



After the Arab spring Revolutions

7 reasons why LED offers a major solution to North Africa's economic problems

Emma Wadie Hobson*



The revolutions that deposed the longstanding regimes in Tunisia and Egypt offer a historic opportunity to put in place effective economic policy making structures, providing a model for other reforming countries. This short paper points out that traditional top down sectoral economic policies will not be sufficient to bring about the dramatic changes in economic development that people in these countries now expect of their new governments. People will no longer be content with approaches that only improve

economic conditions for the population in general but want to see new policies specifically targeted at decreasing inequality and bettering the conditions of the poor. The paper argues that the LED approach offers these countries a way to solve some of the most important economic and local governance problems they face in the medium to long term. An innovative, bottom up approach, LED is designed to reduce inequalities between regions and promote pro-poor growth through unleashing the economic potentials of every territory. The approach empowers local stakeholders from the public, private and civil society sectors to work in partnership to identify the obstacles hindering their local economies and manage investments that remove those obstacles. Furthermore, the participatory nature of LED offers a strategic way in which the local public can be engaged in economic decision making for the first time.

* LED Consultant based in Addis Ababa (Ethiopia). Since May 2011, Ms Hobson has been operating as part-time LEDNA LED expert. For more details on Ms Hobson's profile see: <http://ledna.org/users/wadiehobson> or contact her at: T: +251 910 884 549; E: wadiehobson@gmail.com.

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Introduction

The opportunity offered by the Arab Spring Revolutions to North Africa

We all watched in awe as the events in Tunisia and Egypt led to the biggest shakeup in a region's governance systems since the fall of the Berlin Wall. While the revolutions were inherently political in nature, one of the major underlying causes was the perceived corruptness of the ruling regimes and their mismanagement of economic development.

The revolutions that deposed those longstanding regimes now offer a historic opportunity for effective economic policy making but this is, at the same time, a major challenge for their nascent democratic systems. Nonetheless, what happens in Tunisia and Egypt is likely to offer models to learn from for other North African and Arab countries embarking on reforms.

Traditional top down sectoral economic policies will not be sufficient to bring about the dramatic changes in economic development that people in these countries now expect of their new governments. This is where LED can help.

Progress has already been made to establish democratic governance systems that ensure accountability for the management of Tunisia and Egypt's resources. Programmes of immediate governance and social reforms being implemented by the interim governments include measures focusing on 1) improving government transparency and accountability; and 2) taking immediate actions to relieve the plight of the unemployed and the poorest people and regions¹.

Going forwards, traditional top down sectoral economic policies will not, however, be sufficient to bring about the dramatic changes in economic development that people in these countries now expect of their new governments. Even at this interim stage, before democratic elections to choose the countries' new leaderships have been held, people's expectations of immediate economic changes and

improvements are high. This is where Local Economic Development (LED) can help.



LED is an innovative bottom up approach to generating equitable economic growth through unleashing the economic potentials of every territory. LED is based on the concept that every territory has comparative advantages whose potentials can be enhanced if actions are taken to tackle the bottlenecks currently inhibiting their success. These actions need to be taken through a partnership between the public, private and civil society sectors who all contribute through different inputs to the promotion of LED. Through this partnership, investments can be targeted at the most critical bottlenecks in prioritised sectors, clusters and value chains, leading to greater employment generation and economic growth across all regions².



Seven reasons why LED

Adopting LED policies and strategies makes sense for both economic and political reasons:

1. Traditional top down sectoral economic reforms and policies were not able to address the huge unemployment or persistent poverty and inequality that accompanied economic growth

Policies aimed at creating a stable macroeconomic environment, attracting foreign direct investment (FDI), increasing exports, promoting entrepreneurship and enhancing human skills did achieve considerable success in increasing economic growth and employment opportunities.

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Economic reforms implemented by Egypt and Tunisia were hailed as an example of the economic success associated with liberalisation³. Indeed economic growth in both countries averaged 5% between 1999-2009, job creation accelerated and unemployment declined, despite the global financial crisis⁴. These achievements are even more remarkable when considering the rapid population expansion, adding tens of thousands to the labour force every year.

