

Helmy Abouleish – CEO SEKEM Group

About Helmy

Born 1961 in Austria, Helmy Abouleish moved to Egypt with his family when he was 16 years old. The son of Dr. Ibrahim Abouleish studied at the Faculty of Commerce of Cairo University Business Administration and owns a Marketing Diploma of American University in Cairo. He was deeply involved in the development of SEKEM and engaged in the national and international politic sphere fostering responsible competitiveness, social entrepreneurship and the abatement of the huge problems of the 21st century, such as climate change and food security. Helmy Abouleish is currently the CEO of the SEKEM Group of Companies.

3 Questions to Helmy

What are the main benefits of Sustainable and Biodynamic agriculture in Egypt?

Problems like food insecurity, water scarcity, climate change etc., pose enormous challenges for Egypt that cannot be solved by politics alone. SEKEM stands up to these challenges by embracing a private-economic and civilian approach.

Biodynamic agricultural methods enhance climate change adaptation of the plants and the farm as a whole, while they also substantially promote to mitigate climate change through an increased soil carbon sequestration rate. The sponge structure of the compost increases the waterholding capacity, which in turn decreases water consumption by up to 40% compared to conventional agriculture. Besides, food security is promoted through the provision of healthy foodstuffs. The lack of chemicals and the premium of Organic produce added to the regular market-price increase the income for farmers, provide them a healthy environment and most important, ensure that their soil is built up and stays fertile in the long run instead of short term profits and leaching out the soils.

Furthermore, it is important to state that Organic and Biodynamic Agriculture are in fact not only healthier, more tasty and sustainable but also cheaper than the conventional one. This is proved by so-called “True Cost Accounting” that we applied in our recently published research “The Future of Agriculture in Egypt - Comparative Full Cost Accounting Study of Organic and Conventional Food Production Systems”.

How do you see the current situation in Egypt and how might the future look like?

Egypt is still in a transformation period. Not only after the revolution, we need time to develop. There are still a lot of challenges to handle. Egypt is living in water scarcity, is depending on imports and is one of the countries that are most affected by consequences of the climate change. Educational systems are very low developed and we find dogmatism not only in the religious approaches. What the country needs are artists, philosophers and Scientists as well as space and freedom in spiritual and intellectual life to develop the people’s awareness and spirituality, which is of high importance in regards to progress. All these challenging facts might appear a bit hopeless at first but I am convinced that there is hope. If we only look to the development of the western world, we can see that Europe needed several centuries to find its way from the chaotic period of the Middle Ages to the modern times of reformation and democracy. As Islam is around 600 years younger than Christianity I believe that the muslim regions just need time for development.

What are the biggest challenges that you face in promoting Sustainable Development?

The biggest challenge we are facing in walking the path of Sustainable Development is to find a balance between the different dimensions as they are obviously opposing each other. Hence, for instance we have to take care that we don’t harm the environment or people when we advance economic activities. Sustainable development always requires us to balance different dimensions and goals. And there will never be an end of - as this is a continues process of development, you have to let go of the idea of an ultimate target. Our experience is, that to find a balance between the dimensions that are required by a holistic and Sustainable Development, creativity and social arts are crucial. It is important to understand that what was right today can already be wrong tomorrow. Every day we have to start new and reinvent ourselves. What was right today can already be wrong tomorrow. Every day we have to reinvent ourselves.

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