

# SEKEM Insight

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

## Editorial

### Dear Readers,

in 2012 SEKEM together with the German Society for International Cooperation (GIZ) had laid the first foundations for the creation of a work environment that reflects the specific social and cultural conditions of the lives of both men and women in Egypt. At that time, staff at SEKEM's company Naturetex had closely examined its value chain with the help of its German partners. The managers of the project wished to better understand the challenges women face in the workplace in Egypt and how their needs for permanent gainful employment can be better fulfilled.

The beginning of 2014 then saw the launch of a new, follow-up project with the GIZ which aimed to take concrete measures towards improving the situation and examining the eventual results of the interventions. The German development consultant Anna Kölling is in charge of the project and in this issue reported on the first results on the way to creating truly equal working conditions and appropriate personal development opportunities.

### Your Team of Editors

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#### Women at Work

Special Support  
at Naturetex

#### SEKEM School

New Bamboo Flutes  
for the Pupils

#### RLA Conference

Laureates Appeal  
to African Union

## Empowering Women for a Balanced Society in Egypt

The development consultant Anna Kölling has been supporting SEKEM's Naturetex in the creation of a work environment better suited to young women since the beginning of the year. She reports on the project's goals.



Knowing what's available: Employees of Naturetex create a public board that informs about available education courses.

A new cooperation between SEKEM and the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) started at the beginning of 2014 on the SEKEM Farm. Focusing on measures to increase girls' and women's rights at the working place I am newly deployed by GIZ as a development advisor working closely with SEKEM in its different components.

The balance between women and men is the cornerstone for a balanced

society. Therefore, SEKEM was always fully aware that girls and women need special support due to their disadvantaged position in Egyptian society, especially in terms of economic opportunities and independence. SEKEM always supported women at work and provided them with women-friendly workplaces either within its companies or educational institutions.

To deepen existing efforts SEKEM started an initiative to foster women's



All together: Anna Kölling, who leads the project for the GIZ, with a co-worker at Naturetex.

rights in their working life in early 2012 in cooperation with the GIZ program EconoWin (Economic Integration of women in the MENA region). The entry point for the intervention was NatureTex, SEKEM's company for organic cotton textiles and toys, where a Gender Sensitive Value Chain Analysis (GSVCA) was conducted in cooperation with staff members from EconoWin, NatureTex and the SEKEM Development Foundation. International expertise came in from the globally operating company Mesopartner, well-known for its experiences in participative value chain development processes. Several workshops, interviews and meetings took place with different stakeholders like farmers, female and male employees in NatureTex, external workshop owners, retailers and marketing/sales experts in order to find out which obstacles girls and women are facing in the different sections of the value chain.

## Women's Rights at Naturetex

As a result of the GSVCA NatureTex and EconoWin agreed on career development and capacity building, awareness raising about the importance of work in a woman's life, the development of the external workshops, which mainly employ women and a marketing strategy

as focal points of their cooperation. Until the end of 2013 several activities have been undertaken like trainings for NatureTex employees, courses for additional skills like computer, alphabetization and languages as well as measures to increase the motivation of female staff members by awareness raising sessions with a consultant from GIZ.

## Capacity Building, Sensitising, Improved Support

It became obvious that a person with expertise in gender issues was needed who could dedicate him/herself to the project on a daily basis to further develop sustainable structures within SEKEM to empower women in their professional life. As a result, I am now working as a development advisor with SEKEM and have started to cooperate with all stakeholders with the overall goal to decrease the turnover of female employees in NatureTex and get more women into employment. In my first weeks I had extensive conversations with the female employees to understand their professional situation. Almost all of them told me that they want to continue work after

marriage, but their future husbands and/or their families are opposing this idea. I found out as well, that many of the girls didn't know about the courses for additional skills and other activities which the company is already offering. Therefore, the first step was establishing an information board which was put in a place which girls are usually using in their break times. Also the men were encouraged to make an information board, but as expected it took them a couple of weeks longer than the girls who were highly motivated.

Since it is equally important to sensitize men about the importance of work in a woman's life, we started film screenings with short films from the ANA HUNNA media campaign of EconoWin, which are all focusing on women at work in four different Arab countries. The screenings were followed by a discussion with male and female employees about how important work is for a woman, not only for bread winning but also for the development of one's personality. I am quite sure that women and men alike will have left these discussions with new ideas, maybe thinking differently about the issue.

## Employment Gives Strength and Self-Confidence

Beside these awareness raising sessions we are motivating women to further develop their skills. We will also extend capacity building measures within SEKEM in the future. Plus, part of my task is the establishment of outreach activities to the communities close to SEKEM by linking the external workshops with NatureTex and encourage women to open new businesses.