However, many people not reflected in unemployment figures, continued to be excluded from the benefits of economic growth, as Tunisia and Egypt were only employing a small share of their potential workforce. The employment rate in both countries i.e. the share of working age population that is employed was among the lowest in the world⁵. This is because many people simply opt out of the labour force for various reasons, including lack of the type of employment opportunities that meet the expectations of the population. For example, over 58% of youth in Egypt aged 18-29 are out of the labour force; that is, they are not working, not searching for work, nor willing or interested to work. Moreover, Gender differen-

tials are astounding where women who are out of the labour force are 3 times more than men (UNDP 2010, p.38).

In addition, results were particularly disappointing in dealing with stubborn poverty and inequality trends. Poverty rates reduced and increased along with economic growth cycles, but did not show any overall improvement over the last decade. In fact, the number of people living under the national poverty line in Egypt actually increased (from 16.7% in 2000 to 22% in 2008⁶). Furthermore, inequality is an issue in both countries, with the top 20% of the population in terms of income controlling nearly half of the wealth⁷ while the bottom 20% struggle on less than a tenth of it⁸.

In terms of inequality between places, while disparities did decrease as a result of geographically targeted policies, huge inequalities remain. While Upper Egypt, consistently the most deprived area in Egypt, is closing the gap in economic and social indicators with other regions due to major public investment, it still has a rural poverty rate of more than double



and an urban poverty rate triple that of Lower Egypt (UNDP 2010, p. 76). In Tunisia, regional disparities have also reduced but the Northwest and Central West regions remain clearly disadvantaged (Ayadi et al 2007; Driss et al 2011).

2. Persistent inequalities between people and between places have fostered a feeling of major injustice and could fuel further unrest if not dealt with

While governments thought that reducing unemployment and absolute poverty would be enough to satisfy their populations, the public perception that the rich are becoming richer and the poor poorer fuelled the feelings of popular resentment that ultimately led to revolution. Rather than instituting effective inclusion policies and social safety nets, governments pursued policies that enriched the elite and then used subsidies to placate the rest of the population. This reliance on general food and energy subsidies was ineffective as the benefits accrued largely to the non poor (World Bank 2011). More effective social security initiatives such as conditional or unconditional cash transfers or cash for work programmes were not implemented.

People will no longer be content with approaches that only improve economic conditions for the population in general (regardless of whether they disproportionately benefit the rich or the poor) but want to see new policies specifically targeted at decreasing inequality and bettering the conditions of the poor. Geographically targeted interventions, like LED, are likely to be more effective in dealing with issues of persistent inequality.

Top down, sectoral economic policies cannot by themselves ensure that investment flows into more labour intensive productive activities or into the poorest regions. This is particularly the case in developing countries, where the poorest regions suffer from significant constraints in levels of infrastructure, finance, technology and human skills, discouraging potential domestic and foreign investment. This is why interventions targeting the specific problems of certain geographical areas are needed. While nationally led geographical initiatives can achieve good results, they are less likely to correctly identify and deal with local problems.

For example, the "National Project for Geographic Targeting of Poverty" targeting Egypt's 1000+ poorest villages has been criticized for

high inefficiencies and leakages to the non poor (UNDP 2010).

LED, a locally managed approach, empowers local stakeholders from the public, private and civil society sectors to work in partnership to identify the obstacles hindering their local economies and manage investments that remove those obstacles

By contrast, LED is a locally managed approach that empowers local stakeholders from the public, private and civil society sectors to work in partnership to identify the specific obstacles hindering their local economies and manage investments that remove those obstacles. Identifying these obstacles will need to be based on a rigorous Local Economy Assessment that outlines available information on unemployment, poverty and economic development in the locality as well as on the economic sectors, clusters and value chains that could have competitive potential and on the constraints they face⁹. In this way investments can be prioritized at removing the obstacles facing the sectors with the greatest local employment generation and poverty reduction potential.



These obstacles, and related LED investments, tend to be associated with one of the four areas of 1) infrastructure improvement, 2) human skills upgrading, 3) increasing capacity of local firms, 4) attracting inward investment (Rodriguez-Pose 2001). A variety of project ideas and initiatives can be implemented under each of these pillars, learning from other countries (e.g. see LDI 2011).

3. To tackle the time bomb of youth unemployment new approaches are needed

Tunisia and Egypt's youth bulge could give the two countries a major competitive advantage but in the absence of vibrant, diversified economies able to create the increasing number of jobs needed, it has proven to be more of a curse. Like most Middle Eastern and African countries, both countries face a situation where the proportion of youth in the population is significantly large in comparison to other age groups. Youth make up 25% of the population in Egypt and 23% in Tunisia¹⁰.

