

# SEKEM *Insight*

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

## Editorial

Dear Readers,

many of those who have visited Egypt early during the last decade will likely remember the days when gasoline was cheaper than bottled water. Since then, much has changed. The government has gradually reduced subsidies on fossil fuels. But social problems have grown in tandem in many places, not just Cairo. Many people such as Cairo's taxi drivers depend on the fuel for more than just a comfortable journey from A to B.

SEKEM has been trying to reduce its companies' dependence on fossil fuels and to increase the share of renewable energies it consumes as well as produces for a long time. At the same time we want to set an example of how things might work differently in a "greener" world. Egypt lacks the „know how“ that just is not so easily available in a country where relatively cheap oil is still relatively plentiful. The first Solar Thermal Conference, held these days at the Heliopolis University represents a further step on the road to the goal of a more sustainable energy supply in Egypt. You will read about it in this issue.

## Your Team of Editors

Find SEKEM also on the Internet at:



### Solar Energy

First Conference  
in Egypt

### Coworker Circles

Why People Meet  
at SEKEM

### Deutsche Welle

Contribution by Dr.  
Ibrahim Abouleish

## First Solar Thermal Conference at the Heliopolis University

International experts from many fields discuss Egypt's solar future  
at the first event of its kind at the Heliopolis University.



*Horst Striessnig explaining the Mediterraneo solar thermal collector, which was especially designed for desert environments.*

On June 11th, a number of high-profile speakers and participants from the public and private sector came together at SEKEM's new independent education institution, the Heliopolis University, to discuss Egypt's solar energy future.

After a musical introduction on the piano by an invited artist, Dr. Ibrahim Abouleish opened the solar thermal energy conference, explaining the

four crucial aspects of truly sustainable development: balance of economy, ecology, culture and politics.

The first speaker, Mrs. Giovanna Ceglie (UNIDO representative) introduced her organisation's goals, sparking a vibrant discussion about Egypt transitioning from a fossil into a renewable energy age.

Prof. Adel Khalil (Cairo University) enlightened the audience about



Conference participants after the solar thermal energy demo plant at SEKEM's main farm.

Egypt's solar energy potential, emphasizing the need for establishing a culture of quality in education and research in Egypt.

The next speaker, Mrs. Birgit Birnstingl from Austria, (CEO of SEKEM Energy) presented SEKEM's new solar thermal demonstration plant which is situated at the main farm near Belbeis, 50km outside of Cairo. It was built with support by the ADA (Austrian Development Agency). The generous funding made it possible for not only SEKEM but Egypt as such making a big leap forward in demonstrating that this kind of energy supply is particularly viable in a sun-rich environment like Egypt.

After these inspiring presentations, speakers and participants had a chance to share ideas over coffee and fresh organic fruit, kindly sponsored by the UNIDO, before spreading into two sessions according to their interests.

In session A Mohamed Salah El Sobki (Cairo University) elaborated on the factors influencing RE development in Egypt and presented possible scenarios for integrating solar thermal into conventional thermal power stations.

The following speaker Ashraf Kraidy (RCREEE – the Regional Centre for Renewable Energy & Energy Efficiency) introduced SHAMCI (Solar Heater Arab Mark & Certification Initiative) and stressed the importance of quality criteria in order to re-establish consumer trust in SHW systems.

The last speaker in session A, Jürgen Granditz (BFI Austria) presented the concept of the BFI's vocational training programs. Having qualified installers, welders, electricians and plumbers is crucial for building a high-quality solar energy market in Egypt.

In Session B Horst Striessnig and Werner Pink (Pink Storage Technologies) presented a best practice solar energy storage solution which they designed and implemented at SEKEM's main farm.

Khaled Gasser (SEDA - Solar Energy Development Association) gave an insight into his organisation's activities which include political lobbying, capacity building and awareness raising.

The final speaker in session A, Axel Ceglie discussed finance options for solar energy systems in Egypt for example in the field of agriculture, taking into account technical issues such as maintenance and fluctuating solar radiation.

After a networking lunch participants took the opportunity to visit SEKEM Energy's solar thermal demonstration system, which provides hot water for industrial purposes, for the main SEKEM farm near Belbeis. The field trip also included a short tour of the farm and its companies, vocational training centre (VTC), schools and medical centre.

Solar energy experts Werner, Horst and Birgit explained the solar energy system components to the participants, who showed a keen interest, closely inspecting the whole system and asking many intelligent questions.

Overall it was a fruitful and informative day for the conference participants, speakers and organisers and of course a perfect opportunity for networking and discovering synergies for future projects and collaborations.

