

**PRESS RELEASE**

**34th Cairo Climate Talks**

**November 2, 2015**

**"Greener Cairo: Sustainability through Urban Agriculture?"**

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As agricultural lands are lost to continued urban expansion, urban agriculture becomes an even more essential part of our food supply chain. In mitigating the effects of climate change and reducing energy consumption, urban and rooftop agriculture are beneficial in cooling the temperature of the buildings and absorbing some of the pollution of the city. In addition, creating green spaces in a megalopolis like Cairo might contribute to a more attractive cityscape as well as to an increased quality of life for inhabitants. Raising animals and growing food in restricted urban spaces also help those who experience difficulties tapping into the formal food system to meet their daily food requirements.

The 34th [Cairo Climate Talks](http://cairoclimatetalks.org/) brought together experts from Egypt and Germany to discuss the benefits and challenges of urban agriculture initiatives and the conditions for reconciling the city with food production and rooftop gardening. Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany in Cairo H.E. Julius Georg Luy opened the panel discussion at the German Science Centre in Zamalek Monday evening, saying urban agriculture is increasingly en vogue in Germany.

“Urban agriculture, especially when confronted with such limited space as we have here in Cairo requires innovative and sustainable solutions for agriculture. Smart irrigation and energy-supply systems, stress-resistant crops and modern greenhouse technologies are pressing issues to be tackled in Egypt,” Ambassador Luy said.

In honor of the event, the ambassador also awarded a custom-made Cairo Climate Talks bicycle to the winner of the Greener Cairo Competition, Monica Michel.

“This ongoing project by students of Cairo University has caught our eyes,” the ambassador said. “Recycling materials, such as plastic bottles and car wheels as well as organic fertilizer made from biological waste are used to turn rooftops in less-privileged areas into places for social gatherings. This contribution, therefore combines sustainability aspects with social aspects and might hopefully serve as model for future projects of this kind.”

The ambassador also highlighted a pilot project by GIZ and Schaduf establishing rooftop vegetable and herb gardens for residents in Ezbet el Nasr. A short film made by the Cairo Climate Talks showcased how providing residents with equipment and technical support for a small investment allows them to generate extra income and cool their buildings.

“It’s true that in order to kick off we have subsidized the equipment heavily and we have expected a very small portion to be borne by residents themselves (10 percent of the cost),” said Carl Philipp Schuck, Urban expert with GIZ and Head of "Climate Change Adaptation in Informal Urban Areas" project.

“This is necessary in the beginning and it’s why international cooperation is here and is providing some funds, but we also want to create a social movement behind rooftop gardening. Only then will people be willing to put money aside to reinvest.”

Sherif Hosny, CEO of Schaduf, the leading company in Egypt for green walls and rooftop gardens and a partner in the GIZ pilot project, works with clients from the poorest neighborhoods to the wealthiest corporations who want to green their buildings.

“We can’t force anyone to have an urban agriculture plot on their land, but there is a growing interest. We get a lot of requests from people who say we want our own rooftop garden just for growing our own crops or herbs. We can’t influence individuals but we try to raise awareness, we come to events like this just to tell people it is possible and it does work and if you are interested,” he said.

Rooftop garden projects in Egypt are working with primarily low-tech hydroponic systems, but

Dr. Martin Buchholz, Senior Researcher at Technische Universitat Berlin and CEO of Watergy GmbH, showcased how additional research and investment in technology such as greenhouses could greatly increase urban agriculture production.

“We are starving to do something, but the potential is really impressive,” Buchholz said. “We can continue the technology in higher symbiosis, using grey water from other sources in the building to irrigate. We could transfer our biological waste by composting, use a combustion system to create substrates.”

Buchholz also works on greenhouses that condense the water evaporated from the plants and recycle the air to supply office spaces and other buildings with cleaner, cooler air and the plants with carbon dioxide and water.

Sometimes the best way forward in cities like Cairo where urban agriculture already exists and is an essential part of the food chain is simply to support and not inhibit the existing informal systems, said Emily Matthiesen, Global Program Officer at Habitat International Coalition. Land, roof access and housing arrangements need to be addressed so people feel ownership to invest in gardening, she added.

“Reforming land tenure arrangements in Egypt and having better access to tenure for small-scale and peasant farmers is absolutely critical to having stronger urban food policies, and also tenure for housing. When we talk about rooftop gardening, if you don’t have tenure to your house, which many people in informal areas suffer from, there’s no reality to talk about.”  
  
Usama el Behairy, Professor at the Faculty of Agriculture of Ain Shams University, has been working on rooftop gardening pilot projects for 15 years. At the outset, no one knew what rooftop gardening was, but he says awareness is growing and so is interest among residents from Alexandria to Upper Egypt.

“We are concentrating on women and children [as project drivers],” el Behairy said. “Our vision is that if we have children eating clean vegetables without pesticides and it’s fresh and they’re breathing clean air, their health will be different after 20 years. In my mind it can be a national project to improve health.”

**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), the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and the Egyptian German High Level Joint Committee for Renewable Energy, Energy Efficiency and Environmental Protection (JCEE). For more information, please visit our [website](http://cairoclimatetalks.org/) or contact [press@cairoclimatetalks.net](mailto:press@cairoclimatetalks.net).