute of National Planning. Other economic departments in the different faculties produce periodicals and research studies that are refereed.

On the journalistic level, there is the *Ahram El Iktisady* which follows the lines of the *Economist* in terms of the style it tackles with different economic problems. The *Ahram El Iktisady* is not academic journal but rather a weekly magazine that tackles different economic issues in a digestible format for the layman.

This source of knowledge creation is inflicted with several ills. Refereed periodicals need to enhance the rigor of reviewing methods and criteria. They tend to depend on local reviewers and hence have weak access to networks of global or regional knowledge. Of course weak financial resources are a crucial factor here. Unlike refereed periodicals, non refereed, journalistic periodicals (such as *al-Ahram al-Iktisady*) have established networks of personal contacts to all circles of decision making and to the private sector. These networks often

❖ Social solidarity or the popular scenario; that constitutes a common ground that gathers the support of large segments of Egyptians.

compensate for lack of resources; but it comes at a cost, namely continuously fighting a tug of war between autonomy and embeddedness in the public or private circles of economic decision making. This type of media are centralized structures with few trained journalists in new areas of economics such as the stock market and with few resources dedicated to enhance access to electronic datasets.

When it comes to economic journalism, newspapers that are new to the scene (and often privately funded by big entrepreneurs) have been trying to build a cadre of specialized reporters and journalists in specific economic areas that are new to the field of journalism such as banking and the stock market. However, overall, there is a tendency for economic journalists to filter editorial opinion through the prism of personal relations with the private sector and / or with leaders of governmental circles of economic decision making. In some cases, the level of technical economic analysis is humble either due to lack of training or intentionally done to suit the reader's level of understanding. Besides, Journalists either try to comfort people based on government's instruction or make a big issue out of nothing⁷.

7. SPECIALIZED ECONOMIC MEDIA: SUPPLIER OF INFORMATION, DISSEMINATOR OF KNOWLEDGE

Economically specialized written and audio-visual media are broadcasters of economic news via their news items and partially via interviews. Interviews may also serve the purpose of dissemination knowledge on economic affairs, economic reform and economic policy, especially when the interviewed is providing analysis and lessons learned. But more important than interviews are reportages and analytical articles. Egypt does not have a big number of specialized economic media. One important new comer on the scene is *al-Alam al-Yom*. It is a daily economic newspaper along the lines of the *Financial Times*. It follows economic issues of investment, private sector activities, privatization news and trends, banking news and trends as well as the stock market and currency trends. Financed privately, *al-Alam al-Yom* has better paid journalists and relatively more resources for IT and

⁷ Interviews conducted in the period from 01.11.04 to 18.11.04

research. But in a general environment of weak advertisement and elitist readership, even *al-Alam al-Yom* suffers from limited resources⁸.

Another specialized economic media product are specialized round table TV discussions. Two reasonably popular ones are that led by the chief editor of the economic periodical journal *al-ahram al-iqtisadi* and the other led by a senior member of *al-ahram*-based Center for Political and Strategic Studies. Both have introduced a culture of open discussion about economic issues. However their reliance on quantitative data is still overshadowed by opinionated and polemic discussions.

8. GLOBAL INFORMATION AND KNOWLEDGE SUPPLIERS

International and bilateral donors undertake many studies either based on the demand of the Egyptian government or in-house demand. The studies take in some cases the form of reports which are submitted to the Egyptian government or to the donors themselves and in some cases the studies are made available for the researchers on the web or in hard format. Often, the international donors depend on local consultants and academics as part of the team to conduct such studies.

Some of these studies are influencing the public official discourse on reform, such as the Egyptian National Development Reports which are annually financed by the UNDP and the educational assessment reports of UNESCO and the World Bank. However, the ability of these reports to trickle down to the meso level of organizations of collective action or to the micro level of firms and households is very limited indeed.

Examples of International Information Suppliers

United Nations
World Bank
IMF
World Economic Forum
Foundations, e.g. Heritage, Freedom House, Bertelsmann
Global NGOs, e.g. Transparency International, Reporters Without Frontiers

Examples of International Knowledge Suppliers

United Nations
World Bank
IMF

⁸ Roger Owen 2003 “What Constitutes Business Rationality in Egypt at the End of the Twentieth Century” in: E. Kienle ed. *Politics From Above Politics From Below*. London: Saqi, pp. 157-166 (p. 163)

