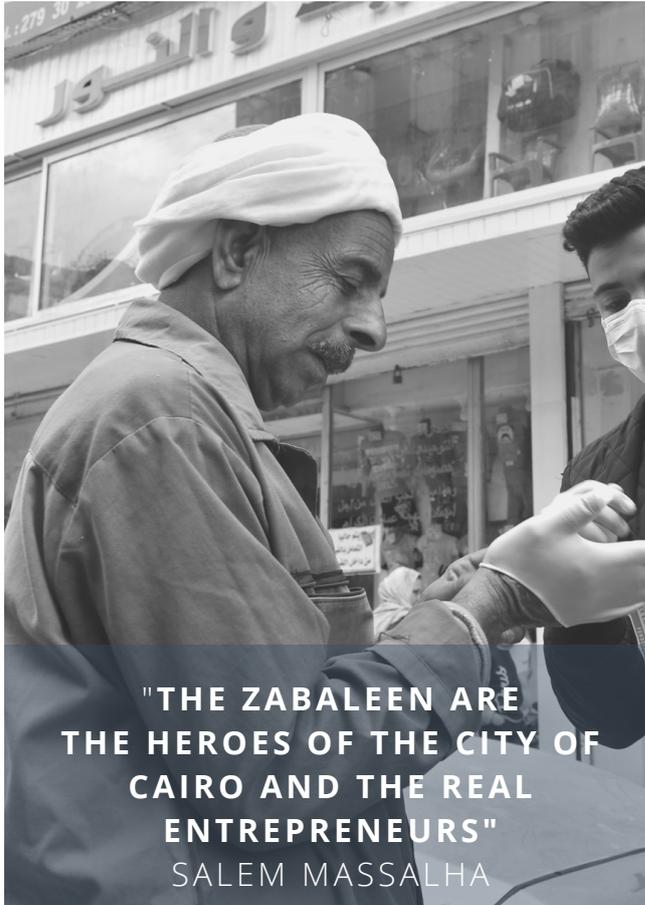




68TH CAIRO CLIMATE TALK REPORT

Water Pollution, Medical Waste and PPE: How do we deal with Covid-19 related solid waste?

2 SEPTEMBER 2020 // PREPARED BY AMENA SHARAF & LILLY VON STACKELBERG



"THE ZABALEEN ARE THE HEROES OF THE CITY OF CAIRO AND THE REAL ENTREPRENEURS"
SALEM MASSALHA

On the 2nd of September 2020 the 68th Cairo Climate Talk invited panelists to discuss the increase of Covid-19 related municipal and medical solid waste.

Solid waste is posing a major threat to the environment, livelihoods and human health. According to the World Bank [2.01 billion tonnes of municipal solid waste](#) are already produced yearly and ongoing pandemic mitigation measures increase the usage of non-recyclable waste such as Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and single use plastics dramatically.

Uwe Gehlen, Head of Cooperation, who opened the panel discussion on behalf of the German Embassy, mentioned that it was not only technology of efficiency that led to German's elaborated waste management system, but an increasing awareness and public dialogue about environmental protection beginning in the 1980s, an approach that could be beneficial for Egypt, too. German-Egyptian partnerships in both

the procurement of PPE and the raising of awareness through campaigns and training programs have already contributed to protecting waste- and medical-workers during the phase of heightened exposure. This cooperation was commended by both project partners **Ruth Erlbeck**, Head of the National Solid Waste Management Programme Egypt (NSWMP) on behalf of the German Corporation for International Cooperation (GIZ) and **Eng. Essam Abdelaziz**, Manager of Hazardous Medical Waste Management, on behalf of the Ministry of Environment.

KEEPING A CITY CLEAN IS EXPENSIVE AND SO FAR THE ZABALEEN ARE TAKING VERY LITTLE PROFIT

Salem Massalha, Co-founder of Bassita and VeryNile, pointed out that waste-workers in Egypt, locally known as the Zabaleen, continue to be marginalized, and stigmatized by parts of the population. He celebrated them by calling them "the heroes of the city of Cairo". Not only do they clean the city at a much lower cost than for example Paris' municipal waste collectors, but they are also real entrepreneurs, making a living off what they have. **Syada Greiss** who is the board chairman of the Association for the Protection of the Environment (APE) located in Manshiyat Naser – the biggest settlement of Zabaleen in Cairo – stressed on the fact that in order to improve solid waste management in Egypt, waste workers need to be recognized as full citizens with access to education and health services, as well as spaces in which they can safely separate the collected waste, as many continue to separate the waste in their homes.

