

**COSIMENA's 2<sup>nd</sup> Meta-Conference  
on "SustaMENAbility"****21 - 22 October 2019****COSIMENA brought together experts from Egypt, Germany, Sudan and Jordan for its 2<sup>nd</sup> Meta-Conference "SustaMENAbility" on 21 and 22 October 2019 in Alexandria.**

Launched in 2017, the COSIMENA (Clusters of Scientific Innovation in the Middle East and North Africa) project aims to discuss global and regional challenges through an "interdisciplinary and intercultural" format, creating a stimulating environment factoring "Innovativeness" as well as cooperation and scientific exchange.

The second edition of COSIMENA's Meta-Conference specifically sought to explore and evaluate how the agriculture and energy sectors combined with economic factors are mutually dependent and how an interdisciplinary approach can help finding holistic solutions.

As a result, the speakers and participants coming from various backgrounds including the field of economy, energy and agriculture actively engaged in fruitful discussions centred around the important concept of sustainability.

After the welcoming remarks by Ms. Isabell Mering, Director of the DAAD Regional Office Cairo, the conference took off by exploring a concrete example of sustainable development in the MENA region. Dr. Dirk Dahlhaus from University of Kassel presented in the keynote of the event the Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency for the Middle East and North Africa Region (REMENA) Programme. This initiative offers students from all over the world the opportunity of completing an international master's in science between the partner Universities in Kassel (Germany), Cairo (Egypt) or Monastir (Tunisia). While keeping in mind the future challenges involving reducing costs for the students, further diversifying the programme and the topics covered, Dr. Dahlhaus highlighted how REMENA Programme stands as a best-practice example of sustainable programmes in reason of its specific features such as cross-fertilization.

The conference proceeded with an interactive panel discussing the benefits for the MENA region deriving from academic exchange and knowledge transfer. Deputy Director of DAAD Regional Office Cairo, Fatma Soliman, moderated the exchange starting from the analysis of the central concept of sustainability. The brainstorm of definitions between Prof. Dr. Alaa Ramadan Mostafa from Alexandria University, Prof. Dr. Alaa Abdel Bary from Arab Academy for Science, Technology & Maritime Transport, Prof. Dr. Dirk Dahlhaus from University of Kassel, Prof. Dr. Jawad Al-Bakri from University of Jordan and Dr. Mawahib Ahmed from the National Center for Research in Sudan brought to light various aspects that the word sustainability entails.

Prof. Dr. Alaa Abdel Bary focused on the importance of financially sustaining a programme after the initial funding, whereas Dr. Mowahib Ahmed drove the attention to the necessity of considering the demands from the community and the impact on it. The resulting debate between the speakers and participants alike led to a first set of concluding reflections for the starting day of the conference. Firstly, the panel highlighted the difficulty in finding a common definition of sustainability which varies depending on the area of specialization of each person. Yet, it was discussed how a constructive confrontation between those different points of view can lead to a more comprehensive understanding of the various approaches to build sustainable projects.

That introductory exchange set the basis to delve into the technical analysis of the core topics of economy, energy and agriculture during the second day of the conference.

The following day continued with professors and researchers from Egypt, Germany, Sudan and Jordan giving presentations on transnational collaborations and projects focussing on Sustainability. In the first slot, the participants were introduced to a series of inspiring economy projects.

Mr. Dimitrios Moschos from Freie Universität Berlin and Prof. Dr. Mohamed Abed from Alexandria University presented the project of the Egyptian-German Centre for International Development. Aiming to become a cluster of excellence for economic and political research in the Mediterranean region, the project, that is funded by the DAAD, involves the two clusters of Institutions & Development and Economic Policy & International Security. Prof. Mohamed Abed emphasised the primary role of personal contact between the creators of sustainable projects in ensuring its long-term durability and effectiveness.

This section was equally animated by theoretical discussions of ways to design research for development. Among others, Dr. Clemens Breisinger from the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) explored how to digitalize policy advice and solutions. Particularly, he offered an overview of AIDA (Agriculture Investment Data Analyzer) to identify the positive effects that digitalisation will have in making policy research more accessible and likely more impactful.

Moreover, Prof. Dr. Iman Zaky from the Arab Academy for Science, Technology & Maritime Transport highlighted the interrelation between entrepreneurship and sustainable development while analysing how to create an enabling entrepreneurial eco-system for sustainable development in the MENA region.

Finally, Prof. Dr. Khaled Abdu from Cairo University outlined major challenges such as climate change, food waste and insufficient investments in his presentation on agribusiness and technology transfer commercialization. In light of the worrying data such as an average of global food waste between 33% and 50%, he highlighted the urgent need for creative solutions including an innovation coupling model and linear innovation models. In this context, the specific case of Egypt was scrutinized, mentioning the areas where to work in order to achieve further self-sufficiency.

The following section highlighted projects and approaches in the energy sector. Prof. Dr. Adel Khalil from Cairo University emphasised in his presentation the high energy potential in Egypt and the MENA region in the field of solar energy. In his Egyptian Renewable Energy

Cluster Initiative (EREI) he stresses the need for clustering, offering several inspiring examples such as the case of the MENA-South MED and Gulf cooperating cluster.

In the next presentation Dr. Mawahib Ahmed from the National Centre for Research in Sudan stated: "Insecurity in Energy and food is a key problem. So as researchers we highlight these problems and we contribute in solving them," For that reason, she focusses in her work on developing a theoretical and applied model to fight insecurity in energy and food as well as creating prototype technologies in Sudan that generate outcome for the local communities.

The Jordanian and Egyptian cases were also presented. Prof. Dr. Jawad Al-Bakri from University of Jordan focused on the development of groundwater resources monitoring in Jordan, while Prof. Dr. Abdel Wahab Kassem from Alexandria University investigated hybrid renewable energy systems in the Egyptian Desert.

"Lack of awareness of renewable energies in Egypt represents a major problem" explained Prof. Dr. Abdel Wahab Kassem. Consequently, working on educational programmes constitutes a priority in current sustainable energy projects. The need for approaching the topic through the Water-Energy-Food nexus was also noted in light of its role in contributing to develop a more comprehensive view of the topic.

The final slot on agriculture was opened by Dr. Dalia Barakat from the Cairo University by exploring major agriculture challenges and major approaches to achieve the United Nations (UN) sustainable developments goals. Most importantly, she focused on the problems arising from pesticides usage and climate change.

Similarly, Prof. Dr. Abd El-Rahman Ahmed from the Agricultural Engineering Research Institute presented some guidelines for developing sustainable agriculture projects. While highlighting the importance of a clearly defined vision, mission and objectives and thoroughly measure the final performance, he offered new insights on ways to increase agricultural productivity and ensure its quality. In addition, Dr. Khaled El-Saadany from Alexandria University raised the question of achieving economic progress through Agro-Food Industries Alliance.

The section concluded with the presentation of a concrete example of sustainable reuse of renewable resources by Dr. Mohamad Midani from German University in Cairo. In light of the considerable quantity of date palm trees in the MENA region that amount approximately to 140 million, Dr. Midani explained the potential of date palm trees. Driven by the desire of promoting sustainable development and improving livelihoods, he described how Palm By products can affirm themselves as a vital sustainable alternative to other elements such as wood.

Beyond the animated discussions during the presentations and various panels, the conference created a favourable environment for networking and exchanging ideas. All participants energetically interacted between each other, exchanging contacts and advices.

(Report by Veronica Merlo)