This huge labour force and lower rates of dependency from the older population could be a major advantage. However, their economies have not been able to handle the exponential increase in annual new entrants to the labour force, creating major youth unemployment problems and leading to social unrest.

It is only through locally led processes that the economic potentials and constraints of local youth and of the local sectors where they could work can be accurately identified.

Disturbingly, the usual education dividend does not materialize, with unemployment being worse among educated youth, particularly women. In Egypt, at least 90% of the unemployed are aged less than 30 years, the highest unemployment rates are recorded for post-secondary graduates and the country has one of the lowest female labour participation rates in the world (UNDP 2010). In Tunisia, unemployment is also highest among higher education graduates, women in particular, and has been consistently rising (while it has been falling or constant for other education groups).

Government policies have long tried to improve the situation of youth unemployment but their results have so far been disappointing. In the 1970s and 1980s, overly generous public sector employment sought to absorb the new entrants to the labour force, with little or no reform in the education and training systems,

and failure to control population growth. This resulted in a loss in productivity and an accompanying decline in real wages and stagnation in the standard of living of those employed in the public and private sectors.

More recently, governments have realized the need for efforts to reduce the mismatch between higher education and labour market needs. Several policies aiming at educational system reform, encouraging entrepreneurship and improving job search services were embarked upon. Nonetheless, results have been limited in terms of making a significant difference in youth unemployment levels.

In addition, therefore, to important national policies on educational reform, access to ICT, entrepreneurship development, economic diversification, etc, new approaches will be needed to bring youth and jobs geographically closer together. In most developing countries, new job opportunities tend to be concentrated in the capital city and surrounding regions. It is only through locally led processes that the economic potentials and problems of local youth and of the local sectors where they could work can be accurately identified. Investments can then focus on developing the local economic sectors and clusters where youth could be interested and qualified to work and measures can then be taken to strengthen their competitiveness and encourage the employment and training of youth within them.

In the absence of such local economic interventions, youth will continue having to migrate to richer regions in search of the limited employment opportunities there - or in the case of women, opting out of the labour force altogether - rather than creating new sectors, clusters and value chains with potential throughout the country. The participatory nature of LED processes gives youth associations the opportunity to participate in shaping LED policies and initiatives to ensure that youth benefit from economic growth in their locality.

4. People are demanding greater public engagement and accountability in economic decision making

A key feature of the popular revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt has been the demand for greater public engagement and accountability in decision making, generally, and in economic policies in particular. The information now coming out about the extent of corrupt practices that had been pervasive in government bodies is reinforcing the idea that never again must the systems of governance allow this to take place. People will not simply be satisfied to trust new faces, unrelated to the previous regimes. They want systems of accountability and public engagement in decision making to be put in place to ensure they have a say in how their country's economic resources are managed.

While public participation in decision making at the national level is possible and desirable, it is easier to achieve and more meaningful at the local level. The participatory nature of LED offers a strategic way in which the public can be represented in economic decision making.

The most typical model for LED governance is where local governments play the coordinator/facilitating role, bringing stakeholders together in an LED Forum. Stakeholders are designed to represent public opinion in a locality and include: 1) public sector actors such as relevant line ministry directorates, Mayors, and government agencies dealing with economic issues; 2) private sector associations like chambers of commerce and industry, investor associations, etc; 3) civil society associations

representing different stakeholder groups e.g. women, youth, disabled, the elderly or organizations involved in economic development projects. The LED Forum then has the major responsibilities of: 1) developing an LED Strategy, based on a Local Economy Assessment for the locality and of 2) prioritizing projects for investment that remove strategic bottlenecks to the performance of the local economy. Projects are then implemented by those best placed to work on them e.g. Municipalities implement urban renewal or infrastructure projects, financial institutions implement projects aimed at increasing access to finance, etc.

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Another prominent model is that of the Local Economic Development Agency (LEDA), where an autonomous, not for profit agency is established to bring together stakeholders and undertake the functions described above. Such agencies often also provide a series of other services such as business development service, entrepreneurial training, territorial marketing, poverty reduction, research, project management, credit provision, innovation support and visioning (Canzanelli 2010). In both of the above models, the local public are thus represented in the economic governance of the locality.

