



**PRESS RELEASE**

**38th Cairo Climate Talks**

**March 15, 2016**

**"Ecopreneurs: Getting Green Start-ups off the Ground"**

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Committed to sustainability, green entrepreneurs start businesses offering products or services that benefit the environment and solve a myriad of local problems. At a crossroads between sustainability, innovation and strategic business development, the growing importance of this business segment has been widely recognized worldwide.

The wider adoption of sustainable business practices has opened up opportunities for green entrepreneurs in market-based economies across the globe, including Egypt. Domestically, the creation of green startups has surged since 2011, and more than 200 startups are working in the field of renewable energy, waste and water management, hazardous waste and agriculture. They are trying to provide clean solutions to pressing environmental, economic and social issues such as energy shortages, pollution and shrinking arable land and water availability.

While investors are wary of tying their money to local green startups, globally plummeting oil prices could provide the boost investors need to refocus on a domestic economic future.

Forbes recently highlighted a Seedstars study that put Cairo among the top 10 cities worldwide to launch a startup.

The Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany in Cairo H.E. Julius Georg Luy opened the 38th [Cairo Climate Talks](#) panel discussion at the German Science Centre in Zamalek Tuesday evening.

“Nearly one third of Egyptian youth entrepreneurs started their own business due to the lack of wage work, indicating that high unemployment and difficult labor market conditions do push youth into entrepreneurship,” said the ambassador, citing figures from the Egyptian Population Council.

“Let’s take the demographic development and the difficult economic situation in Egypt combined with the global need to go green as an opportunity – now,” the ambassador said, highlighting several programs through the German Science Centre and Cairo Climate Talks that support entrepreneurship.

Green economy is increasingly being recognized, said First Assistant Minister of Environment Dr. Mohamed Salah and environmental sustainability is a key part of Egypt's 2030 development plan.

"At the policy levels, the long term plan for renewable energy is to cover 20% of energy needs by 2020, a vast opportunity for local businesses," he said. "Egypt implements a lot of projects moving toward a green economy designed to meet socio-economic priorities."

Despite the regulatory hurdles in Egypt, panelists agreed that market failures are creating many opportunities for ecopreneurs, particularly in waste management, energy and water.

Mahmoud Galal tried and failed to start several agricultural waste businesses until he successfully launched Dayra, a company that turns agricultural waste into biofuel for cement companies.

"When we started collecting agricultural waste in Beheira in the Delta the people said 'are you crazy? You collect rice straw and cotton, we don't care about this we will burn it.' And now we pay for every ton. We create jobs. We have more than six suppliers in one governorate. It's creating a new culture when you open a new market and create the opportunities," he said, advising aspiring ecopreneurs not to shy away from trial and error.

Dr. Ahmed Huzayyin, co-founder and CEO of CleanTech Arabia, who has helped bring several clean energy startups to market, has a unique take on environmental problems: "These businesses are generally very profitable and have the capacity to attract capital. Luckily enough they also have capacity to solve social problems. During the power cuts [of 2013], I was very excited ... -The same thing for garbage; I walk around and see garbage accumulating on the street and know the price is going down for Mahmoud so it's a happy scene for me."

Lack of funding is a challenge for entrepreneurs, and there are few local investors willing to risk capital on green start-ups, said entrepreneur and investor Con O'Donnell, but mindsets are beginning to change as investors from other countries see the value in Egyptian business ideas.

"Pre-2011 people were being told don't bother, don't try you can't fix it anyway. Post-2011 the mindset changed among youth that things can change. Being connected to the internet and things going on around the globe you realize change can happen and through something seemingly as mundane as running a business. There are problems, but there's a mindset change and there's an opportunity."

Panelist Nora Kempmann is an education consultant who has worked on entrepreneurship education programs in Berlin and helped launch one in Saudi Arabia. While the exposure to sustainability concepts may be different in those regions, the basic qualities of a good entrepreneur are the same.

"Entrepreneurs need to be resilient, passionate, hardworking," she said, "What we can do in entrepreneurship education is really plant a seed and show students entrepreneurship can be a career path for the future ... it's a new world different from more traditional careers they've been exposed to."

### **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 Science Center (DWZ), the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) and the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ). For more information, please visit our [website](#) or contact [press@cairoclimatetalks.net](mailto:press@cairoclimatetalks.net).