

# SEKEM *Insight*

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

## Editorial

Dear Readers,

In recent weeks, the accidents in the Asian textile industry were widely discussed topics on many mainstream media. The collapses of derelict factory buildings in Bangladesh have moved many more consumers to think about which ways the clothing they buy actually takes. Was it produced fairly? Have employees been exploited or are they receiving reasonable salaries and benefits? Is the production overseen by independent controllers?

However, the actual production of a garment represents only the tip of the iceberg. Added to this has to be the entire value chain of raw products and accessories that go into the production of every piece of final garment. Was the cotton organically cultivated? What dyes were used? How much water is production consuming?

This month we would like to show you how healthy clothing is made at SEKEM. We wish to provide you with more information on how the producers of SEKEM's clothes themselves think about the situation in the market and how you can help them do a better job that helps everyone along the global chain of value creation in textiles.

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„Summer of Soil“ with  
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## How Healthy Clothing is Made at SEKEM

After the dramatic accidents in Bangladesh, the issues of work safety and product quality in the clothing industry have made many headlines. In this issue SEKEM Insight documents for the first time the production process at SEKEM's Naturetex factory and the importance of standards for its production.



SEKEM's company Naturetex offers a wide range of products for a variety of well-known customers from Europe, North America and Asia – all certified according to international organic standards.

Aida Mahmood carefully folds the sleeve of a baby body made from soft organic cotton grown by SEKEM and readies the packaging of the cheerful striped garment for international shipping. She quickly adjusts the position of the price tag so that it is readable for the client and then wraps everything up. Tonight, the box she just packed will be picked up by the carrier along with 150 other boxes and leave for the port of Alexandria

from where the entire shipment will be loaded onto a container that will then make its way to Hamburg, Germany. From there, it will continue its journey directly to Naturetex' German customer Alnatura.

Aida is very pleased with her work because she likes these kinds of clothes very well. She even knows some employees of Alnatura personally, because Mrs. Elke Dannenfeldt

and her team are regular visitors to SEKEM. Here, they join forces with their counterparts at Naturetex to select and prepare the patterns and pieces for new collections. These are the days that are particularly exciting for Aida.

## A Garment is Created

The life cycle of all the 1.2 million parts which are created annually at Naturetex begins in the pattern and design department of the factory that is actually the largest business entity of the SEKEM Group with around 300 co-workers. Here, where also the fabrics and patterns are produced, the first of many steps in the process of turning the precious organic cotton into a finished textile product is made: colour and design selection, creation and production of sample parts.

Usually, customers from Europe or from the U.S. come to Naturetex bringing their own ideas for new products that they frequently wish to customize together with the clothing specialists at Naturetex according to the current trends in their specific markets. The pattern masters of Naturetex then produce the first samples according to their ideas and designs, which are then tried and revised until everyone

involved in the process agrees: This baby clothing looks just perfect and will be ordered!

Then, workers and machines kick into action at the Naturetex plant 50km outside of Cairo: Yarn is needed in matching colours and will be produced at a spinning mill. The cotton for Naturetex has already been bought last fall from Demeter-farmers in Egypt who grow it especially for Naturetex. After the cotton seeds – nearly 2/3 of the total weight – have been removed, the cotton is ready for spinning.

Just like the farmer, the mill, too, is always under the watchful eyes of an external party to ensure that all operations meet the requirements of the GOTS, the Global Organic Textile Standard. The first check verifies that only certified organic cotton is used for the textiles. And, in addition, that no harmful additives are used.

## Fairtrade Ensures Better Incomes

The organisation behind the Fairtrade international trading standard also sends a specially trained inspector to check that the mill meets the criteria to be awarded the Fairtrade label. These criteria apply to all companies that are involved



*Naturetex' healthy textiles are sewn almost entirely in-house.*

in the processing of the finished textile. Among the most important points that make up the set of criteria are the Fairtrade minimum price that helps farmers cover the costs of sustainable production, the Fairtrade premium paid by the buyer and that must be used towards community projects by the growers group, and clear evidence by all parties contributing to the supply chain of their compliance with the ILO core labour standards.

