

SEKEM Insight

SEKEM's Journal for Culture, Economy, Society and Ecology in Egypt

Editorial

Dear Readers,

over the past 30 years SEKEM's Vocational Training Centre (VTC) has evolved into a serious contender in the provision of professional training programmes in the region where SEKEM is located. It focuses on training qualified professionals in areas of the labour market in which competent experts are urgently needed. The choice of courses available to male and female youngsters in the vicinity range from carpentry to advanced computer technology and installation of photovoltaic systems (SEKEM Insight reported).

In recent weeks, the SEKEM Development Foundation (SDF), which established and runs the centre, has won financial support from the Foundation for Development Cooperation in Baden-Württemberg (SEZ). These funds will now be used to expand and improve the training for agricultural engineers the VTC is already offering. In the future, 4 additional students per year will be able to complete studies at the institution and apply their knowledge to advancing sustainable agriculture in Egypt.

Your Team of Editors

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Training

Expanded Opportunities at VTC

Products

GEPA Peppermint Tea Scores Well

Austria

Events of the Local Association

VTC Expands Agricultural Training With German Help

In the coming months SEKEM's Vocational Training Centre (VTC) will be expanding its training opportunities for agricultural technicians with the help of a German foundation.



In Egypt technical agricultural systems and equipment are subject to enormous material stress. Still, they are indispensable in a country that largely depends on produce cultivated on poor soils. Knowledgeable technicians are urgently needed.

The proper use of modern technology can help in the conservation of the natural resources on which our agriculture depends. That agriculture can, in turn, benefit from advanced technologies if used properly and not only for monetary benefit. This is one of the reasons why SEKEM, aside from aiming to bring employment to as many people as possible in the Egyptian countryside, is also spending a lot of time and effort on the promotion of modern technologies

and is financing related training courses. A modern kind of agriculture should rest on both pillars.

Even today, Egypt remains dependent on a large agricultural sector. 42% of its population live from work in fields directly related to cultivation. However, most people employed in these areas have never received professional training. The results are not only inefficient production methods and damage to

agricultural produce, but also pollution and waste because of unprofessional use of technologies. While soil may get compacted through the (improper) use of bad equipment, energy consumption may be excessive, and natural resources such as water may be wasted. All too often, modern equipment cannot be used in agriculture at all as the knowledge necessary for maintenance and repair is not available.

The financial support of the German Foundation for Development Cooperation in Baden-Württemberg (SEZ) has now enabled SEKEM to improve its existing training programme for agricultural technicians. The training branch on Agricultural Engineering at the Vocational Training Centre (VTC), which trains young people in one of the most sought-after work areas in the country, will also receive a boost through new and better machinery. The three-year training programme is offered through the facility run by the SEKEM Development Foundation includes extensive practical instruction in addition to theoretical training.

The project will not only improve the quality of education, but will also expand existing training capacities. The improvement of practical training facilities will allow for the qualifying of service technicians able to construct, maintain, and repair agricultural machinery. In addition, opportunities for further education courses for other groups will be created, such as technical training courses directed explicitly at small-holding farmers.

Situation in the Region

The area in which the SEKEM Development Foundation (SDF) is active includes the rural Egypt surrounding the original SEKEM farm. It is a particularly impoverished area comprising of 13 individual settlements under very poor living conditions. Usual economic activities include simple retail stores and manufacturing shops, and too a very limited extent small-scale trade. Still, the unemployment rate has increased enormously, furthered by the unstable

political situation of the past 3 years. It currently hovers at around 13%. 25% of the population in this area lives below the poverty line. Young people are particularly affected by this situation. They do not have many viable job prospects and frequently have to make do as day labourers in agriculture or other manual jobs, e.g. in factories. Youth unemployment is particularly high at 77%.

As in many developing and emerging countries, much of the farm work in Egypt is also still done by hand or employing animals. On large farms, some mechanical equipment including tractors is common even today. However, most of it is in bad shape falling often. It is generally accepted that the younger generation will need to acquire the necessary skills to use more advanced equipment profitably. Unfortunately, however, there is a lack of experience in handling such devices, in particular in the proper use, maintenance, and the repair of simple, robust tools. Plus, many traditional and wasteful practices such as flood irrigation must be replaced by resource-conserving methods that protect the soil and its microbial life, such as sprinklers or drip irrigation systems. Again, there is a lack of knowledge and experience in the care of the filters, pumps and pipelines, needed for the operation of such instruments.

Vocational Training at SEKEM

The SDF has trained more than 800 apprentices since the establishment of the Vocational Training Centre in 1997. Admission is based on completion of secondary school (9th grade). The final certificate received by apprentices after 3 years of training is recognized by the State of Egypt. At the VTC, young people from any of the 13 villages that surround SEKEM can learn professions that are actually required by local markets.

For all of its training schemes, educational plans and concepts were developed by VTC staff that make active use of a tight connection between theoretical

teaching and its reinforcement through practical exercises. Thanks to its own factories and plants, learning in SEKEM is always closely connected to work. Such three-year training programmes are offered to apprentices in a number of subject areas including carpentry, mechanical installation, textile production, electrical installation, office management, metal processing, and agricultural technology.

Such practice-oriented education programmes are by no means common in Egypt; vocational training is usually entirely theoretical. Therefore, the SDF aims to build on successes already achieved by the Agricultural Engineering training branch. Today, 8 new apprentices can be trained every year. The new plans call for an expansion to 12. Aside from providing them with a practice-oriented training, the equipment of a professional training workshop shall give them the necessary tools for an education that is close to modern-day requirements in agricultural management. The SDF is also cooperating with the local farmers' association that supports small-holding farmers in the acquisition and sharing of equipment, and also assists them in obtaining the necessary know-how to convert to organic farming.