Kimberley Ellis

! More information:  
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## Video Documentation of German SEKEM Events Available Online



**Helmy Abouleish**  
SEKEM-Geschäftsführer

Helmy Abouleish speaks at the SEKEM Day 2012, the video documentation of which is now available online.

On 20 April 2013 of this year the annual SEKEM Day was held in Stuttgart, Germany. Several months earlier, co-workers from the German SEKEM support association had also contributed to designing the 2013 Stuttgart „Cairo Days“. Friends of the European SEKEM support groups have now produced three videos of the events and made these publicly available on YouTube (in German).

All videos are available on the channel of the SEKEM Initiative at the address below. The video for the SEKEM Day 2012 contains a summary of the event and an interview with Helmy Abouleish. The video for the Stuttgart „Cairo Days“ contains interviews with participants and speakers and vividly summarizes the lively event that attracted a great number of visitors.

The German SEKEM support group has also made available Helmy Abouleish's speech on innovation at the Heliopolis University from the SEKEM Day 2013. All film clips are available at <http://www.youtube.com/SEKEMInitiative>.

Bijan Kafi

! More information:  
• <http://www.youtube.com/SEKEMInitiative>



## Why People Meet in Circles at the SEKEM Initiative

At SEKEM, co-workers, pupils, and other members of the community meet in circles every morning to begin the day together. This article explains why they do so.

**S**EKEM is a multicultural society that encompasses a number of nationalities. Its aim is, among others, to improve the exchange of experience and the flow of knowledge needed to face the challenges of today's world with more sustainable solutions that address all of man's needs for a dignified life. SEKEM aims to never focus on the economic dimension alone. These solutions are aimed at making an active contribution to improving the lives of individuals, their communities, and the environment in the long-term and in a future-oriented manner.

SEKEM intends to promote this sustainable development in a number of different areas. These include scientific, economic, social and cultural contexts and the balance between all of them. For example, SEKEM attempts to directly address the cultural and social lives of SEKEM co-workers through training and other advancement programs, which are co-designed by the members of the community itself. These programmes include the organization of major conferences.

The famous morning circles and the weekly meeting on every Monday evening have, from the very beginning, been some of the key elements of this approach. Especially the morning circles stand out to each visitor who visits the main SEKEM farm, the Cairo-based Heliopolis University, or the initiative's administration on the

outskirts of Cairo. These circles are a part of SEKEM's programmes for community advancement and one of the prime examples of what new co-workers often find most startling at first and then quickly grow very fond of.

The morning circle that is actually a number of circles large and small taking place at the same time in multiple places is primarily an instrument to facilitate mutual awareness through face-to-face encounters. Here, co-workers are given the opportunity to give a brief report on their work and to point out what they have planned for the day. Central to the event is the awareness of each other of all co-workers at a specific facility or in a given department. It helps to form a sense of community and an experience of belonging. It also promotes good communication and clear daily structure. So do the weekly staff meetings: every week the "Monday forum" also provides a chance to discuss issues co-workers might have and listen to their experiences. Cultural, scientific, historical, and artistic presentations by writers and artists are also held here.

SEKEM values its co-workers, strives to form a long-term good relationship with them, and to optimally meet their needs. The aim is to help build a community in which everyone can be proud of each other.

*Fatma Sami*

## Organic Halal Meat Now Available in The Netherlands

**W**hen I met Dr. Abouleish for the first time seven years ago, he drew my attention to verses of the Quran, which emphasize the importance of human respectfulness towards the holy nature and for its ecological balance. Here it is said, among other things, in the Sura ar-Rahman 5-8: „The sun and the moon follow premeditated courses. The herbs and the trees bow down in adoration. He has raised high the firmament, and He has set the balance so you do not transgress.”

From this point on, I have tried to promote the idea among Muslims in the Netherlands that reducing their carbon footprint should be part of their Islamic way of life. Although all Muslims know these verses, many do not understand their meaning in this sense. However, when it comes to meat they easily agree that large-scale factory farming does not comply with the rules of „halal“ (Arabic for „what is allowed“), a term that refers to ritually slaughtered meat.

Since there are no Islamic butchers in the Netherlands that dared to deliver organic meat in „halal quality“, I decided to work with an organic butcher myself and start an Internet sale for organic halal meat, herbs, and dates from SEKEM as a start. All these products are now available at [www.fitrahfood.nl](http://www.fitrahfood.nl), sold under the name of „Fitrah Food“.