9. FACTORS INFLUENCING THE SUPPLY AND DEMAND FOR INFORMATION PROVISION AND KNOWLEDGE CREATION AND DISSEMINATION

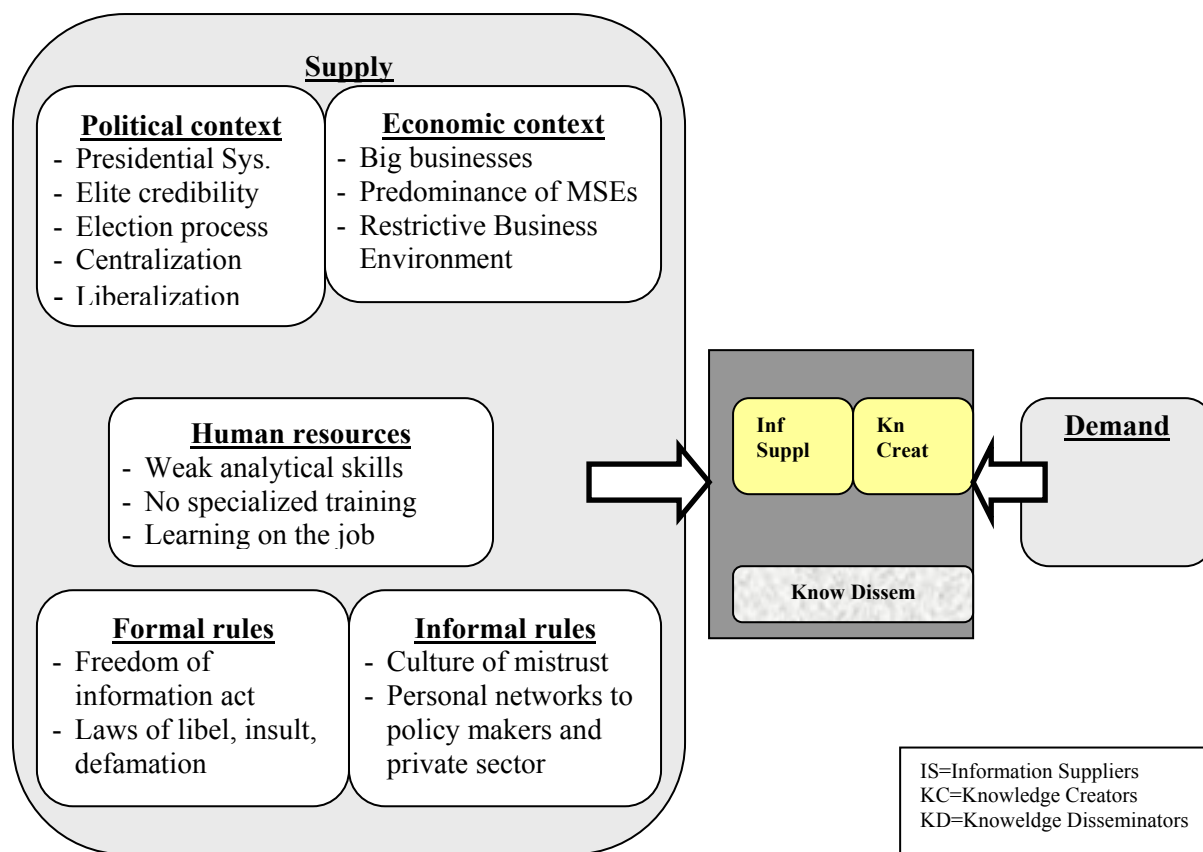
To abstract from many anecdotes about the information flow and knowledge creation systems in Egypt, here are the often perceived factors which may be influencing the demand and supply of information and knowledge.

9.1. Factors Influencing Supply

When one talks of supply, the price of production comes to mind. The price of producing information in Egypt is absorbed in the government budget, being the major and dominant producer of information. This may remain a governmental activity for some time, as information is a non-excludable good, i.e. has the same characteristics of a public good. This may be circumvented by mechanisms that reduce the circulation of information; however, in this case its value especially as a basis for a knowledge society would be dramatically reduced, so would its value for transparency and accountability. Furthermore, if any other non-governmental body or individual researcher is to produce information, e.g. household surveys or opinion polls, then the opportunity cost becomes high. One needs an authorization which may take time and still end up being rejected. If accepted, one needs to find trained personnel to conduct accurate surveys. Mostly these people are trained on the job. Egypt, though, is slowly becoming a market for local consulting firms which conduct surveys for a fee. The quality of these services is still questionable because of the general reluctance of individual citizens, individual firms and households to volunteer information.

The supply of knowledge, on the other hand, seems to be witnessing an inflation of prices. Thanks to the presence of several bilateral and multilateral agencies in Egypt, well trained scholars with expertise can afford to charge above local prices for their expertise, i.e. for their knowledge creation. However, the market is not big and is pretty much focused in Cairo. This adds to the price inflation. Besides, the cost of producing knowledge includes in many cases the cost of organizing workshops and seminars and inviting international scholars to transmit the state of the art.

The supply chain of information and of knowledge is furthermore similarly affected by other factors. These are outlined in the chart below and then explained briefly in the following bullet points.



9.1.1 Factors Influencing Supply of Information

Economic Context

- On the positive side, the existence of relatively big business enterprises has been good for the system of information collection. These firms create pressure on the government to produce reliable information about the market. Yet it must be said that these firms will have to be themselves transparent (i.e. willing to give out information about themselves in order to improve firm level data).
- On the downside, the predominance of micro and small enterprises as job creators in the Egyptian economy⁹ has been bad for the system of information collection. The private sector is mainly composed of micro and small enterprises and this critical mass is usually difficult to collect information from.

⁹ Dr. Alia El-Mahdi (Faculty of Economics, Cairo University) estimates the share of the micro small and medium enterprises in the total of jobs in the Egyptian labour market at 34%, the predominant majority of which is in the small and micro enterprises.