Once spun, the finished yarn is then tested in the laboratory of Naturetex. Only when it is certain that it has the right thickness, sufficient tensile strength, and does not contain knots or other impurities is it sent to the dyeing factory.

Here, the yarns are now coloured according to the specifications of Naturetex. Even though Naturetex uses synthetic dyes, they may only contain a handful of chemical substances. Plus, Naturetex must make sure that their potential impact on waste water and the health of its employees is minimized. Natural dyes cannot yet be efficiently used for the dyeing of cotton, because harmful chemicals are still needed for their fixation. The coloured yarns are again tested by Naturetex: Is the colour wash-fast? Does it fade quickly in strong light? Does the yarn exactly meet the desired reference colour?

If everything turns out correct, the product moves on to the knitting factory where a large number of basic materials for Naturetex products are produced from the yarns. Eventually,



*In the production of a natural product made by Naturetex begins with the creation of the patterns.*



All fabrics used in the cutting department have been organically produced. Here they are laid out on the table for cutting the single pieces of the garments according to the patterns.

these will again be washed and mechanically equipped to avoid later shrinkage.

## External and Internal Controls

Regular inspections of all of these subcontractors are carried out both by employees of Naturetex and by independent inspection bodies. This way, Naturetex can make sure that the environment is not too heavily burdened with waste water and other residues, and that the health of the co-workers is not in danger.

After the quality test, the finished fabrics are cut. Now, the co-workers at Naturetex must make sure they have everything else they need: Buttons, matching sewing thread, a size label that also shows the details of the customer's brand, washing instructions, price tags, packaging materials such as bags or wrappers of paper and cardboard. All of these items are assembled at the plant by a large number of skilful seamstresses. Here, everyone needs to make sure that the final product looks exactly like the reference piece originally approved by the customer. During several intermediate steps of "in-process control", the product is examined, measured and

tested, and then pressed and packaged. The result is a valuable piece of healthy clothing.

## Two Important Goals

Since its establishment in 1993, Naturetex has been pursuing two important goals. Firstly, that the production of healthy clothing does not encompass only the cultivation of bio-dynamic cotton, but also the entire chain of textile production. Along this chain, all steps must be checked for environmentally friendly procedures and potential for optimization. And secondly, all co-workers participating in the production of the clothing must be provided with fair and safe working conditions. Naturetex has come close to the fulfilment of these goals over the past 35 years. All co-workers approve of the material, social and cultural services Naturetex provides on top of its regular employee benefits. A high degree of identification with the fate of its operation became particularly apparent during the 2011 revolution and has encouraged Naturetex to continue along this way.

However, the road to convincing all other partners along the value chain of the benefits of such an economic

activity that goes well beyond the mere fulfilment of minimum legally required standards is long. This is going to be Naturetex' goal for the next years.

*Christina Anlauf*

## The Sleeping Giant Called Consumer

Christina Anlauf, editor of SEKEM Insight, spoke with Konstanze Abouleish (Head of Naturetex), Mohammed El Zahar (Quality Assurance Manager) and Walaa Mohammed Sayed (co-worker) on the textile production in SEKEMs largest operation.

*Konstanze, currently many social issues regarding the textile industry in Asia are discussed by consumers. How is the situation in Egypt?*

KA: I can not imagine accidents as those in Bangladesh to happen in Egypt. Compliance with building codes is examined much more thoroughly here. Nevertheless there is of course great need for improvement regarding the betterment of the livelihoods of employees and their families. The usual salaries, for example, allow one to make a living – they do not allow positive development, however.

*What makes Naturetex different?*

KA: We go to great lengths to ensure a safe and neat work environment. In addition to a reasonable salary Naturetex also offers health insurance and pensions, as well as pro-



Naturetex currently employs approximately 300 employees, 40 percent of them women.