THE PRIVATE SECTOR NEEDS TO BE INVOLVED BUT FOR THAT STRONG LEGISLATION IS NEEDED

The need for stronger regulations and legislations was stressed by all invited experts. **Ruth Erlbeck** praised the introduction of new waste laws on August 19, 2020, as they are at the core of the ongoing reform of the waste management sector. The private sector is a vital partner in addressing solid waste challenges as they can add vital waste management plants, however the private sector will follow profit. This means that if valuable waste is not collected and attractive conditions are not provided, the private sector will not move into the waste sector. It is also important to make sure that regulations are in place to ensure ethical and sustainable waste treatment.

HOSPITAL ASSESSMENTS SHED LIGHT ON WEAK MEDICAL WASTE MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Especially when it comes to medical and hazardous waste, Egypt has been struggling with safe waste disposal facilities. While subscriptions are mandatory and most medical facilities pay for the disposal, according to **Ayman Sabae**, CEO and Specialist in International Health Systems Management at Shamseya, recent assessments have shown that the frequency and safety of this collection is often far from ideal. He added that Corona made the situation more complex as “we are forced to look at household waste as a potentially contagious one.” While segregation of the waste seems to be a possible solution, it became clear through the expert’s insights that the segregation needs to be preceded by a holistic awareness campaign, otherwise the separate wastes will be thrown together by the waste collectors or during the manual sorting process.

MEDICAL WASTE MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES NEED TO BE CENTRALIZED TO INCREASE SAFETY

In addition, **Ruth Erlbeck** pointed out that many hospitals have their own medical waste treatment plants, but they do not always meet the highest standards. A centralized approach to ensure safe disposal could be a possible future scenario for the Egyptian medical sector, especially given that medical waste discarded in landfills poses major health and environmental threats.

“We need to organize and not compete with each other in order to solve the challenges” **Syada Greiss** said. While many reform strategies for waste management have been written, it is actions we need to see, she stressed. The lessons learned during the Covid-19 crisis may lead the way forward for the Zabaleen and the waste sector, as Uwe Gehlen said: “a lot of things can be achieved, can happen when they are pushed by internal or external shocks”.

RUTH ERLBECK

HEAD OF THE NATIONAL
SOLID WASTE
MANAGEMENT
PROGRAMME EGYPT
(NSWMP), GIZ

Ms. Ruth Erlbeck is a solid waste management expert. She is currently Project Manager of the National Waste Management Programme in Egypt at the GIZ. The project, launched in 2012, aims at restructuring the waste sector at the national, regional and local level, establishing an independent central entity to regulate the management of the municipal solid waste system, and waste management units in four governorates. Previously Ms. Ruth held the position of project director at the GIZ on Integrated resource management in Asian cities, tackling topics of secure water supply and sanitation systems, energy security and efficiency, land use, and food security.

Ms. Syada Greiss is a development consultant with experience in the domain of project management, in addition to contributions in the field of social research and development. Ms. Syada is currently the Board Chairperson of The Association for the Protection of the Environment (APE), an NGO that was established to address the needs and rights of waste collector's communities in Cairo. During the course of her professional career, she headed the Socioeconomic Development Department at Environmental Quality International, a well know Egyptian consulting firm, and was the Director of the Canadian International Agency's Program Support Unit.

SYADA GREISS

BOARD CHAIRMAN,
ASSOCIATION FOR THE
PROTECTION OF THE
ENVIRONMENT (APE)

SALEM MASSALHA

CO-FOUNDER, VERYNILE;
CO-FOUNDER, BASSITA

Mr. Salem Massalha is a social and environmental entrepreneur who has a longstanding experience in the field of development. Mr. Salem is the co-founder of Bassita community, specialising in social media campaigning and cause marketing. Mr.Salem developed Clickfunding, an innovation that enables causes to raise funds and awareness through social media interactions. The Clickfunding received multiple innovation awards in Paris, Cape Town, Cairo and Beirut. Mr. Salem is also the co-founder of VeryNil. VeryNile is the first initiative to develop large scale means to clean the Nile while raising awareness on the importance to protect our environment.

Mr. Ayman Sabae is focused on quality management processes for healthcare, social innovation, organizational development and project management. Mr. Ayman is the Founding Partner, CEO and Specialist in International Health Systems Management at Shamseya for innovative community healthcare solutions. Among his other focus areas are the legal framework of public health law which led him to partake in the creation of the Egyptian Charter for Patients' Rights at the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR). In 2019 Mr. Ayman was awarded the Obama Foundation Fellowship which supports outstanding civic innovators.

AYMAN SABAE

CEO AND SPECIALIST IN
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SYSTEMS MANAGEMENT,
SHAMSEYA

BACKGROUND
INFORMATION:

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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