Political Context

- The political system dominated by the President crowds out ministers with political management skills and that creates a disincentive to supply (i.e. collect and share) information because it is easier to make decisions without the push and pull of various opinions and interests, i.e. to make them in insulation. At best, such a system gives, as Stiglitz argued, an incentive to produce the “politically correct” information which considers only some voices whose demands can be accommodated.
- High concentration and centralization level of information suppliers in Cairo (and most of them function on a top-down and center-oriented basis) has limited the amount of information supply to that which suits the purposes of the central leadership; disturbing information may be blocked out by self-censorship, thus affecting not only the availability of information but also its quality. By the same token, the centralization of information supply marginalizes information from the periphery (e.g. governorates) and the marginalized groups / regions. This applies to data, news and analysis providers alike, impacting negatively on the availability and quality of information.
- However, the availability of international data, benchmarks and ranking systems serves as a corrector and creates an environment in which even public authorities are bound to improve their data collection and their measurements, even if this means unravelling “bad news” about the economy.
- Nevertheless, as the political elite comes under attack for caving in to international pressure, this elite becomes less inclined to collect too much information on the impact or result of economic reform, lest information brings it under more fire and criticism.
- The lack of a credible election process has resulted in a ministerial elite which has not had to develop media campaigns to sell public policy to “voters”. Neither have they developed a tradition of subjecting themselves to public scrutiny except for the scrutiny they occasionally face inside parliament (with well known results of complacency on the part of the questioning MPs) or in opposition papers’ reportages in which data is often inaccurately cited. Thus, there is no rigorous tradition of presenting data and responding to penetrating questions in public¹⁰. This may leave a negative impact on the drive to collect information as well as on the quality of the information supply.

¹⁰ The new system introduced in the past year (2004) which established the position of spokesmen for ministries is a good start. Though still limited and often dominated by security concerns and lack of mutual trust on the part of the spokesmen and the public, yet it may with time evolve into a good bridge between policy makers and the public. It will require training of specialized spokesmen. In the majority of cases, the ministers did not assign a spokesman and there are currently only two spokesmen, one for the President’s Office and one for the Cabinet of Ministers (in fact of the Prime Minister).

9.1.2. Factors Influencing Supply of Knowledge Creation

Economic Context

- Positively, the existence of relatively big business enterprises has been good for the system of knowledge creation. The private sector has been a willing partner in the creation and financing of centers of knowledge creation. Big business entrepreneurs are to be found on boards of directors of several of these research centers. This has helped the wave of knowledge creation in a positive sense.
- On the downside, the existence of a critical mass of small and micro enterprises is not good for knowledge creation because no information about them is readily available and hence the knowledge base on the biggest job creating actor in the economy is lacking and costly to produce.

Political Context

- The political environment has left enough room for providers of knowledge, especially private ones, to flourish. Private institutions of knowledge creation are allowed to exist and receive private funding (both local and international). Policy makers manifest readiness to attend policy dialogues and seminars organized by such institutions. University research centers are benefiting from this politically welcoming environment. They are able to raise funds for research and policy makers are frequently welcomed guests in their seminars and conferences. National institutions such as al-Marakez al-Qaumiya al-Mutakhasesa are not as fortunate; their resources are still too limited and their incentive structure is weak. Both factors affect their ability to compete as centers of excellence in the business of knowledge creation, even though they have a critical mass of trained senior and junior social scientists.

9.1.3. Factors Influencing Supply of Dissemination Services

Economic Context

- As to the economic factors which affect the dissemination of information and knowledge via the printed media, the supply side is quite constrained. Aside from the big national newspapers (e.g. Ahram, Akhbar, Gomhoreya), other private newspapers are financially weak and their circulation limited; hence the marginal cost per one newspaper issue is high. Furthermore, the cost of production is rigid; while Ahram, Akhbar or Gomhoreya newspapers enjoy economies of scale and scope because they produce several news items that have wide cheap circulation (in fact they are

publishing institutions), opposition or advocacy newspapers neither have economies of scale nor scope¹¹.

- Most importantly, there is a restrictive business environment (both vertical and horizontal restraints) which prohibits the emergence of a level playing field and institutionalizes unfair competition. For one, there are various surcharges levied on private newspapers but not on the national papers. Second, private papers have to have a license when they venture into new publications, while the national papers do not have to have such license. Third, licensing means a commitment to publish using the printing houses of the national institutions mentioned above (ahram, akhbar, Gomhoreya)¹². If a private newspaper decided to publish from outside the country, it faces question marks about its credibility and is often suspected of having built alliances with anti national forces. Finally, it should be noted that economic profitability is not a variable taken in consideration by both public and private newspapers, but for different reasons. Public newspapers function as non profit governmental organizations while private newspapers are either issued for reasons other than economic profitability and / or depend on donors' contributions or on advertisement revenues to remain in the market.

Political Context

- Journalism exercises self censorship as part of the overall culture of clientelism and favoritism.
- Printed Press can be (and is) suspended by government decree.
- In audio-visual media with an economic focus, there is a general lack of vision as to the developmental role of TV and radio, also after the change of leadership (Minister of Mass Communication) in 2004.

Human Resources

- Journalism specialized in economic affairs is weak due to lack of training in economics, especially in new fields such as stock market, free trade rules, intellectual property rights, competition and fair play, etc.