Konstanze Abouleish in talks with co-workers and managers at Naturetex.

grams for health promotion, a shuttle service to work and healthy food in our canteens. For the co-workers, there are also special rates at SEKEM's social institutions. We also offer both technical and general training for everyone.

Walaa Mohammed Sayed: Here in the samples department, I am responsible for production and for its cleanliness and orderliness. I love working here because it's so clean and tidy and I can take much more responsibility for my field of work. It is also important to me that my family can trust that Naturetex takes good care of its female employees. That is the main reason why so many young women like me also enjoy working here. In my village it is well known that the girls are in good hands here. That was very different in another company where I worked before.

*Konstanze, what would you still like to improve?*

KA: We want to give employees more opportunities to actively participate in Naturetex to scrutinize operational rules and to take on more responsibility. While it has always been like that in SEKEM, we

now want to use the new "winds of change" in the country to our advantage and that of our staff.

*Do your customers explicitly ask for compliance with social standards at Naturetex?*

KA: Yes, almost all of our customers appreciate the transparency and quality of our products – including the quality of our working conditions. For us the central question remains to be the price that must be paid for that quality. We hope that in the future, there will be more movement in the market to change this. There still is a true "dictatorship of price" in the global textile market, which is based on exploitation and social injustice. Therefore, it is important to provide the consumer at the end of the value chain with important information concerning our products, their method of production and the people who stand behind them!

Mohammed El Zahar: We have been working closely together with most of our suppliers and subcontractors for a long time. I have never had difficulties enforcing our regulations. We conclude agreements that list clearly what substances they may

use in the production of the raw produce they eventually deliver to us. There is also a "safety data sheet" on which these ingredients are listed for each product. This list is revised annually. I have to personally confirm any additions.

*Konstanze, is there something you would personally like to see from your international customers?*

KA: I wish that our customers pass on information like this to their own consumers in order to make it clear why our clothes have to cost a little more. We are also working on a tracing tool, so that the ingredients of each piece can be traced to the very field they were grown on. The textile market will, I hope, change after the recent accidents and because customers are increasingly asking for data on the origins of their products. Currently, the location of the cheapest labour still determines the location of the place of production of a garment. We try to break this logic together with our trading partners. It has to be broken if we want to buy textiles that provide decent lives for everyone involved in production.

*Is there anything consumers can do?*

KA: The customer truly is the „sleeping giant“. Unfortunately, he still has not woken up. Consumers should query the companies about the origins of their products and means of production. They should also equip their own wardrobe more consciously by looking for organic products, and if none are found, ask for them. Through their decisions customers determine the direction the market moves. The market for organic textiles is still small but it is growing fast and can eventually overtake that of conventional clothes if we make the right choices!

*Interview by Christina Anlauf.*

! More information:  
<http://www.demeter.de>  
<http://www.global-standard.org/de/>  
<http://www.ilo.org/berlin/arbeits-und-standards/kernarbeitsnormen>

## Heliopolis University Again Awards Prize for „Green Innovation“

The INNOVA Prize awarded by the Heliopolis University promotes the development of application-oriented „green“ ideas in Egypt. This year, five winners were again honoured for their smart concepts for developing sustainability in Egypt.

Some years ago, the Heliopolis University for Sustainable Development began to award a prize to promote practically useful scientific research and technological development in Egypt. The prize is given to pioneers in their respective fields for innovation in „green“ research areas, such as renewable energy, organic agriculture, or health. A cash prize of 35,000 Egyptian pounds is part of the award.

This year, the Heliopolis University has just awarded five INNOVA 2 prizes to young winners. The first prize went to Dr. Amr Sobhy for his research on „Development of the first economically and environmentally viable refining facility for organic waste in Egypt.“ His plant treats industrial organic wastes, increases their value, and thus prepares them for further use in other locations along the chain of value generation.