During my two-year employment I hope to be able to stimulate women from rural areas to take their chances and achieve more, and to motivate them to appreciate work as an important value in their lives. It provides them with self-confidence and determination.

Anna Kölling

Anna Kölling, M. A. works for ECONOWIN and is based in Cairo. Her interests are with interculturality, religion and gender roles.

SEKEM

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WWW.SEKEM-REISEN.DE  
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! More information:  
• <http://econowin.org>  
• <http://ana-hunna.org/>



## Bamboo Flutes Project Seeks Successor for SEKEM School

Each year, Karin Posthumus is travelling to SEKEM to supply the local school with the necessary utensils for varied music lessons. Now a successor is sought by the Dutch SEKEM Friends.



*The children at the SEKEM School greatly enjoy the possibility to use new instruments in class.*

This year, Karin Posthumus from the Netherlands has been travelling to SEKEM already for the 14<sup>th</sup> time to manufacture bamboo flutes together with the teachers of SEKEM School and to assist them during their first steps in using these instruments in dedicated musical lessons.

Mrs. Posthumus engagement has a long history. Karin Posthumus had originally got the idea to support SEKEM's musical teaching during a journey through Egypt. Not long after that trip, Mieke van Asbeck, initiator of the Dutch SEKEM circle of friends, approached

her with the question if she wanted to introduce the use of bamboo flutes to SEKEM's school teachers and instruct them in their use. Thus, in 2004, Posthumus travelled to Egypt for the first time and then started this long-standing project with SEKEM.

### Hand-Made Flutes for the SEKEM School

In addition to the students, the School teachers also had to take their time of getting used to the new instruments as well as the new subject on the

curriculum. Over the years, the collaboration between Karin Posthumus and them intensified, however, and the lessons using the bamboo flutes has been an integral part of the teaching plans ever since.

Even before the Egyptian summer holidays come to an end every year, Karin Posthumus manufactures new flutes together with the teachers and works with them to create new lesson materials. When school starts, Mrs. Posthumus is present in flute lessons for a while to directly help the teachers. This way, they can witness first-hand how the lessons are supposed to be taught and receive the necessary practical support. In addition, Mrs. Posthumus advises the teachers after school by providing them with valuable feedback on their own teaching styles. She lives in SEKEM for 3 to 4 weeks every year, sometimes two times a year.

Musical instruction is largely absent from Egyptian governmental plans for teacher training. It is thanks to the initiative of Mrs. Posthumus, that choir lessons also feature prominently on the SEKEM School's teaching plans. Support by the Dutch SEKEM circle of friends will remain necessary for the foreseeable future, though, because the training of new teachers requires their ongoing training.

### A Successor for Karin Posthumus?

However, Karin Posthumus is now considering transferring her engagement to a successor due to her age. The Dutch friends would be glad if someone could be found who would visit SEKEM ideally as a music teacher for 9 months a year. Fortunately, an intern at SEKEM will continue her work for a while. Interested parties may contact the friends at <http://www.SEKEMvrienden.nl>.

*Dick Blokker, Karin Posthumus*

## 30-Year Anniversary of German SEKEM Friends Demonstrates Success of Cultural Cooperation

To mark the 30th anniversary of SEKEM's support association in Germany, a large number of the local friends of SEKEM celebrated the initiative's work at the Liederhalle Stuttgart on 17 May 2014. Here and for the first time, participants were offered a rare opportunity to gain insights into the work of the Egyptian eurythmy ensemble and its training in the country. The Egyptian eurythmy training is among the many cultural and social projects in SEKEM that could be supported with the support of German and European donors in recent years.

Several poems in the Arabic language were spoken by two Egyptian narrators. They had been trained by the German Dorothea Walter, who has been supporting SEKEM personally for many years. She also provided participants of the event with the necessary background on Arabic poetry throughout the entire programme. In a clear and concise way, she succeeded in conveying many insight into the richness of the Arab language and its manifold artistic expressions through short summaries of the pieces performed on stage. Musically, Sherif Moustafa accompanied the ensemble.

### Great Force of Expression

The performances itself were particularly impressive in terms of the great force with which the ensemble members expressed their artistic understanding of the matter through their mobility, the wide dynamic range of their physical performance, and the harmonious interaction. This proved to be a surprise for many participants, as the practical experience by the individual artists ranged from one to twelve years. That such a tremendous difference in experience could be brought into such harmony on stage testified to the teaching skills of the two eurythmy instructors



*The SEKEM Eurythmy Ensemble under the guidance of Martina Dinkel and Christoph Graf.*

Martina Dinkel and Christoph Graf, who were also present at the event.