5. There is a need to channel the current popular energy in a positive manner. There is a risk that new governments will be driven by populist demands and that necessary reforms stall due to popular backlash.

There is a popular perception that the previous governments' policies focused on private sector led growth were at the root of the pervasive corruption and rising inequalities experienced. For example, in Egypt, businessmen had for the first time brought in as ministers and government advisers to help government design

policies that would increase economic growth and employment opportunities in the private sector. While numerous successful reforms were implemented, major abuses of power also took place. In addition, the previous regimes showed little interest in instituting effective social safety nets to support those not

benefitting from or hurt by the economic reforms. This unfortunately led to the (erroneous but understandable) popular feeling that all private sector or business oriented policies are not useful or indeed harmful to the interests of the poor.

It is imperative that the public are given a chance to interact with economic decision makers to, on the one hand, air their grievances, but on the other, debate and understand why private sector led growth focused policies are important to employment and poverty reduction.

There is therefore a great danger at this juncture that the newly elected governments, keen to show their responsiveness to popular demands, might reverse important economic reforms. It is important to recognize that the fact that reforms were accompanied by corrupt practices does not mean that they are not economically correct. It was not the whole private sector that was at fault but the handful of politically connected firms that were protected from competition by government actions, while the majority of private sector operators were just trying to make a living.

Any reversals in government support to private sector competitiveness and growth are likely to impact negatively on employment op-

portunities given that most new jobs created in the Middle East and North Africa region are in the private sector (World Bank 2007). New governments may enact reversals to trade and investment liberalization policies, which have often been blamed for subjecting domestic firms to competition and putting them out of business. This would also be damaging given that these policies resulted in increased competitiveness of those local firms able to adapt and survive and increased employment opportunities. Another area that has attracted considerable criticism has been privatization, where public sector enterprises were siphoned off to businessmen with connections creating damaging monopolies. Again this related to how the policy was implemented rather than whether privatization per se is a bad policy. It would be a mistake to think that public ownership of productive enterprises is better than private ownership.

It is, therefore, imperative that the public are given a chance to interact with economic decision makers to, on the one hand, air their grievances, but on the other, debate and understand why private sector led growth focused policies are important to employment and poverty reduction. As argued under point 5 above, such a process is more easily facilitated at the local level and LED governance models provide a good starting point.

6. There is a major distrust of donor driven policies and an appetite for locally defined goals and solutions

The actions of the previous governments and donors in the last couple of decades has led to major feelings of popular distrust of donor motivations in the Middle East and of pressure to avoid aid that is conditional in any way. This has led the current interim governments to declare their reluctance to accept aid with conditionality¹¹. Any aid that is accepted, therefore, will need to be targeted at supporting locally defined policies and programmes. This of course is, in any case, in line with the donor led aid effectiveness agenda, which also emphasizes local ownership. But the type of policies and programmes that the newly elected governments are likely to want to focus

on to increase their legitimacy are those that have wide popular acceptance among the local population.

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Again, the participatory nature of LED processes, give a major opportunity for the newly elected national governments and donor funded programmes to channel funding to

initiatives that have legitimacy among local stakeholders. LED Strategies that have been developed through a participatory process with local stakeholders will identify priority policies and programmes that could remove specific bottlenecks affecting the economic performance of local sectors, clusters and value

chains. They will also identify the initiatives that could have the greatest potential to achieve pro-poor results in reducing unemployment, poverty and inequality. Not only will such initiatives have a greater chance of achieving impact and success due to relying on local knowledge, but they will also have legitimacy in the eyes of the local population.

7. Both local government and private sector leaders were completely discredited due to their actions under the previous regimes and new representatives need ways to increase their legitimacy among the local population

After the revolution in Egypt in particular, there were major public calls for the removal of local government leadership due to their corrupt and repressive actions under the previous regimes. This is currently taking place after a court decision to dissolve all Local Councils¹². To bring back confidence in local governance structures, new leaders need to enact initiatives that will show their commitment to a new way of doing things. It is just as important for people to have confidence in their local representatives as in national representatives. People want to feel that local government is there to represent their wishes and act in their interest.