Formal Rules: Legal Framework

- One legal rule is important for the system of information and knowledge dissemination, namely rules governing media access to information. When access is

¹¹ Roumeen Islam “Into the Looking Glass: What the Media Tell and Why” 2002 In: The Right to Tell: The Role of the Media in Economic Development, a WBI Publication, p. 1-26 (14).

¹² Interview with Mr. Hazem al-Sherief, Chief Editor of al-Mal (Money) private specialized economic newspaper.

not regulated or when the laws are weakly observed and weakly reinforced, what remains are informal channels of information collection and knowledge dissemination, e.g. personal connections and interviews. Due to the lack of a freedom of information act, many reports are not available to the public (whether journalists or researchers). Thus one has to build a network of personal friends who replace a freedom of information act. This is often a costly endeavour in terms of time and transparency¹³.

Mexico's new Freedom of Information Law

- Rests on premise of disclosure defining all government information as public
- Directs government agencies to favor “principle of publicity of information” over secrecy
- Requires agencies to publish information concerning their daily functions, budgets, operations, staff, salaries, internal reports, and awarding of contracts and concessions
- Grants citizens the right to seek release of information, appeal an agency's decision to deny information, and take a case to court when appeal is denied
- Clause prohibits withholding of information on crimes against humanity or gross human rights violations
- Secrecy end-date: According to Article 15, the government must open its files after 12 years of creation
- Deadlines: An agency must respond to a request within twenty working days and deliver documents ten working days later. Lack of response means request is accepted, setting in line the process of responding within the deadline set above. Citizens have renewed opportunities to challenge an agency's decision to withhold information, after one year has passed since the original decision.
- Documents: A citizen's request and the government's response must themselves be public, and agencies must make the resulting documents available to all in an accessible manner
- Fees for access: the new law removes the cost of search. Only the cost of reproduction and delivery of documents is charged.

Weak Points

- Possible exemptions to disclosure include information on national security, international relations, economic stability, personal life and ongoing law enforcement investigations in case that their disclosure is considered harmful
- Sweeping protection depends on agency interpretation
- The lack of records of the government's internal deliberative process

Implementing Bodies

- Law establishes government bodies to implement the new transparency rules, these are to be created and operated only with the agency's regular budget, no extra allocations
- Creation of a new Federal Institute for Access to Public Information which assists agencies in classifying, publishing and managing information, helps individuals to request information and educates citizens about the new right.

- Laws of insult or defamation are critical factors that influence the general attitude of self censorship. When libel, for example, is a criminal rather than a civil offence, journalists tend to exercise self censorship. When truth or the public interest, rather than proven malicious intentions, do not come to the defense of journalists, their incentive to investigate freely without fear is weakened¹⁴. It also has to censor itself to avoid harsh punishment, either clandestine or explicit. Journalists have been intimidated by physical abuse and other less direct means. They have, moreover, to worry about a legal system which gives harsh punishment to libel, at a time when

¹³ Roumeen Islam “Into the Looking Glass: What the Media Tell and Why” 2002 In: The Right to Tell: The Role of the Media in Economic Development, a WBI Publication, p. 1-26 (11).

¹⁴ Roumeen Islam “Into the Looking Glass: What the Media Tell and Why” 2002 In: The Right to Tell: The Role of the Media in Economic Development, a WBI Publication, p. 1-26 (13-14).

journalists are not always sure judges would stand by freedom of expression and go against the will and power of public figures (in politics and / or business).

- The Presidential decree which abolishes the imprisonment sentence for journalists who published wrong information is a step in the direction of more democracy.

Informal Rules

- Among providers of economic news there are personal networks to policy makers and sometimes to the private sector as well. This makes transparency come second to safeguarding friendships. A chief editor would reprimand his deputy for writing an article that criticizes the business community because the chief editor or his wife who is in charge of a section on businessmen in the newspaper would be afraid of angering some friends. A journalist in a governorate would care more about his relationship to the Governor and would only publish what the latter would want to see / hear. This is, however, changing lately due to an unprecedented growth of newspapers and magazines. Some newspapers find no grudge in blackmailing businessmen, ministers or high government officials when they think they have a scandal to uncover.
- Rules of friendship get diluted when the community of non-state actors has a history / tradition of strong and autonomous networks. This has been observed in Port Said and Dameitta (Egyptian Human Development Report 2004).

