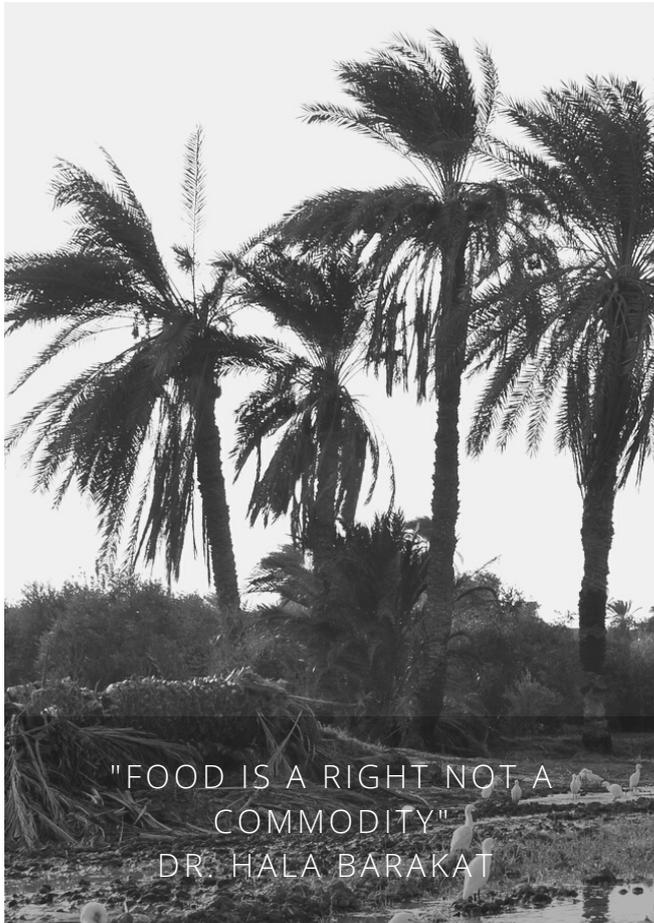




69TH CAIRO CLIMATE TALK REPORT

SUSTAINABLE EATING: FOOD SOVEREIGNTY AND CONSCIOUS CONSUMPTION

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



On the 16th of September 2020 the 69th Cairo Climate Talk (CCT) took place to discuss food poverty, security, sovereignty and ways forward to feed the world.

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.

Omnia 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 Arab 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.

FOOD SOVEREIGNTY IS DIFFERENT TO FOOD SECURITY, IT CONSIDERS LOCAL NEEDS AND KNOWLEDGE

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."

INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY CAN HELP AVOID FOOD WASTE ON ALL LEVELS OF THE FOOD SUPPLY CHAIN

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.

80% OF THE FOOD CONSUMED BY EGYPTIANS IS PRODUCED BY SMALLHOLDERS

Another way to strengthen countries' food self-sufficiency, Dr. Hala suggested, is by investing in and promoting the use of heirloom seeds. Heirloom seeds are local seeds that are adapted to the climate and available soil quality, and which yield seeds for the next season. Currently most farmers in Egypt, including organic farms, are dependent on cultured hybrid-seeds which need to be bought anew each season and are provided by international companies and hence not locally adapted. Smallholders and urban farmers could save money and increase productivity in the long run by breeding and using heirloom seeds. However, many heirloom seeds have been lost or are available in villages where their rarity is not known. Hence Dr. Hala stated that civil society needs to do the research, supported by the government, to find local heirloom seeds in order to ensure resilience of crops and thereby resilience of the food supply chain to ensure food sovereignty.

Dr. Hala stated that 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".

MENNA SHAHIN

CO-FOUNDER OF TEKEYA

Menna Shahin is an Egyptian entrepreneur, and a pharmacist by training, who co-founded Tekeya, a phone application to fight food waste. With co-founder Maxim Haartsen who is also joining us today, Menna launched TeKeya in April 2019. TeKeya is an application designed to fight food waste and to decrease CO2 pollution. Since its launch, the app has repurposed thousands of surplus meals, that were either donated to charity organizations, or sold at reduced price to customers. So far, Tekeya's work has prevented 4 tonnes of CO2 from being dispersed in the atmosphere.

Hala N. Barakat is a trained archaeobotanist and has a Ph.D. in Paleoecology from the University of Aix-Marseille III in France. From 1995 to 2000, she worked as a lecturer at Cairo University before becoming the deputy director of the Center for Documentation of Cultural and Natural Heritage, affiliated to the Library of Alexandria, a position she held until 2012.

DR. HALA BARAKAT

FOOD RESEARCHER AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONSULTANT

In 2013, she joined the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights as a part-time researcher on issues related to the Right to Food and Food Sovereignty in Egypt. She is also a founding member and the former president of Nature Conservation Egypt, a nonprofit organization active in the fields of conservation of endangered species and habitats. Hala has recently finished writing a book on "Food in ancient Egypt" that will be published later this year by AUC press.

JULIA BEHRINGER

DOCTORAL CANDIDATE IN FOOD AND AGRICULTURAL POLICY AT HUMBOLDT-UNIVERSITÄT ZU BERLIN

Julia Behringer came to Berlin as a German Chancellor's Fellow and is currently a doctoral candidate in Food and Agriculture Policy at the Albrecht Daniel Thaer-Institute of Agricultural and Horticultural Sciences at the Humboldt-Universität, with a focus on Food Democracy. She has a background in journalism with a master's degree in Environment and Development Studies from King's College London. She also served as Communications Manager at the Centre for Agriculture and Bioscience International (CABI) in the UK and Switzerland.

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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