



Dear Readers,

after three years one of SEKEM's biggest projects co-financed with its European partners has come to a successful end. The 13-Villages-Project, as it was unofficially called, was closed by the end of 2008. The extensive final report will reach its largest donor, the European Union, these days.

The report demonstrates how important the project has been for the people in SEKEM's closest neighbour community, Gelfina, and its adjacent villages and hamlets. Thousands of beneficiaries have benefited directly from the services and products of the intervention and thousands will continue to profit from it in the future. This is because most of the activities will be continued thanks to the ongoing support of the SEKEM Development Foundation and its German support association.

Based on the final report this issue of SEKEM Insight offers you a review of some of the project's final achievements. It also demonstrates how relevant its activities have been for the development of the SEKEM initiative. They have increased SEKEM's global reputation as a partner in social development.

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SEKEM Successfully Concludes 13-Villages-Project



Villagers - men and women - have been coming together in Community Development Associations to participate in the development of their villages and hamlets for more than three years

By the end of 2008 the SEKEM Development Foundation (SDF), SEKEM's non-profit association for social and cultural development in Egypt has completed one of its biggest projects ever: the three-year 13-Villages-Project. The project is finally being concluded these days when the last report is sent to the European Union, its major donor together with SEKEM's German support association.

Since 2006 the project has kicked off numerous material, financial, and social development activities that have shaped the circumstances

of life and work of a part of Egypt's rural population in lasting ways. Thanks to the ongoing support of its European partner organisations almost all of the activities carried out in the framework of the project will be continued in the future.

The project was situated in SEKEM's closest rural community, the village of Gelfina, and its 12 neighbouring hamlets. Here the 13-Villages-Project supported by SEKEM's own social workers initially began to organise group meetings of community elders and villagers to raise awareness of the importance of central

issues of their communities' development in sustainable ways. This included for instance consultancy on personal hygiene and sanitary precautions, appropriate handling of domesticated animals, or the dumping of wastes carried out by medically trained personnel and professional "outreach teams". The SDF used local community spaces - schools, village mosques - for these meetings. More than a hundred of them took place over the course of three years. Particular attention was paid by the workers of the SDF's Medical Centre to the situation of pregnant women before and right after childbirth. The specialists also provided consultancy on topics such as sexual hygiene and female genital mutilation (FGM). To reach the women affected the medical teams visited the villages and brought with them information material, often in pictorial form to specifically address those who could not read or write. The teams visited the villages once a month and also offered a comprehensive basic medical examination for disease prevention to many villagers. Over the course of several dozen sessions the programme has successfully reached approximately 8.800 inhabitants of the communities. Additionally more than 3.400 pregnant women were regularly examined at the SDF Medical Centre.

The programme also included the ongoing education schemes for 11 new and seasoned midwives from the area as well as of 17 social workers from various medical fields. Each of the two groups took part in more than a dozen further education sessions on topics of general public health with a specific emphasis of reproductive health issues.

The comprehensive experience of the SDF in the support extended to children still frequently

affected the desperate economic situation of their families could also positively influence a new component of the project: families that had to cover parts of their income through the work of their children had to be specifically supported. 100 of the children known as "Chamomile Children" received the chance to participate in a comprehensive basic education programme over the course of the project duration. It covered conventional school subjects such as mathematics and at the same time provided advanced tuition in cultural, social, and artistic topics combined with practical exercise. Where necessary the children could also participate in a literacy programme and a scheme dedicated to preventing diseases and improving their general well-being. They were examined by staff from the SDF Medical Centre every three months.

A literacy programme was also available to the more than 600 women of the villagers who could not read or write. A class was created specifically for them in Belbeis in cooperation with a local education provider.

The project moreover achieved results in expanding education opportunities for young Egyptians about to leave school and choose vocations. Two new vocational training tracks have been launched in "Computer Maintenance and Repair" and "Professional Plumbing". The curricula were developed during the first year and more than 120 graduates have successfully completed the tracks to date. Remarkably, a surprisingly large number of them were girls - also in the technical fields.

In the areas of environmental protection and community development an expert developed a sustainable concept to implement a

mobile waste removal system available to all 2.000 households of the communities. It was planned to allow them to regularly have their solid wastes removed and transported to a designated site where they could be sorted and recycled. Initially these sites had to be selected and technical facilities to be purchased that would then provide the necessary means to sort and eventually hydraulically compact the collected waste that could not be recycled. Here, too, many villagers found work in the project that is scheduled to remain available after its closure.

A 65-horsepower tractor and trailer turned out to be an unusual but appropriate solution to the challenge. Until this day the tractor regularly picks up wastes and has even replaced the custom of manually collecting garbage by using donkey carts.

The SDF also built a small bio pre-treatment plant for the treatment of liquid waste (used water) from the households. The plant allows the treatment of moderately polluted waters and recycles them for use in the irrigation of fields and village gardens. This action has greatly improved the availability of water for agriculture and the embellishment of the villages themselves. The system that is already in use for solid waste removal was thus refitted with a mobile tank and has turned out to be double effective.

