



Press Release

69th Cairo Climate Talks

September 16, 2020

On the 16th of September 2020 the 69th Cairo Climate Talk (CCT) took place virtually via Zoom on the topic of: “Sustainable Eating: Food Sovereignty and Conscious Consumption”. While 80% of the food consumed by Egyptians is provided through small-scale farming, farmers and owners of small agricultural businesses would like to be more in political discussions that affect their sector and ask for more involvement in agricultural policy making. Experts from Egypt and German research institutes discussed why the presence, inclusion and validation of those who provide our daily food is important to ensure no one goes hungry.

Access to food is a right that is declared by international agreements and one of the main goals of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aiming to reduce food poverty and inequalities by 2030. But until now, “820 million go hungry every day all over the world” as was pointed out by Philippe Maupai, Head of the Science Department at the German Embassy in Cairo.

Omniah Hegazy, Director of the Adaptation Department at the Climate Change Central Unit, who opened the talk on behalf of the Ministry of Environment of the Arabic Republic of Egypt highlighted that “Climate change negatively affects all four pillars of food security: availability, access, utilization and stability.” Addressing them jointly is therefore more important now than ever, and in line with the government’s 2009 adoption of the fourth Sustainable Agricultural Development Strategy.

Panelist Dr. Hala Barakat, Food Researcher and Environmental Consultant, explained food sovereignty as the access to and availability of food. However, in contrast to food security, sovereignty implies that the means of production are local and take into consideration local knowledge, culture and climate conditions, thereby ensuring no external dependencies are formed and the food serves the people.

The connection between including citizens into decision-making processes when it comes to food, was highlighted by Julia Behringer, who is a Doctoral Candidate in Food and Agricultural Policy at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. “Food democracy” she said is an extension of food sovereignty, “food

democracy steps back and says: who decides what we eat and what we grow, how do we decide and who is the food system intended for?" Not only is food a right, she affirmed, but to make decisions about our food is our right, too. "In Berlin for example, you can see that in food policy councils, which are groups of citizens and really diverse stakeholders that are saying they want to have an equal input in decision making, not just in Berlin but on national, regional and global levels of food policy."

While all panelists agreed that citizen's awareness of interlinkages between food, health and the environment have increased drastically due to the pandemic, they also saw continuous efforts of community-building and bottom-up approaches as vital in making food available to all.

To make sure everyone can be included in the solution of at least one of the problems concerning sustainable availability of food, Menna Shahin and Maxim Haartsen founded the online platform Tekeya. "We are wasting around 30% of our food, each person in Egypt is wasting around 73 Kilo per year" Ms. Menna explained. On every step of the food supply chain we are currently wasting food, due to unsustainable practices, too low market prices which make throwing food away cheaper than offering it to the consumer, and the practice of surplus food – buying more than will be consumed as a strategy to encourage consumption. Tekeya allows food providers like hotels, markets or grocery stores to sell their surplus food or donate it to those in need. During Ramadan more than a thousand people were able to receive Iftar-packages (for breaking the fast) due to donations facilitated by Tekeya.

According to Ms. Julia such initiatives show that "local food systems are a collaboration, they show that there is a level of trust and solidarity established at a local level" – translating that into a bigger context in which this reflects in policies and is backed financially and politically should be the goal to ensure food sovereignty and increase the resilience of countries' food systems.

According to Dr. Hala, right now in Egypt most policies and funding are focused on large-scale production which is mostly for industrial and export produce, while small-scale production is for feeding people. "Maybe this crisis is an opportunity to think differently and move closer to the principles of working with nature and respecting those who are working in the food production, of which 53% are women" Dr. Hala suggested. And Ms. Julia agreed that "local food needs to be a topic of global commitment and global action, that's what I want to see in 2021".

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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