Not only government representatives have been discredited, but also the private sector has. The word 'businessmen' for many has become synonymous with allegations of corruption, monopolistic and even outright criminal behaviour under the previous regimes in Egypt and Tunisia. Just as new government representatives need to find ways to regain the confidence of the local population, the private sector also does. Current popular resentment of businessmen could lead to pressure against policies encouraging private sector led growth (see point 5 above) or even outright hostility or attacks on private property. Private sector representatives need to show that they also are committed to doing things differently, abide by legal requirements and contribute positively to economic development. Such efforts will be needed at the national level but will also need to be complemented by local level processes. National level private sector associations and prominent businessmen are already trying to promote a different image for themselves. For

example, Egyptian telecoms billionaire Naguib Sawiris has founded a new political party that promotes the principles of a civil state, where youth play a major role¹³. At the local level, LED governance structures and processes again offer a vehicle for both local government as well as private sector representatives to show they can play a positive role in their local economies.

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Public participation and accountability in economic decision making can be increased through the LED Strategy development and subsequent evaluation processes. Also the implementation of LED initiatives through a partnership between public, private and civil society actors towards achieving strategy objectives will signal a new way of managing local development. Private sector and civil society actors have a major distrust of public sector representatives due to corruption and harassment under the previous regimes. The LED process gives a chance for the new local government leadership to show that they can act differently and play a positive role in local development. At the same time, private sector representatives can implement a variety of LED initiatives. Examples from other countries include projects led by Chambers of Industry and Commerce or Industrial Zone Boards focusing on matching youth training and employment, attracting investment through territorial marketing, etc.

The way forward

When recommending LED as a suitable development approach (among other policies) at this juncture for Egypt and Tunisia, this is with the realization that it will not be an easy task. Government capacities are low at both national and local levels and there is no experience of participatory decision making or implementation. Also, while the heads of the previous regimes have been removed, even the lowest ranking government employee was used to working in a corrupt and inefficient bureaucracy and it is unreasonable to expect them to change overnight. There is also a major popular mistrust not only of government structures but also of the private sector and it will take time and effort to overcome this. In the meantime, there is likely to be criticism and resistance to many government or private sector led initiatives. At the same time, public expectations of change and the betterment of their conditions are extremely high. People are impatient to see immediate changes to their countries' and their own economic circumstances. They are unlikely to be prepared to wait for the medium to long term outcomes of implementing LED strategies.

What this paper argues, however, is that while knowing that the task facing the new governments in Egypt and Tunisia is by no means easy, LED offers them a way to solve some of the most important economic and local governance problems that their countries face in the medium to long term.

If government representatives in Tunisia and Egypt agree that LED is important in achieving their strategic objectives to improve economic performance, they will need to go through some important steps:

- Firstly, relevant national government ministries need to establish which LED governance models they would like to pursue in their country, which institution will take the lead and where funding will come from.
- Secondly, a national LED programme will need to be designed setting out the specific details of implementation at national and local levels.
- Thirdly, awareness raising and training initiatives on LED will be needed for government, private sector and civil society stakeholders.
- Fourth, public awareness raising through the media will be important to ascertain public opinions and increase legitimacy.

While the road ahead will be long and difficult, establishing effective LED mechanisms from the outset will give new governments in Tunisia and Egypt a major chance of success in achieving pro-poor economic growth and social justice.

Endnotes

¹ Detailed measures in Tunisia include: a) Governance reforms such as reinforcing freedom of association, public access to government information, increasing transparency in public procurement and strengthening government accountability controls; b) Employment and addressing regional disparities including emergency transfers to lagging governorates and improving training and job search programmes; c) Strengthening the capacity of the financial sector by strengthening governance and encouraging the develop-

ment of new instruments for microfinance and venture capital; d) Social sector reform to enhance social service delivery and improve citizen participation in evaluating performance (World Bank 2011).