Agriculture: Only Source of Income

In a region as the one in which SEKEM is located, employment in agriculture is often the only source of income. Significant development can be achieved by qualitative advancements in agricultural production furthered by agro-technologies. Practical agronomic training is therefore an essential prerequisite for the mechanization of agriculture. Since 1983, the German Association for the promotion of Cultural Development in Egypt e.V. together with the SDF has been committed to the provision of such training. Their goal is to improve the welfare of all Egyptians through education in order to empower them to put all of their social, intellectual and practical skills to good use.

SEKEM YOU CAN VISIT SEKEM YOURSELF:
WWW.SEKEM-REISEN.DE

*Bijan Kafi with material from the
SEKEM Friends Germany*

Feinste KÖSTBARKEITEN



Genuss mit gutem Gewissen.

Die neuen Produkte von SEKEM verbinden Genuss mit nachhaltiger Erzeugung und sozialem Engagement. Demeter-Datteln aus dem SEKEM-Anbauprojekt sind die Grundlage für unsere feinen Köstlichkeiten. Entdecken Sie edles Dattelkonfekt, Dattelcreme oder Dattelsirup – exklusive Spezialitäten in Demeter-Qualität.



SEKEM

Impressions from SEKEM



Excellent grades for an organic product: the GEPA-made “organic & fair peppermint tea” received an excellent “very good” rating in the November issue of the German journal “ÖKO-TEST”. The tea is one of the seven best of the 23 herbal teas tested. All of the winners were organic products. Conventional herbal teas, however, scored “poor” or even “unsatisfactory” numerous times, usually due to significantly elevated residue levels.

Plus, the GEPA mint tea scored “very good” also in the various sub-categories of the general test. Its main ingredient is produced and harvested by hand by the many GEPA trading partners that cooperate with small-holding farmers that grow only organic herbs. They also sort and dry the herbs by hand. One of these is SEKEM. Its herbs are traditionally grown in the Nile Delta. Bio-dynamic farming, as practiced by SEKEM, ensures the sustainability of the local ecosystems, improves soil fertility, and slows desertification. It also creates additional revenue streams. Farmers use the Fairtrade premium they receive for organising literacy courses, building sanitary installations, and purchasing computer equipment, among others.

New „Austria Scholarships“ Available to Heliopolis University



One of the students funded by the Austrian fund

Last year, the SEKEM Friends of Austria and several other national associations have begun to financially support students in need at the Heliopolis University. Following an appeal, many donations have reached the association and are still being collected. They will soon allow several students to come to Graz (Austria) for practice periods within their study programmes.

The Board of Directors of the association would like to thank all its donors for the pledged support, which will also be used towards the funding of grants in the coming year. Among the sponsors is also the Deputy Mayor of the City of Graz, Dr. Martina Schröck, who is responsible for science and women's issues in the city senate, and who has generously supported this project aimed specifically at young Egyptian women. The help of the many donors supporting the association have inspired its Board of Directors to trust that the group will succeed in collecting the total amount of € 7.000,- for the coming year.

The mayor of the city of Graz, Mag. Siegfried Nagl, also supports the Heliopolis University. Through his contribution, two students from Egypt will be able to complete internships at the Technical University of Graz.

SEKEM Austria

! More information:
<http://www.SEKEMoesterreich.at/index.php/steuerbeguenstigte-spendenmoeglichkeit>

Dr. Mouhanad Khorchide Speaks in Graz on Islam



Dr. Mouhanad Khorchide

To SEKEM and her friends in Austria as well as in other countries, the furthering of interreligious dialogue has always been a particular concern. Therefore, the Board of the Austrian support association was especially pleased when it succeeded in bringing the known scholar of Islamic religious pedagogy, Dr. Mouhanad Khorchide to the Karl-Franzens-University Graz (Austria) for a lecture. The lecture on "Islam Means Mercy" proved to be extremely popular and gave rise to long discussions at the event. The organizers wish to thank the Training Centre for Human Rights (ETC) of the Karl-Franzens-University Graz for making the opening words as well as the lecture itself available in full as a podcast including images.

The book "Islam Means Mercy", which was published in the German Herder-Verlag, is already available in its 2nd edition. It is also available for purchase in Graz at the "OASIS" bookstore which supports SEKEM Austria, among other initiatives, through parts of their proceeds. Recently, the book has also been made available as an e-book in the English language. It is available through major e-book outlets. The Board of SEKEM Austria hopes to be able to expand working relations with Dr. Mouhanad Khorchide in the future.

SEKEM Austria

! More information:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eXgZhXI9obc>

Lecture with Dr. Ibrahim Abouleish Now Available on DVD

The recording of Dr. Ibrahim Abouleish's lecture „Art and Sustainable Development“, which he held in Graz on 23 May 2014, is now available on DVD. The DVD contains the complete recording of the welcome ceremony that SEKEM Austria had organised jointly with the University of Arts on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of SEKEM Austria.

Not only the speech of Dr. Ibrahim Abouleish on the relationship between art and sustainable development is included on the DVD. It also contains the introductory speeches and the complete music program. In addition, the DVD contains photos of the event, including the ceremony and reception, plus a 20-page illustrated booklet.

The DVD can be ordered by placing a donation of at least 25 € to the financing of the scholarship project for the benefit of Heliopolis University (see left column). More information is available on the website of SEKEM Austria.

SEKEM Austria

! More information:
<http://www.SEKEMoesterreich.at/index.php/steuerbeguenstigte-spendenmoeglichkeit>



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Masthead:
 The editors of SEKEM Insight wish to thank all contributors to this issue.

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