The second prize went to Dr. Mostafa Salah of Cairo University for his research in the field of innovative development of botanical drugs from organic compounds. The third prize went to Dr. Youssef Ahmed Youssef for his project „In-vivo effects of essential mint oil (*Mentha viridis*) on the production of aflatoxin obtained from corn stock *Aspergillus flavus* in tissue.“ Aflatoxin is a spontaneously growing natural toxin with which the food industry in Egypt is still struggling. Dr. Mohamed Abdullah Al Aydi received the fourth prize for a new natural product against plant diseases in organic farming. He had carried out a research product under the title „A new product for the control of plant diseases in organic farming“ that led to the new development.

The fifth and final award went to Dr. Iman Mohamed Fathy Eshrak for her project on new methods of production of the valuable spirulina algae rich in nutrients, vitamins, minerals, and proteins. Spirulina can be used as an effective organic food source and food supplement.

Student researchers of the Heliopolis University also took part in the competition. The students Yassin El Sherif Shalaby and Anas Ahmed Mazhar presented a research project on „Energy generation from driving over road bumps.“ The project is meant to harness energy from the many installations in Egyptian roads that are meant to force drivers to slow down when riding their vehicles across them. The student Ahmed Mohamed Abd EL Khalek presented his research paper on „New ways to generate electricity using solar cells“.

The INNOVA 2 Prize is awarded to researchers at universities and in companies, as well as to ambitious high school students interested in developing innovative new ideas that are ripe for practical exploitation in the context of the Egyptian society. The successful candidates were invited to personally present their ideas to a group of experts at the Heliopolis University. The panel was chaired by Dr. Kadria Abdel Motaal, Head of Academic Research. Prizes are being awarded once a year at the headquarters of Heliopolis University on the grounds of the SEKEM initiative on the outskirts of Cairo.

*Fatma Sami*



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[WWW.SEKEM-REISEN.DE](http://WWW.SEKEM-REISEN.DE)  
[WWW.AVENTERRA.DE](http://WWW.AVENTERRA.DE)

## German Conference on Public Communication

Communicating with the Public“ is a symposium on communications training for communication professionals, journalists, and other media practitioners from all sectors with a special focus on the Waldorf and anthroposophic environment in Western Europe. The event is the second iteration of the 2011 conference in which SEKEM was involved with its co-workers and it will be held on 1 and 2 November 2013 at the Waldorf School in Bochum, Germany.

öffentlich  2. Fachtagung  
 wirken  für Kommunikation

Communication can be a very challenging task, states the conference website. We do not only need refined communication skills, but also a lot of empathy when we approach other people in the course of professional communication jobs. To be able to leverage all options we have at our hands, we should be in perfect command of all key modern tools and technologies. Moving image? Crisis management? Working with Social Media? Or does your organisation only care about internal communication? In times of rapidly changing trends concerning new technological means of communication, it can be difficult to keep pace.

In workshops, speakers will report on their own experiences in working with these technologies. Lectures will focus on key current issues and provide helpful answers. Best practice examples will focus specifically on institutions with small budgets. There will be opportunities for initiatives to present themselves on the sidelines.

Registrations should be placed directly via the website below.

*Source: Conference Team*

! More information:  
 • <http://www.oeffentlich-wirken.de>

## Impressions from SEKEM



**B**iodynamic agriculture has helped SEKEM to grow from a small farm on a barren patch of desert land into a haven for a rich and rare biodiversity that has no comparison in the vicinity. In addition to the crops that are grown for later harvesting such as chamomile, clover to be used as cow feed, or wheat, there are many types of trees, shrubs, herbs, and flowers that grow on the main SEKEM farm itself. Many animal species have gotten used to living in close proximity to domestic animals such as cows, chicken, sheep, or camels. Insects such as dragonflies and scarab beetles can be seen as well as mammals, from simple mice to the desert fox or the mongoose. Lizards and sometimes even a chameleon enrich animal life on the farm, and a particularly large diversity can be experienced among the birds: some types are permanently at home on the SEKEM farm, others visit once or twice a year on their flight from the southern to the northern hemisphere or vice versa. These include rare species such as the wagtail or storks. The Rose-ringed Parakeet shown here, however, is an exceptionally rare guest who loves the taste of sunflower seeds. A total of 65 different species of birds can now be counted every year on SEKEM and in its immediate surroundings.