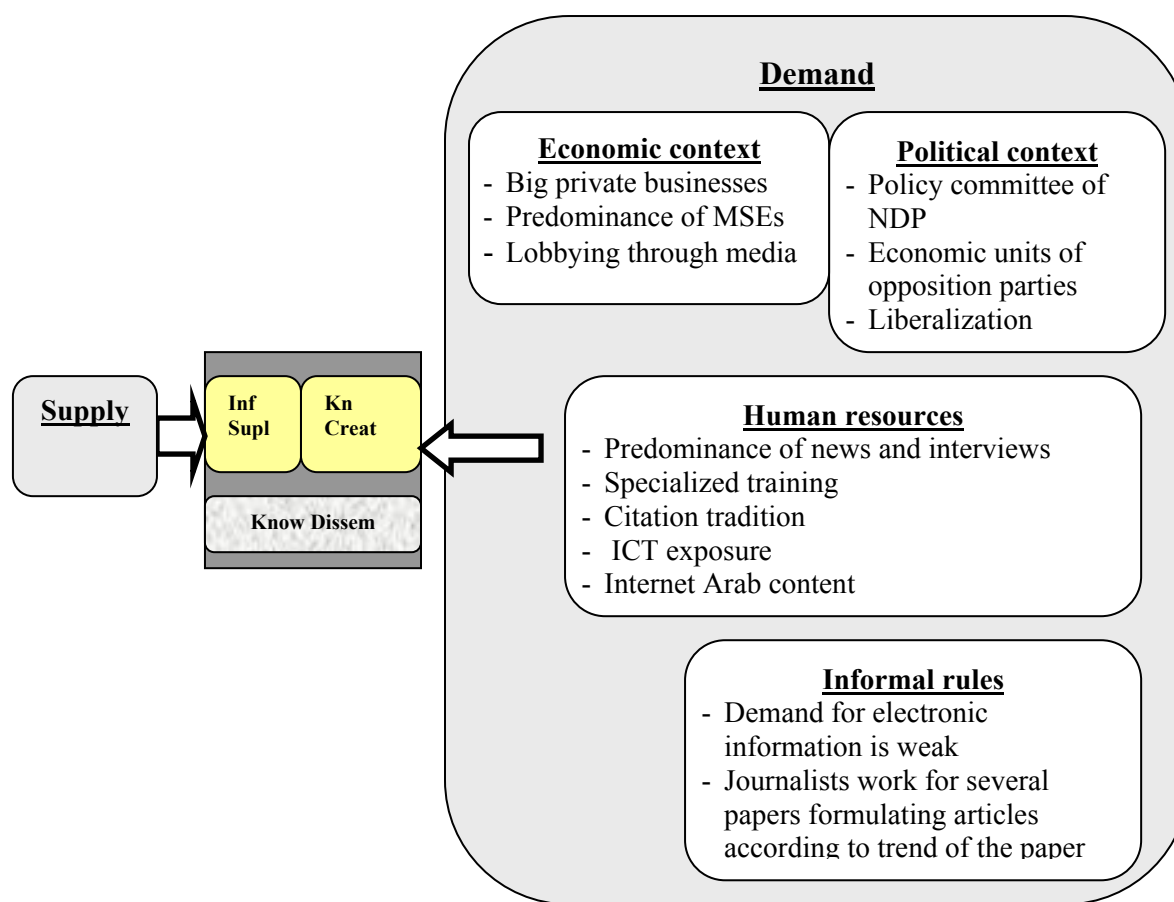
9.2. Factors Influencing Demand

Also with respect to the demand for information and knowledge, one can discern a number of factors which affect this demand.

9.2.1 Factors Influencing Demand for Information

Economic Context

- The existence of relatively big private business has positively influenced the demand for economic information.
- However, the weakness of the critical mass of the Egyptian private sector, namely micro and small enterprises, with respect to their demand for information.



Political Context

- Political parties have economic units that follow up on economic policies and economic trends. But opposition parties in particular tend to have economists who are mostly ill-trained in economic issues that are new to the economic discourse, issues related to free market, competition, stock market dynamics, privatized services, etc. This reduces demand for information on the part of the legal and institutionalized opposition.
- The newly established policy committee of the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) has created positive dynamic of demand for information and knowledge. This unit includes some of Egypt's best social science thinkers who by virtue of their competence are bound to require good quality information. It goes without saying that this is all done from the vantage point the ruling party.
- The pressure for economic liberalization, however, is increasing government and private sector demand for information, be that human resources or institutes for research and policy analysis.

Human Resources

- Demand for information is hampered by bad quality education, where memorizing is the basic skill, not research, fact finding competences nor analysis.
- A similar educational weakness permeates journalistic education, if we are to consider journalists as a pivotal segment of demand for information. Journalists covering economic affairs may not know basic differences between trade and budget deficits, GNP and GDP or interest rates for lenders and for depositors. With the increase in the number of specialized economic newspapers and TV talk shows, however, there will be a rising trend for more excellence and competence.
- Journalists are often keen to publish interviews with economic public figures and / or opinionated articles than deep economic analysis.
- The general cultural lack of exposure to the new technology (internet and the like) as well as the lack of physical infrastructure, especially among journalists¹⁵ has reduced demand for information on the web.
- Weak proficiency in English has reduced demand for information on the web, discouraging demand for electronic suppliers. The Egyptian Ministry for Information Technology and Communication is concerned about that and has plans to help expand the amount of Arabic content on the web.
- With respect to demand for knowledge, the tendency of think tanks and research centers, especially outside Cairo, to rely on journalistic material (i.e. newspaper articles, both news and interviews) reduces demand for the production of knowledge from research centers and think tanks. This tends to reduce the cumulative effect of knowledge creation.

Informal Rules

- Intertwined personal relations among the leadership of organizations providing information leaves the public – in a culture of mistrust- wondering if the checks and balances effect of this multiplicity of providers truly kicks in or rather tacit alliances among them prevail¹⁶. This sheds doubt on the credibility of supply and thus reduces demand for it.

¹⁵ In some established specialized economic periodicals, there is one PC for 50 journalists, in some only 3/50 journalists own a personal laptop. Even chief editors are not keen on internet sources, cannot verify their accuracy and hence cannot evaluate the material submitted by journalists.

