



Press Release
74th Cairo Climate Talks
May 4, 2021

On the 4th of May 2021, Cairo Climate Talks hosted their 74th panel discussion on the topic of Sustainable Makers and Local Crafts. The conversation aimed to encourage a dialogue about how creative innovation spaces can support achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Two experts in the maker scene shared their insights as to how sustainability is a major driving force for entrepreneurship and how to increase environmental consciousness.

In his opening remarks, Philippe Maupai, Head of the Science Department at the German Embassy in Cairo, highlighted the potential of Maker Spaces. He explained that Maker Spaces, FabLabs and HackerSpaces – communal workshops that have been opening in growing numbers – are “places designed to facilitate the access to traditional and new tools and technologies, like 3D printers or wood-working equipment, that individuals might not have access to in their own homes.”

In terms of the environment, he explained that in order to tackle climate change and reach the SDGs “grassroots development of new technologies and innovative ways of working together in a sustainable way have an important role to play.” Various German institutions have over the years recognized and supported this so called “maker movement” which supports Do-it-Yourself and open innovation processes. Initiatives such as the “[Make Light](#)” initiative exemplify these efforts and sum up the underlying idea in their slogan “if it can be imagined, it can be made”.

Dr. Yousria Hamed, opened the event on behalf of the Ministry of Environment of the Arab Republic of Egypt by introducing the Egyptian-Italian Program which she manages. This program revived local crafts and traditions in [Al Nazla Village in Fayoum](#), by supporting the unique local pottery tradition and building 20 workshops. This created added value, new revenue streams and economic opportunities. Additionally, an established visitor center adds revenue and educates visitors and students about local craftsmanship.

According to Dr. Yousria “the local community of Al Nazla has recognized the value of their place” and have hence an incentive to sustainability: “they now aim to develop the site through considering the environment in all their activities, from sorting and collecting garbage and operating the oven with more environmentally friendly materials.”

Aravinth Panch, Co-founder of 7 different start-ups in various fields, one of them the DreamSpace Academy, has a similar approach to creating valuable and feasible solutions for communities in need, environmental approaches always need to consider the economic opportunity and social potential they have. This is best achieved when learning from local needs to create such new value. While many Maker Spaces in the West became playing grounds for project-based learning, he saw that this does not help to create meaningful change or revenue on the long run. Rather challenge-based approaches bring out the needed solutions for communities, from within the community.

Omar Essafty, one of the early supporters of FabLab Egypt, and the Co-founder of its parent company San3a Tech, shared similar insights from Egypt. In the beginning they tried to recreate a FabLab modelled as an exact replica of the US archetype, but quickly they realized this would never succeed in their home context, so they decided to pave their own way. Following the example of many other initiatives in Egypt and the region, they realized the struggle of being a donation-based NGO.

Omar highlighted how many in the maker movement had originally worried about the unexpected changes brought along by the pandemic but realized that having learned to learn from a challenge was quite useful in coming up with quick solutions such as producing 40.000 face shields direly needed by health care personnel, due to the ability to create quick solutions and the tools at hand. Another example of localizing production, decreasing CO2 footprints of products, and creating economic opportunity is the Egyptian Ramadan light called “Fanous”, which used to be mainly produced in China for the past years but has been brought back to Egyptian makers thanks to technical training and accessibility of workshops and tools.

While we still have a long way to reach the SDGs, Aravinth encouraged young people to use whatever access they have to networks and online sources, to gain new skills and perspectives to go build up one’s own ideas. Omar doubled down on this, stressing how the main aim of the Maker Spaces and FabLabs needs to stay alive: make innovation easy, because “if you make the process of innovation difficult, the less ideas and the less innovators you have” and this should be avoided as everyone agreed: we need people to believe they can, so they do.

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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