The model of eurythmy training in Egypt is itself a "one-of-a-kind" project. The students have the ability to actually work in addition to their training, both at the eurythmy school in SEKEM and inside SEKEM companies, partly in eurythmy therapy with students, and even at the Heliopolis University with its own students.

### Visible Results of International Cultural Cooperation

The SEKEM choir supported the Stuttgart performance under the direction of Konstanze Abouleish. The exceptionally strong applause was an audible sign of the gratitude of the audience. It thanked the performers not only for the „visible“ performance, but also the „invisible“, organisational one by Martina

Dinkel and all the assistants in the background, which have made this trip to Germany possible. Particularly noteworthy is the cooperation with five students of the Youth Seminar Stuttgart under the direction of Dietlinde Hattori. With them, the poem „God is the Orient, God is the Occident“ was rehearsed and performed in Arabic and German. The seminarians at the institute come from Korea, Japan and Germany, thus through the eurythmy performance, the Middle East truly met the Far East.

In this part of the program, the participants also worked on poems of Khalil Gibran and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe in Arabic translation. Adonis added a special accent to the selection as a contemporary poet, and the two French and Arab composers Erik Satie and Gamal Abdelrahiem gave the performances a further multicultural colour.

*Sandra Bloch, Martina Dinkel*



## RLA-Laureates Call on African Union Governments to Implement Ecological Organic Agriculture in Africa

A group of eleven award-winning experts working across Africa has appealed to governments of the African Union to develop ecological organic agriculture on the continent. The laureates of the Right Livelihood Award, often referred to as the “Alternative Nobel Prize”, who met in Cairo for a 3-day conference, signed a joint appeal calling on the African Union Commission and its NEPAD Planning and Coordinating Agency (NPCA), to implement their road-map for Ecological Organic Agriculture in Africa.

With regard to the latest findings of the 2014 IPCC report and to the “grave consequences for food security in Africa,” they also called on governments to implement the Maputo Declaration on Agriculture and Food Security and invest 10 per cent of national budgets into ecological organic agriculture including research and development, job creation and rural development. The UN has declared 2014 the International Year of Family Farming.

“We are worried that international corporations are working with the government to cultivate large areas of land for agribusiness. The threat is already at our door”, said Nomewende Joël Ouedraogo of the Fédération Naam in Burkina Faso.

Signatories to the appeal are recipients of the Right Livelihood Award working across Africa: renowned Nigerian environmentalist Nnimmo Bassey, President of the Chadian Association for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights, Jacqueline Moudeina, Representative of the First People of the Kalahari, Jumanda Gakelebene, Executive Director of Federation Naam in Burkina Faso, Joel Ouedraogo, Dr Ibrahim Abouleish, founder of the biodynamic farm SEKEM in Egypt, Helmy Abouleish, SEKEM's Managing Director, Hans R. Herren, agronomist and entomologist from Switzerland, Matron Sr.



Participants of the first regional conference for the laureates of the „Right Livelihood Award“ came together for several days in SEKEM.

Tenadam Bekele Wolde, representative of Dr. Catherine Hamlin's Fistula Hospital in Ethiopia, MOSOP President Legborsi Pyagbara from Nigeria, Guillaume Harushimana from Centre Jeunes Kamenge in Burundi, and environmental activist René Ngongo from the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

### Other petitions signed to protect Africa's future

During the regional conference of African Right Livelihood Award Recipients, the Laureates also collectively appealed to the Nigerian government to clean up the oil spills in Ogoniland, as recommended 3 years ago in a UNEP report. Also, they called on the government of the DRC and oil company Soco International to respect national laws and regulations which outlaw all activities harmful to the environment, including oil exploration and

exploitation in protected areas, to cancel exploration contracts within the boundaries of the Virunga National Park and to respect all areas designated as World Heritage Sites by UNESCO.

### About the Right Livelihood Award

The Right Livelihood Award was established in 1980 to honour and support those „offering practical and exemplary answers to the most urgent challenges facing us today“. It has become widely known as the „Alternative Nobel Prize“ and there are now 153 Laureates from 64 countries. The annual Award Ceremony takes place in the Swedish Parliament Building in December, with support by parliamentarians.

*Right Livelihood Award Foundation*

! More information:  
• <http://www.rightlivelihood.org/cairo2014.html>

## Impressions from SEKEM



**A**t the end of May, a film crew from the German studio “Denkmal Film” specialising in topic of sustainability came to Egypt for a week to shoot footage for a film on the subject of compost. The film, which is scheduled to come to German cinemas in the coming year, shall bear the title „The End of Genetic Engineering“, or „Code of Survival“.