¹⁶ In the Fall of 2004, Egyptians were busy debating whether an inter-governmental report from the Central Auditing Authority al-Jihās al-Markāzī Lilmuhasabat was biased towards the interests of particular enterprises with a dominant position in the market of iron and steel production. Though many readers of the Authority's report see no sign of bias in it, the general public who followed parliamentary debates and journalistic coverage of the topic were left with their mistrust reinforced, thus damaging the public's general perceptions about

- There is also the problem of journalists who work in more than one newspaper and they formulate their articles according to the general trend of the newspaper. So they can attend the same event, be supportive of the arguments and views voiced during the event when they public in one newspaper and then turn around to report about the same event critically it another newspaper. This kills the credibility aspect of the whole journalist profession and reduces the incentive of research centers and think tanks to invite and interact with journalists¹⁷.

9.2.2 Factors Influencing the Demand for Knowledge on Economic Affairs

Economic Context

- The existence of relatively big private business has positively influenced the demand for analytical economic knowledge.
- However, the weakness of the critical mass of the Egyptian private sector, namely micro and small enterprises, with respect to their lack of resources to consume analytical knowledge reduces overall demand for economic knowledge.
- The tendency of private sector lobbyists to use the specialized economic media to deliver anonymous messages to policy makers about policy directions has corrupted economic journalism, creating more demand for opinion articles and interviews than for analysis¹⁸.

Political Context

- The policy committee of the NDP has created positive dynamic of demand for knowledge. This unit includes competent social scientists who are bound to be catalysts of knowledge creation and dissemination, even though they may only welcome knowledge that supports the government in most cases.
- The pressure for economic liberalization, however, is increasing government and private sector demand for economic knowledge and their incentive to invest in the

transparency and accuracy of information provision in Egypt. See al-Ahram al-Iqtisadi # 1869 of November 1st 2004, p. 48-49.

¹⁷ An anecdote that has been mentioned by a journalist is that he has to “yeahram” his article after writing it to be in line with the tone of the Ahram newspaper.

¹⁸ Most journalists produce news items about the sheer fact that an information provider issued a data set. The second best journalistic product is an interview. Rarely do they produce analysis based on these data sets. Hence demand is not sophisticated and does not create pressure for better data. Interview with economic journalist in one specialized economic periodical

infrastructure of knowledge creation, be that human resources or institutes for research and policy analysis.

Human Resources

- Weak analytical skills, which journalists acquire on the job after they graduate¹⁹. This enhances their overall sense of challenge which several of them have expressed as “the economy is going from one crisis to the next and we have no clue how to analyze that.”²⁰ However, recently think tanks as ECES and research centers as CEFRS have organized a number of training courses for economic journalists and reporters to enhance their capabilities.

9.2.3 Factors Influencing the Demand for Knowledge Dissemination

Economic Context

- The weakness of the critical mass of the Egyptian private sector, namely micro and small enterprises, with respect to their lack of resources to consume analytical knowledge reduces the circuit of knowledge dissemination²¹.
- There is a dominant position for state advertisement which has been bad for journalism as consumer of information and disseminator of knowledge. The specialized economic media (especially written media) depends heavily on state advertisement. This does not provide an incentive for data scrutiny, especially when it comes to data or knowledge that uncovers an alternative economic reality. When the media channel depends on private advertisement, this trend is less pronounced and the need for a qualitatively good supply of information and analysis is created.

¹⁹ First two years of a 4-years program are general knowledge on subjects such as economics, sociology, law and political geography. Then two years of specialization in journalism, radio and television or public relations. Practical training is not taken seriously nor is the graduation project. There is some improvement in this trend especially in the only faculty of mass communication at Cairo university. Competition for better quality is also intensifying due to the expansion of departments of mass communication in other provincial and private universities. The Egyptian system can be contrasted to the German one, where journalists usually have a university degree in the social or natural sciences or humanities after which they attend a journalism course which goes on average for 1.5 years. Most journalists with a bachelors equivalent in economics have by the time they enter the journalism course gotten used to economic research, economic theory and economic scientific standards

²⁰ Interviews conducted between 01.11.04 and 18.11.04

²¹ The Global Competitiveness Report of 2001-2002 charts the lack of competitiveness of Arab enterprises with respect to resources devoted to research for products or on market analysis. This reflects to some extent the weakness we allude to.

Human Resources

- The country still suffers from high illiteracy rates.
- The country's educational system does not depend on projects, problem solving or library and field research. The system of memorization as well as the system of exams with set questions and model answers also contribute to the lack of demand for knowledge.
- The country lacks the physical technological infrastructure and the technological literacy which are quite a hindrance to demand for information and knowledge dissemination (see table 1).
- However, the various projects of the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology are a very good start (see annex 2).