The last component of the project implemented a micro-finance scheme available to all villagers with a promising business idea. It also set out to improve the decision-making and planning structures on the community level of rural improve-



ment programmes developed by the inhabitants themselves.

In cooperation with Egyptian partners the SDF developed concepts for the financing of small businesses. More than 220 loans could be disbursed to applicants from a wide variety of professions with more than 1 Mio. Egyptian Pounds (ca. 125.000 €) disbursed as loans in total - a great success also in light of the near-optimal repayment rates.

On the community level the SDF and its cooperation partners furthered the inauguration of local Community Development

Associations (CDA's). This way the results achieved should also grow sustainable roots. Seven rural committees could be installed that today serve as platforms for the planning of local development initiatives. The villagers can now take full ownership in the achievements of activities such as the waste removal system.

Thanks to the excellent cooperation with the German support association and its future-oriented initiative during the planning phase of the project almost all activities

turned out to be great successes. The SDF is already working on new proposals to make the results last such as new ways to improve the water supply in the villages that are particularly remote to public supply systems.

Bijan Kafi

Images on this page: Chamomile children during class; Women taking part in a community meeting; loan recipients in their shops (master craftsman, reseller of seeds, shoemaker); a renovated community school.

Preceding page from left to right: participants of a community meeting; female pupils during a vocational training class; biological water pre-treatment plant; loan recipient in her shop

SEKEM Helps Provide Carbon-Neutral Gas to Parts of Germany

The Technische Werke Schussental (TWS), a German regional provider of energy with its headquarters in Ravensburg has begun to offer CO2-neutral gas with the help of SEKEM. Following the motto „Think global, act local“ the TWS purchases certified CO2-certificates from a climate protection programme launched by the initiative. The German supplier is responding to customer requests and has begun to offer the product “Oberschwabengas” (“Gas for Upper Swabia”) in a CO2-neutral form in the entire counties of Baden-Wuerttemberg and Bavaria.

Even when producing environmentally friendly gas its production, transport, and combustion always necessarily produce significant quantities of CO2. The greenhouse gas pollutes the atmosphere on a global scale regardless of where and through which means it is released into the air. Emissions that are essentially



unavoidable can thus effectively be avoided in any location on earth.

To neutralise its emissions of greenhouse gas that is released during the production of heat for households and businesses TWS has begun to purchase certificates from a carbon reduction project carried out by the SEKEM initiative. The project produces high-quality compost out of organic material and has been successfully operational since 2007. Through this sophisticated process only a fraction of the gas that is normally released during production is actually emitted. The emissions avoided by the initiative are then "converted" into carbon certificates that comply with internationally accepted standards set forth by the convention on climate protection of the United Nations (based on the framework of the Kyoto Protocol). This way customers deciding to benefit from the new product can now actively invest in climate protection. TWS is already delivering the gas to the German counties of Baden-Wuerttemberg and Bavaria and additional countries may be supplied on request.

More information is available at www.oberschwabengas.de.

Dr. Ibrahim Abouleish Celebrates His Birthday

On 23 March Goethe's fairy tale of the green snake and the beautiful lily was performed at the Heliopolis Academy on occasion of Dr. Ibrahim



The eurythmy ensemble of SEKEM performs Goethe's fairy tale of the snake and the beautiful lily

Abouleish's birthday. The performance kicked off the annual festival week that eventually ended on 26 March.

The fairy tale is one of the most mysterious texts of the German poet and author that has given rise to plenty of interpretations. The new form of presentation at SEKEM involving a eurythmy performance demonstrated that an entirely new approach to the work can be found that encourages to experience its spirit through the "wisdom of sensual experience" rather than the abstract nature of the mind.

While the poem was articulated by a trained orator in Arabic the participants of SEKEM's Eurythmy ensemble, this time expanded by a team of eurythmy students from the School of Arts of the Heliopolis Academy visualised every gesture and figure through physical representation. This resulted in a performance that transformed the stage into a site that powerfully merged the objective powers of man and the world supported by colourful costumes and the music performed by the chamber orchestra under the leadership of conductor Bernhard Sieberer.

Christoph Graf, artistic coordinator of the event, succeeded admirably in merging the power of the Arabic language with intercultural connections in the global language of eurythmy.

Not only this performance was witnessed by more than 1.400 people. Lots of smaller musical and recital performances enriched the experience. For the first time a circus was also invited. And even though the time scheduled for the events was eventually exceed by more than an hour everyone in the audience greeted the performances of the clowns, artists, and magicians with lasting applause.

*Daniel Baumgartner
& Regina Hanel*

Stuttgart Delegation Visits SEKEM Initiative

On occasion of the 30th anniversary of the twin cities of Cairo and Stuttgart a delegation of the latter's representatives consisting of more than 40 people visited Egypt in April. On 16 April the representatives from the city's administration, political life, the media, the church council, and several other institutions and agencies also visited the SEKEM initiative as one stop on their trip through multiple Egyptian organisations. The delegation was lead by chief mayor Dr. Wolfgang Schuster.