Part of the film was already shot in Darjeeling on the „Ambootia Farm“, an organic tea plantation which has been working with SEKEM for a long time. Another part of the movie focuses on organic farming in Germany. Finally, the film will also deal with organic farming under extreme conditions as exemplified by the case of SEKEM. In this part, it will mainly focus on the cultivation of the desert using compost. The film crew travelled around the SEKEM Farm and its subsidiary farm in the oasis of Baharya in the company of Angela Hofmann, who is responsible for organic farming at SEKEM.

For details on the work of “Denkmal Film”, please see the website: <http://www.denkmalfilm.tv>.



## City of Stuttgart Presents Dr. Ibrahim Abouleish with Apple Tree for SEKEM

A very large circle of friends from near and far came together on 17 May at the Stuttgart Liederhalle to celebrate many years of successful networking by the local SEKEM friends. Dr. Ibrahim Abouleish and Helmy Abouleish were able to join the German SEKEM friends in an atmospheric setting and provided for an enjoyable morning and afternoon for the many participants who had come. In keeping with its motto to act as a cultural bridge builder, the German association has been looking to facilitate the dialogue between East and West as well as in Germany for the past 30 years resulting in many successful development initiatives in Egypt, Stuttgart and abroad.

The organizers of the event would like to thank Secretary of the State Klaus-Peter Murawski as a representative of the State of Baden-Württemberg for his words of welcome, in which he expressed his strong appreciation of the SEKEM initiative and its ideals. The city of Stuttgart, which has maintained town twinning relations with Cairo for more than 35 years, was represented by Director of the City Ms. Klett-Eining. Together with Dr. Frederic Stephen, Ms. Klett-Eining presented to the Stuttgart branch of the SEKEM community an apple tree as a special gesture. The plant is currently looking for its counterpart to be planted directly on the SEKEM Farm, as well as students here and there, who wish to engage themselves in its nursing and care.

Art as development is a key ingredient of SEKEM and its work that has shaped its initiatives from the beginning in all its phases of development, Dr. Ibrahim Abouleish, the founder of SEKEM stressed in his speech. It acts as a "living power source" to the Egyptian community. As an impressive result of this long-standing commitment to artistic work, Dr. Abouleish named the SEKEM Eurythmy Ensemble and the SEKEM Choir both of which also performed at Stuttgart (see story on page 4). In addition, Mrs. Caroline Wispler, an expert in Goethe's cultural work aiming



to unify East and West, introduced participants to his "West-Eastern Divan". The organisers thank also her for her contribution.

"30 Years of German SEKEM Friends" represented an occasion for a celebration that warranted a closer look at its history. Dr. Hans Werner, a close friend of SEKEM almost right from the beginning, described its development from his point of view in impressive words which are going to be published in a special report in the next issue of SEKEM Insight.

A discussion group on the topic of „Building Bridges Between East and West“ in the afternoon focused on the topic of the importance and necessity of partnership in development. The moderator Dr. Martin Kilgus directed the event and elicited stimulating contributions from a number of guests. Two core ideas became particularly clear: Without global cooperation, the future development of all mankind will no longer be possible. And: In order to build the future together, all people need to become receptive to this future in a much more imaginative way. Education institutions need to teach the abilities required to do so, Dr. Abouleish stated. One way to do that is through the arts. With a tour through SEKEM's history in pictures, Dr. Roland Schaette concluded the event.

May the event be a kick-off for new developments, for what the future may teach us. The SEKEM Friends Germany thank all those who have made the day possible, specifically the volunteers who have made the wonderful atmosphere possible, particularly in the foyer.

*Waltraud Bandel, SEKEM Friends*

## Dr. Ibrahim Abouleish Speaks at KU Graz

The 10 year anniversary of SEKEM Austria provided the pleasant occasion for the visit of Dr. Ibrahim Abouleish to Graz, the city where he himself studied around 40 years ago. Dr. Abouleish spoke as part of a choir concert at the Art University Graz on „Art and Sustainable Development“ on 21 May 2014. The „György Ligeti Room“ of the „House of Music and Musical Theatre“ was packed with visitors.

As a first retrospective, SEKEM Austria have collected a selection of photos and some footage of a radio interview with Dr. Ibrahim Abouleish originally created by the web radio of the four universities of Graz. Both are available via the link.

*Source: SEKEM Austria*



**! More information:**  
<http://bit.ly/1ryEP4I>



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

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**Pictures:**  
5: Right Livelihood Award; 1-3, 6: SEKEM; 4, 7: SEKEM-Freunde

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