Table 1: ICT (HDI and the digital divide)

Tempus Country	HDI 1998	# of telephone mainlines (per 1,000 people), 1999 & Rank in Global Competitiveness Report	# of PCs (per 1,000 people), 1999	# of web sites (per 10,000 people), 2000	total # of internet users (in thousands) & Rank in Global Competitiveness Report
Algeria	0.69	52 73/102	6	0	0 80/102
Egypt	0.63	75 61/102	12	1	7 74/102
Jordan	0.71	87 59/102	14	1	14 54/102
Morocco	0.58	53 80/102	11	0	2 78/102
Syria	0.65	99	14	0	1
Tunisia	0.71	90	15	0	12
Lebanon	0.73	201	46	12	70

Source: Arab Human Development Report 2002 & Global Competitiveness Report 2003-2004.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, data and information availability has improved significantly in Egypt over the last decade. Such improvement was a result of parallel, and in some cases collaborative efforts, between government, academic, private sector and international donors. This collaboration helped to enhance the transparency and increase public awareness among the policy makers and researchers as well as the private sector.

However, more needs to be done to redress the negative impacts that reduce the ability of people involved in the networks of demand and supply of information and knowledge. That

entails education and training programs for economists and journalists. The introduction of formal rules that guarantee freedom of information and the enhancement of institutions which enforce such formal rules are imperative conditions. For this to function, conducive political and economic factors need to support these reforms. When all this is said and done, the culture of trust, transparency and argumentation will be enhanced. Some programs may be needed to bring in lessons learned from other countries. Establishing networks of research institutions and networks for journalists both regionally and internationally can be of help. Making these networks function in Arabic for the Arabic speaking communities in Egypt is a must at this juncture.

Annex 1: List of 25 Research Centers and Think Tanks featured regularly in *al-Siyasa al-Dawliya* since 2 years

Name of Research Center or Think Tank	Areas of Activities	Telephone / Fax	Contact Person
Center for Political and Strategic Studies in al-Ahram	Political, economic, strategic and military analysis	T +20-2-5786037 F +20-2-7703229	Dr. Abdel Monem Said
Center for Political Research and Studies, Cairo University	Political and economic analysis	T +20-2-5680998 F +20-2-5680998	Dr. Nadia Mostafa
Program for Dialogue of Civilizations	Cultural and political analysis for dialogue and understanding among cultures	T +20-2-5676486	Dr. Nadia Mostafa
Center for Asian Studies, Cairo University	Political and economic studies of Asia	T +20-2-5692735 F +20-2-5711020	Dr. Hoda Metkees
Center for the Studies of the Developing Countries	Political and economic studies of the developing countries	T +20-2-5705542 F +20-2-5711020	Dr. Ahmed Abdel Wanees
Center for Studies and Consultancies of Public Administration	Studies of public administration in Egypt	T +20-2-5708091 F +20-2-5711020	Dr. Salwa Sha'rawi Gomoa
Center for European Studies	Political and economic studies of the European Union and its relations with the Arab world, specially Egypt	T +20-2-5711678 F +20-2-5711020	Dr. Naglaa El-Ahwani
Center for American Studies	Political and economic studies of the USA and its relations to Egypt	T +20-2-5711605 F +20-2-5711020	Dr. Lobna Abdel Latif
Center for Egyptian African Studies	Political, economic and strategic studies of Egyptian African relations	T +20-2-7746466 F +20-2-5711020	Dr. Ahmed al-Rashidi
Institute for Arab and African Studies	Political, economic and strategic studies of Arab and African affairs	T +20-2-5675553 F +20-2-5734141	Dr. al-Sayeed Fulaifal
National Center for Research and Studies of the Middle East	Political, military and strategic studies of the Middle East	T +20-2-5770041 F +20-2 5770063	
Institute of Research and Arab Studies	Political research on Arab affairs	T 7951648	Dr. Ahmed Y. Ahmed
Center for Future Studies, Asyout University	Political and strategic Studies concerning Egypt	T +20-12-3971523	Dr. Mohamed I. Mansour

Name of Research Center or Think Tank	Areas of Activities	Telephone / Fax	Contact Person
Center for Economic and Financial Studies, Cairo University	Economic studies concerning Egypt and its economy	T +20-2-5689910 F +20-2-5689910	Dr. Heba Nassar
Center for Arabic and African Research	Political, social, strategic research	T +20-2-3620511 F +20-2-3620511	Mr. Helmi Sha'rawi
Economic Research Forum for the Arab Countries, Iran and Turkey	Economic analysis	T +20-2-3370810 F +20-2-7616042	Dr. Samir Radwan
Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Ain Shams University	General studies of the Middle East	T +20-12-2149437 Or +20-2-4826077	Dr. Susan al-Qallini
Gulf Center for Political and Strategic Studies	Studies of the Gulf region	T +20-2-7945949 F +20-2-7923579	Dr. Omar al-Hassan
National Center for Sociological and Criminological Studies	General studies of the Egyptian society	T +20-2-3472484	Dr. Nagwa al-Fawwal
Arabic Center for Development and Future Studies	Development, politics and economics	T +20-2-3450516 F +20-2-3035219	Mr Gameel Matar
Egyptian Center for Economic Studies	Economic studies of the Egyptian market and economy	T +20-2-4619037 F +20-2-4619045	Dr. Ahmed Galal
Mishkat Center	Human development studies	T +20-2-3375656	Dr. Nader Fergany
Parliamentary Program, Cairo University	Studies of the Egyptian parliament and comparisons with other parliaments	T +20-2-7746051 F +20-2-7746051	Dr. Ali el-Sawi
International Center for Futuristic and Strategic Studies	Strategic, military and foreign relations analysis of Egypt and its neighbors	T +20-2-6175555 F +20-2-6175305	Dr. Adel Soliman
Ibn Talal Center for American Research	American affairs analysis	T +20-2-7976274 F +20-2-7976386	Dr. Manar al-Shuehy

