



Press Release
74th Cairo Climate Talks
May 4, 2021

On the 1st of June the Cairo Climate Talks (CCT) hosted their 75th panel discussion in which experts from Germany and Egypt discussed how planting new forests, strengthening existing ecosystems and protecting biodiversity are vital steps towards reaching true sustainability.

Protecting our climate and planet is closely tied to the wellbeing of forests, as they act as carbon storage, vital oxygen to the planet's ecosystems, and home for much of the world's biodiversity. Additionally, forests "provide means of livelihoods for more than 1.6 billion people" Dr. Ayman Hamada, Head of Central Department of Biodiversity, emphasized in his opening remarks on behalf of the Ministry of Environment.

Ambassador Dr. Cyrill Nunn, opened the event on behalf of the German Embassy saying "2021 is a pivotal year in the climate negotiations and we are expecting an important movement of more ambitious climate commitments in the run-up to COP26 in Glasgow." He stressed that "protecting biodiversity is a very important aspect to preserving a healthy planet for future generations. Here in Egypt, and all over the world, planting new trees can undo environmental degradation such as desertification, offer agricultural biodiversity, and increase air quality."

Sustainability in its essence is about protecting the natural resilience and resistance of ecosystems as Hany El Kateb, Presidential Advisor & Senior Scientist at Technische Universität München (TUM), explained. Dr. Nunn and Dr. Ayman both stressed that as we are nearing the 2030 milestone of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) global efforts to support the restoration and protection of forests are increasing.

As Dr. Ayman mentioned, the safeguarding of vital ecosystems and biodiversity hubs, like the coral shores of the red sea, are on the priority list of the Egyptian government, with Egyptian Minister of Environment, H.E. Dr. Yasmine Fouad, being the president of the UN's Convention of Biological Diversity (CBD) Conference of Parties (COP). Recent initiatives all over Egypt encourage the protection of ecosystems while also creating economic opportunities, such as recent ecotourism initiatives. This highlights, how economic and environmental sustainability can and should be tackled together.

While afforestation might seem like an odd theme for Egypt, since more than 95% of its land is considered desert, it has promising potential. Due to the good climate in Egypt, the annual growth of trees far exceeds their German counterparts. Forests could therefore quickly be turned into climate change mitigation and economic opportunity. Hany himself has first-hand experience, as he helped set up the Serapium forest in Ismailia, which uses wastewater to reclaim land from desertification by growing forests.

Dr. Ayman Hamada cautioned that the introduction of new ecosystems has to be managed with care, as not to disturb the natural balance of systems. Policy frameworks are needed to protect existing forests and ecosystems, which starts by identifying them and their ability to adapt to a changing climate. Barbara Ral, Climate Protection Manager and Free Certified Biologist has been working on forest transformation systems. Based in Brandenburg, she is familiar with dry, sandy lands and has seen the impact of forest fires and forest degradation due to parasites. She carefully chose which seedlings to introduce to the existing forest, to tackle different aspects of sustainability; big-leafed trees to stop fires from spreading and giving shade to let the soil store water, other trees that grow fast and can be sold for profit to increase economic sustainability, and trees that give home to many species, insects and bees and increased biodiversity.

The panelists agreed that existing ecosystems should be sustained where possible but transformed where needed in order to adapt to changing environmental and climate conditions. However, a close management and consideration of social and environmental sustainability must be given at all times, and especially when growing new forests.

Background Information:

The Cairo Climate Talks are conceived, organized and hosted as a cooperation between the German Embassy in Cairo, the Egyptian Ministry of Environment, the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) and the German Corporation for International Cooperation (GIZ).

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