Over the past months the German SEKEM support association had intensified its relations with the Stuttgart city administration. These activities had succeeded in inciting the city's interest in the work of SEKEM and eventually lead to its inclusion in the April journey. The guests where welcomed to the main farm by Dr. Ibrahim Abouleish, his wife, and Helmy Abouleish who had also organised a tour around the premises including the social and cultural institutions. After a celebration at the SEKEM School involving demonstrations of daily class work performed by the pupils themselves all participants came together in a final meeting that gave room for posing questions and discussing SEKEM's idealistic concepts. The meeting that also allowed for critical inquiries incited praise from the visitors for its successes over the past 30 years, and the open-minded and humane atmosphere prevalent where SEKEM co-workers set to work. In concordance with the well-known Egyptian hospitality no-one was to leave without a conclusive bio-dynamic dinner.

„Most participants in this delegation have got used to taking part in very different forms of cooperation in their daily work and life. To combine work with cultural and artistic forms of expression - particularly to the extent practiced in SEKEM - is

frequently new to them. This led to astonishment in many. After a few days more and more questions were posed, even critical ones for instance regarding the role of the Chamomile Children, or the conclusive weekly circle.“, says Waltraud Bandel, a participant and long-standing supporter of SEKEM taking part in the journey as a representative of the German association. She used the opportunity to get in contact with many participants and answer questions as they arose. „Many of the talks revealed, though, that after a while participants understood how social change regarding its means sometimes has to leave the beaten tracks break new ground. Praise and astonishment remained; constructive criticism was voiced.“

The visit to the initiative and the following dialogue have also intensified plans to pursue collaborative projects in the future and increase cooperation between the city of Stuttgart and the SEKEM initiative. Common projects are already in the works, for instance an activity aimed at the fostering of youth exchanges to allow young people to experience other cultures first hand and through pro-active participation.

The SEKEM association welcomes its next opportunity to intensify its links with Stuttgart when in the coming July on the occasion of the continuing anniversary celebrations many of Stuttgart’s inhabitants shall be involved in the festivities. The celebrations are expected to span multiple days.

The association specifically thanks Dr. Frederic Stephan for his support during the organisation of the journey that allowed all participants to experience a new culture first hand and that had as its goal the furthering of new projects between the two parties in the spirit of an equal partnership. A concrete and proactive step to furthering peace and mutual understanding through individual engagement has been made.

Christina Boecker

Austrian Support Association Takes the Initiative

After meeting several of Europe’s support associations for SEKEM in Germany, Switzerland, and the Netherlands the two Austrians Ernst Rose and Hermann Becke founded their own Austrian support initiative with the help of Elisabeth Gergely, a long-standing friend and supporter of SEKEM, in 2004. Until 2009 the group grew to 84 members and more than 40 people interested in following SEKEM’s progress through reports and public events.

„Sekem Austria“ intends to support the SEKEM initiative through networked collaboration of people and institutions alike. That specifically includes awareness raising activities and the involvement of youth to experience cultures between West and East for themselves through active participation. The board is comprised of Soleiman Ali, Ilse Anderwald, Friedl and Hermann Becke, Ernst Rose and Gabi Spiegel. It is supported by a consultative committee that includes Elisabeth Gergely and Clemens Mader and others. The members meet every 6 to 8 weeks.

Key developments in 2008 included the search for an able personality to drive the professionalisation of the section of musical arts at SEKEM and the building of new networks including Austrian academic contacts. Fortunately, both initiatives turned out to be successful. The Tyrolean conductor and music instructor Bernhard Sieberer chose to take up his work as the artistic director at SEKEM in Autumn 2008 (see report in SEKEM Insight). Additionally new institutional partnerships could be launched with the Karl-Franzens-University Graz (research on medical substances against high blood pressure and diabetes) and the Technical University of Graz (University Chair of Innovation).

The foundation of the Regional Centre of Expertise on Education for Sustainable Development Cairo (RCE Cairo) was also substantially supported by the RCE Graz. The support association thus wishes to extend its thanks specifically to Dr. Hani Sewilam (Heliopolis Academy – International Affairs). His support has repeatedly reinvigorated the enthusiasm of the association’s members.

The Austrian association also financially supported an Austrian choir project that will take place in SEKEM around Easter 2009. It also continues to support SEKEM’s graduate Mohamed Ali Khater during his three-year studies to become a „Farm Administrator“ in Venezuela. In his letter of thanks he writes: „I will return with my diploma and I will strive to make SEKEM the most successful farm in the world.“

Furthermore the website of SEKEM Austria at www.sekemoesterreich.at could be relaunched in 2008. For the coming years the association’s members are now looking forward to a follow-up members convention for all European support associations in 2010 to continue the past success of the meetings in SEKEM in 2004 and in Graz in 2007, hopefully again in SEKEM.

Friedl Becke



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