*Hendrik Jan Bakker*



## Impressions from SEKEM



**T**he Deutsche Welle Global Media Forum is a congress with international reach. Having steadily grown since its launch in 2008, more than 2,000 people from 115 nations attended the most recent conference in June 2012. The forum draws media representatives from around the world and people from the fields of politics, culture, business, development cooperation and academia. Together they discuss and design approaches to meeting the challenges of globalization in which the media play a central role. Many organizations and institutions are involved in the panel discussions, workshops, interactive presentations and exhibitions. The venue is the World Conference Center in Bonn, directly adjacent to Deutsche Welle's broadcasting center.

This year Dr. Ibrahim Abouleish had been invited to discuss with other participants in the plenary the issue of "Changing Economic Values - Green Economies, CSR and Human Rights". The session is now available as an audio recording (Dr. Abouleish at 0:43, 0:55 and 1:15) at the following link: <https://soundcloud.com/dwgmf> and <https://soundcloud.com/dwgmf/plenary-session-changing>.

## SEKEM Condemns 2013 “World Food Prize” Choice

The SEKEM Initiative has reacted with disbelief to the announcement that in 2013 three multinational companies shall receive the “World Food Prize”, a group that includes Monsanto, a leading producer of genetically modified organisms (GMO). The SEKEM Initiative has signed and fully supports the statement of the global NGO’s “World Future Council” and of the “Right Livelihood Award Foundation” (“Alternative Nobel Prize”) that has been published today in “The Huffington Post”: “In honouring the seed biotechnology industry, this year’s World Food Prize — often considered the Nobel Prize for food and agriculture — betrays the award’s own mandate to emphasize “the importance of a nutritious and sustainable food supply for all people.”

In the view of SEKEM, the decision to honour Monsanto with the “World Food Prize 2013” also ignores the will of many people stepping up against the commercialisation of agriculture, the disenfranchising of farmers, and the cultivation of GMO’s. “Recognizing a GMO-company with an important international prize while the majority of consumers in the EU have just openly rejected GMO’s is a very questionable step”, says Helmy Abouleish, CEO of the SEKEM Group of companies. “In the industrialised countries, we throw away about 30% of the food we purchase. Food shortages have mostly political causes. We do not need GMO’s to solve them.”

SEKEM has been working for an agriculture in harmony with nature for 35 years and is convinced that organic farming remains the only way to feed the world without irreparably damaging our natural environment.

Source: SEKEM

! More information:  
• <http://www.worldfoodprize.org>

## Demeter Awards „Land- WirtschaftKultur-Preis“

It is already a good tradition: Demeter, the umbrella organization of the biodynamic agricultural movement, annually awards the „LandWirtschaft-Kultur-Preis“ on to outstanding Demeter producers. This year, two exceptional farms will be honoured: the nursery Sannmann outside Hamburg and Tennental in Baden-Wuerttemberg, both in Germany. Both show that voluntary commitment to sociocultural, quality and environmental issues can be a viable addition to the production of valuable food following an approach similar to that of SEKEM.

When Thomas Sannmann took over the company from his father in 1986, he transitioned its business just as determinedly as carefully into a new era. Instead of producing just a few high-yielding vegetables the young father intended to cultivate many different vegetables in Demeter quality. This conversion of vegetable gardening to biodynamic cultivation took several years to complete. 27 years after the initial spark Sannmann manages 33 dedicated employees working nearly 50 acres of land and cultivating more than 40 kinds of vegetables, herbs and salad specialties.

The Tennental village community encompasses a nonprofit association including a social-therapeutic facility with workshops for people with special needs. On the biodynamic grounds close to Munich, people with different levels of disabilities work closely together. Since 1990 they have been producing healthy Demeter food for the people all around in the region. At Tennental, anthroposophically motivated curative education and inspiration seamlessly come together with agricultural culture.

Source: Demeter

! More information:  
• <http://www.sannmann.com>  
• <http://www.tennental.de>


## GLS Bank Europe’s „Most Sustainable Bank of the Year“

As part of the International Sustainable Finance Conference 2013, GLS Bank, a long-term partner of SEKEM, was honoured with the „Sustainable Bank of the Year“ award for its leadership in quality and innovation in the field of sustainable banking. The GLS Bank, the roll of honour states, demonstrates in an exemplary way how social and environmental responsibility can be viably combined with business success. It does so well in the framework of its core business as well as in its employee policy and in terms of corporate ecology, the jury stated.

“The GLS Bank is the first universal social-ecological bank in the world and has a 39-year experience”, confirms Thomas Jorberg, GLS Bank’s CEO. “Our high transparency and sustainability standards have continuously developed. Thus, our approach has also proven economical and in gathered appeal particularly in recent years. We greatly enjoy that our work has been acknowledged by the award.”

Source: GLS Bank

! More information:  
• <http://www.gls-bank.de>



**SEKEM**

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

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