## “Summer of Soil” in Järna With SEKEM Participation

Summer of Soil is a 5-week, multi-disciplinary accelerator program designed to awaken and inspire a collaborative movement to rebuild and maintain living soils. The program will include a series of hands-on soil-related courses, an exhibition of regenerative growing practices and the 5-day Living Soil Forum for bringing conversation to action.

The courses offer a variety of opportunities to explore and experience different aspects of working with soil. In addition there will be keynote events, excursions and film screenings to build the capacity to become active stewards of the soil. Current course topics include, among others, Preserving, Wild Food Harvesting, Organic Agriculture, Biodynamic Agriculture, Forest Gardening, Regenerative Agriculture, Seed Saving, Ecological Recycling Agriculture, and Urban Gardening.



The exhibition aims to give insight into the amazing substance soil, as well as showcasing and illustrating different growing practices which promote soil regeneration. It includes a pavilion with small scale “Do It Yourself” solutions and an eco-tour around the local sustainable food society, and more.

The Living Soil Forum is a 5 day conference, aiming to accelerate the international collaborative movement to steward our soils by bringing together farmers, retail, government, academia, civil society & youth from 22 July – 26 July in Kulturhuset i Ytterjärna, Sweden.

*Source: Summer of Soil*

! More information:  
• <http://www.summerofsoil.se>

## New Movie: “After the Revolution” in Egypt

The movie „After the Revolution“ by the famous Egyptian director Yousri Nasrallah is based on the story of the rider Mahmoud and the journalist Reem and paints a vivid picture of Egyptian society and its problems in the aftermath of the revolution:

It is the 2<sup>nd</sup> of February 2011. In Tahrir Square in downtown Cairo, riders on horses and camels attack the protesters opposing the continuation of the Mubarak regime. Mahmoud is also among the riders, but is drawn into a fight and falls from his horse in the ensuing confusion. Humiliated and ostracized as a traitor, he loses his job and then all hope for the future, including that of his children. He then meets Reem, a modern young woman who fights for the rights of women and the poorer population. The two become friends and gradually get closer. However, a few things may not be – even in a society that dares to shake its fundamentals and overthrow its dictator.

In this movie director Yousry Nasrallah stages a love story between two strong individuals who are in every respect equal and caught up in the conflict between tradition and modernity. It is, unfortunately, not very believably executed. The director frequently mixes fictional and documentary scenes that express themes that are at times very personal and occasionally political in nature. It provides viewers with a deep insight into the processes of change unfolding in a country with many lines of social friction. Egypt evidently still has a long way ahead of it towards true freedom and democracy. Movies like „After the Revolution“ do send an important signal. In theatres in Germany beginning 30 May 2013.

*Source: fbw Movie Review*

! More information:  
• <http://www.revolution-derfilm.de>

## Dr. Ibrahim Abouleish Speaks at “Business for Peace Award 2013”

In 2012 Dr. Abouleish was awarded the Oslo Business for Peace Award for his commitment to the forging of a sustainable connection between ethical trade principles and the building of global peace. At this year’s award, Dr. Abouleish spoke again in Oslo as a guest. His speech can be viewed as a video on the internet (see the link below, started at minute 32).

Dr. Abouleish took the opportunity of his visit to also drop by the Anthroposophical Society of Norway. There, he spoke about his own philosophical studies and how his reading of the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess and of his thoughts on ecology had deeply inspired him with regard to his practical development work in Egypt. After another visit to, among others, the University of Oslo and meetings with government representatives, Dr. Abouleish continued his journey from Oslo directly to South America to speak at the INALDE Business School in Colombia.

*Source: SEKEM Scandinavia*

! More information:  
• <http://new.livestream.com/vizart/bfpa>



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

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