

# SEKEM

## Gender Strategy for a Balanced Society

  
Henry Abouleish

  
Konstanze Abouleish

SEKEM Holding for Investments S.A.E.

Version 01-08.15

## Introduction

The SEKEM group sets the framework of values guiding all operations concerning its commitments regarding legal compliance, business ethics, anti-corruption, labor standards, human rights and environmental responsibility in its code of conduct and is working for a sustainable development where every human being can unfold his or her individual potential. These principles are also applied in SEKEMs educational institutions under the umbrella of the SEKEM Development Foundation (SDF) and in the Heliopolis University (HU), where students are educated for an understanding of sustainable development and the development of ethical values.

SEKEM as a community is well aware of the fact that women and men in Egypt are facing different challenges, whereby especially women are struggling to find a balance between work and family life because of traditional family roles and in particular economic dependence. Therefore, SEKEM supports women for a balanced society where men and women have the same chances to make their individual choices concerning their education, work and lifestyle.

### 1. Our Vision

The basis for the sustainable development towards a balanced society is equality between citizens and first and foremost the equality between women and men. International studies show that including women in a country's workforce is not only essential for the development of a balanced society, but also for economic growth. Since women in Egypt are not supported to gain economic and social independence – especially in rural areas, where many of our employees come from - we developed a gender strategy with guidelines how to support women in education and at work and thereby secure their human rights and strengthen their societal role towards a gender balance in the Egyptian society. Especially because they are still mainly responsible for the upbringing of children in Egypt it is of utmost importance that they gain experiences in work and public life to be able to raise their children to become independent individuals and responsible citizens.

### 2. Our values:

- On an individual level, everyone needs partnerships and support with and through others, their families and communities, as much do especially women need the sovereignty over their lives and the right to make their individual choices. (balance between partnership and sovereignty)
- In their community's women play an integral role to maintain Egyptian traditions and values especially when it comes to mutual support and care between families and neighbors. Nevertheless, we support women to extend their margins from their homes and local communities to public and working life. (balance between expansion conservation)
- In social life women are well integrated mainly by fulfilling duties as housewives and mothers. These roles are appreciated by their families and by society as a whole, but usually these women are depending financially on the good will of others. Despite the appreciation of their traditional social roles women are lacking integration in public and working life (only 23 - 24% of women in Egypt are economically active). Therefore, we support women in gaining more self-confidence to reach an equal position to men in public life. (balance between self-assertion and integration)
- Any successful society is based on people cooperating with each other. Therefore, especially women and men, beginning in the smallest societal entity, which is the family, should cooperate with mutual respect and care for each other and their families. In working life men and women should cooperate as equal partners in order to increase the national economy's competitiveness, which needs them both, as its male and female workforce. (balance between cooperation and competition).

### **3. Our Mission:**

#### Equality in Education

##### at the SEKEM schools...

- We support boys and girls alike to develop their individual skills and personality in the SEKEM School. As boys are taking handicraft classes, girls learn to work with for example wood. There is no differentiation between boys' and girls' activities – everyone is doing everything.
- We encourage - inspired by the German concept of a girls' day - especially girls to occupy professions which are traditionally occupied by men (carpentry, electrical engineering, gas and water installation, etc.) by training them in our vocational training center (VTC). Especially because female plumbers and electricians could solve the problem of men not being allowed to enter houses in daytime, when most housewives are alone.
- We introduce the concept of gender equality in secondary school to all students of the SEKEM School by an informative/interactive session and different projects to inspire them to reflect about gender roles in a group process.

##### At the University for Sustainable Development...

- We encourage all students at Heliopolis University for Sustainable Development (HU) to think and discuss about the role of women and men in society as they all attend a session about gender equality in the frame of the compulsory course for sustainable development in their first year at university. This session is promoting the concept of gender equality as a basic value for a balanced society.
- We support the activities of the students' club (Balance Club) on campus, which is raising awareness about the importance of gender equality and supporting female students especially concerning self-assertiveness, career development, soft skills, etc.
- We invite successful women or organizations for women's rights on a regular basis to the university's forum to shed more light on the important role socially and economically active women play in the Egyptian society, because we are aware that young Egyptian women are lacking role models to motivate them for achievements in their professional life.

#### Equality in Work

- We allow all our female and male employees up to one consecutive month unpaid leave for marriage preparations/honeymoon additional to their annual leave.
- We comply with the Egyptian Labor Law by allowing every female employee, who worked with us at least six months, a paid maternity leave of three months as we are guaranteeing the two additional daily breaks of half an hour each for childcare in the first two years after childbirth. This right can be claimed twice if the mother is employed constantly by SEKEM.
- We support our employees by paying a part of the school fees for children attending the SEKEM schools and there is a baby class for the children of working mothers.
- We believe that fathers' care and attention is of utmost importance for a child, therefore we allow fathers up to one-month unpaid parental leave within the first year after the birth of a child to support their wives and spend quality time with their child/children. This right can be claimed twice.

- We are offering diverse work arrangements for women, wherever possible, for example by facilitating reduced/flexible working hours, home office, part-time work and job sharing to encourage them to keep their jobs while enabling them to meet the responsibilities for their families.
- We are aiming to reach a portion of 50% female employees in the workforce in all SEKEM companies on the long run, by measures like including the commitment of managers to recruit a certain percentage of women as a condition for their annual bonuses.

#### Equality in Personal Life

- We are clearly supporting a woman's free choice to decide about her employment after marriage by encouraging her to stay in the company.
- We provide female role models within SEKEM by publishing and promoting female success stories through corporate communications and company events.
- We raise awareness and initiate a dialogue about the issue of women and work among male employees as well to gradually convince them that experiences in working and public life is important for every human being's personal development – for women as much as for men.

Most of all human societies worldwide are male-dominated to a certain degree and therefore out of balance.

This is the reason why SEKEM believes in gender equality as a necessity for a sustainable development towards a balanced society and tries to support women in all conscience and actively in all its components by the above mentioned principles and measures.

After the gender strategy came into effect, SEKEM with all its companies and (related) educational institutions will consequently develop strategies and tools for implementation.