Detailed measures in Egypt include: a) Governance reforms to limit presidential powers and establish a multi-party democracy through a constitutional amendment and a new law on exercising political rights; b) Increasing accountability through prosecution of officials from the previous regime as well as new measures for public sector

- reform; c) Economic stabilization measures including compensation for businesses damaged in recent events and an emergency fund to invest in the Egyptian Stock Market; d) Social justice measures including increasing government salaries and pensions for the poor, improving the targeting of subsidy schemes, increasing the minimum wage and starting an enterprise youth training incentives scheme (<http://www.egyptiancabinet.gov.eg>).
- ² For more information on the LED approach, see the World Bank's LED Primer (2006)
 - ³ See, for example, IMF's assessment of Egypt's reforms at <http://bit.ly/hIUJYI> and praise for Tunisia's reforms at <http://bit.ly/nzljE4>
 - ⁴ In Egypt the main decline in unemployment was experienced after the reforms of 2004, reducing from 11.2% in 2005 to 8.7% in 2008 (before rising again as a result of the global crisis). In Tunisia, unemployment consistently declined from 16% in 1999 to 14.2% in 2008 (WDI Databank 2011).
 - ⁵ Averaging just over 40% in both countries between 1999-2009 (similar to other countries in the Middle East and North Africa region) but compared to a world average of 60% and lower than every other region of the world.
 - ⁶ World Bank WDI 2011
 - ⁷ 47% in Tunisia in 2000 and 41.5% in Egypt in 2005 (WDI 2011)
 - ⁸ 6% in Tunisia in 2000 and 9% in Egypt in 2005 (ibid)
 - ⁹ For an excellent toolkit on undertaking a Local Economy Assessment, see Cities Alliance (2007).
 - ¹⁰ Egypt statistics from UNDP 2010, Tunisia statistics from <http://bit.ly/pVj1yj>.
 - ¹¹ For example, see Egypt's Minister of Planning and International Cooperation's comments regarding the refusal of a World Bank loan to Egypt due to conditions not appropriate to the national interest (<http://bit.ly/p6YMSg> in Arabic)
 - ¹² For more information, see <http://bbc.in/mOocYn> in Arab
 - ¹³ See <http://bit.ly/q3V8Ri>.

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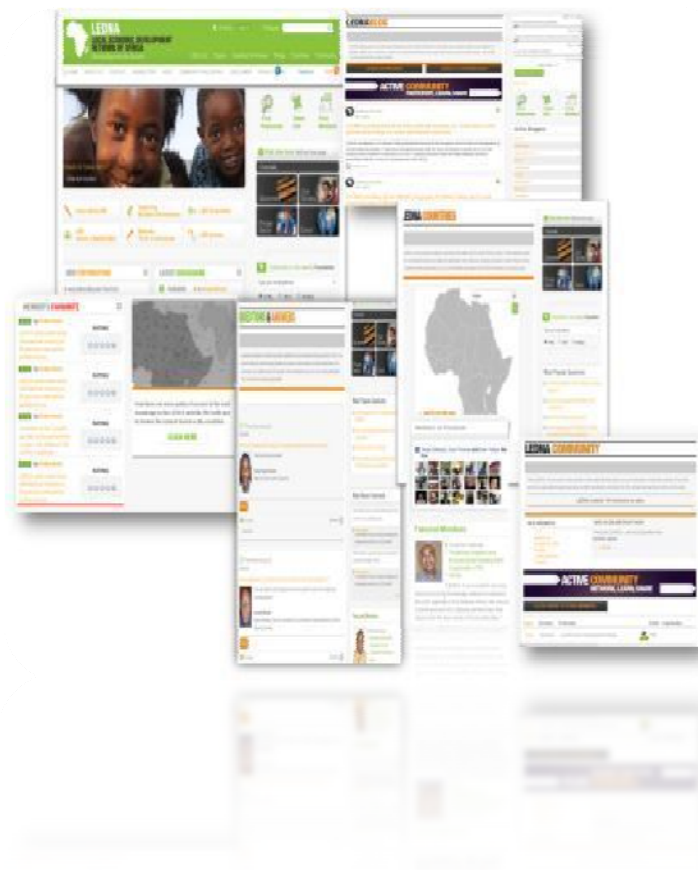
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- 3) Boy showing Egyptian flag in protest crowd

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4) Egyptian farmer on p.3: from *history-link101.net* at <http://bit.ly/nnlB8W>.

5) Urban poverty in Egypt p. 4: from *ericyoungonline.wordpress.com* at <http://bit.ly/r0TKSL>.



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LEDNA KNOWLEDGE BRIEF series seeks to foster direct LED knowledge creation in areas where gaps exist or unfolding practices have yet to be documented. It is an attempt to address the current dearth of LED knowledge in relation to some African countries or key economic sectors/activities peculiar to Africa.

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