Annex 2: Ministry of Communication and Information Technology

In October 1999, a new **Ministry of Communications and Information Technology** (MCIT) was formed to facilitate Egypt's transition into the global Information Society. MCIT is in charge of preparing the National Plan for Communications and Information Technology. Concrete actions have been the development and expansion of the telecommunications infrastructure, the establishment of hundreds of information technology clubs, the expansion of the pool of IT skilled labor and the creation of national information systems and databases.

The National Plan has paved the way for the initiation of the **Egyptian Information Society Initiative (EISI)**, an innovative partnership between the public and private sectors, designed to facilitate Egypt's evolution into an Information Society. The aim is to offer every individual, business, and community the opportunity to harness the benefits of the new information era. EISI comprises seven elements: 1. E-Readiness, Equal Access for All, 2. E-Learning – Nurturing Human Capital, 3. E-Government, 4. E-Business, 5. E-Culture, 6. E-Health and 7. ICT Export Initiative.

The Egyptian Information Society Initiative's education component covers various training programs with internationally accepted certificates to create and enhance ICT skills (e.g. Basic Skills Training Program, International Computer Driver's License program, Super User Program, Communication and Networking training, Information Technology training, Vocational Education Program for Computer Technicians). The International Computer Drivers License project in cooperation with UNESCO will standardize computer training and certificates according to international standards. This pilot project may be exported to other Arab countries. In order to close the Gender gap, MCIT has created a unit focusing on ICT and gender issues. The development and provision of software and programs with Arabic content has been considered a crucial aspect to increase "ICT literacy".

Examples of successful initiatives are:

The **Free Internet Initiative** was a major step in increasing the number of Internet users from 1 million in January 2002 to 2.5 million in November 2003 through 940,000 connected households.

The **Computer for Every Home** initiative is to provide end-users with PCs at prices affordable for the average user. The number of PCs sold has reached 48,000 (November 2003). The target is to reach 100,000 PCs sold annually, since PC penetration remains low at 2.3%.

The **ICT Clubs model** (550 clubs in November 2003) is a public-private sector initiative to bring affordable Internet access throughout the country. The objective is to reach 1000 villages by 2005, while promoting, with the Ministry of Education, the connectivity of all schools to the Internet. Many centers are based in the deprived and rural areas. Users receive guidance through instructors available in each club as well as training for basic skills. The government provides all equipment and hardware necessary for each club's launch. IT clubs also create job opportunities for university graduates who join the Training of Trainers program.

The **Smart Schools Network** aims to introduce IT education and IT-aided learning in schools. The Network will build public-private partnerships to put computers in schools and develop quality computer and computer-aided education.

The **Egyptian Universities Network** aims to facilitate the electronic exchange of data between universities. The **National Telecommunications Institute** was established to provide high quality, postgraduate education and training in the field of telecommunications, and conducting research.

The **Global Campus Initiative** was launched in 1997 by the Regional Information Technology and Software Engineering Centre (RITSEC), with the aim of building a global e-learning community through utilization of distance learning tools and techniques. It involves the provision of e-learning programs and services. It has an academic program which provides two masters degrees that are accredited from Middlesex University (UK). Its Global Distance Learning Center (GDLC) provides a variety of executive courses jointly with the World Bank Institute.

The Nile Technology University is a non-profit university specializing in IT to produce graduates. Nile Tech puts strong emphasis on applied research and development, as well as on graduating the future entrepreneurs and middle managers for Egypt.

The **Information Technology Institute (ITI)** was established in 1993 by IDSC to provide specialized software development programs for new graduates and training programs and IT courses for the Egyptian government, ministries, and local decision support centers. ITI also introduces IT training materials in Arabic.

Small and Medium Enterprise Businesses is supported by Microsoft Egypt to promote the SME industry with a special focus on empowering women. The project was created by RITSEC, in partnership with the government of Egypt. The aim is to empower SME businesses through the use of ICT to enhance their productivity, increase market share and open up new markets both locally and internationally. The project will focus on IT training programs to meet SME needs through incremental approaches, starting with 250 young graduates. The project has a special focus on empowering unemployed women through IT skills training and qualifications to create new job opportunities in the SME industry.²²

The United Nations Development Program, under the IT for Development Programme, is currently funding a project called the **Technology Access Community Centres (TACCS)**. Three Technology Access Community Centers have been developed in the Sharqeya governorate. The TACCs in Egypt are the first in a series of UNDP sponsored IT pilot projects which will be hosted by other countries and regions. A principal goal of the pilot project will be the development and implementation of a flexible, local approach to community development with an emphasis on non-formal education using information technology and human resources to increase the role of training and education in the life-long learning of all community members.²³

²² Information of this paragraph is cited from: <http://www.microsoft.com/presspass/features/2004/Jan04/01-23UNDPProjects.asp>

²³ See <http://www.undp.org/info21/pilot/launch.html>