

# As water scarcity affects millions, a Middle East foundation is making a difference

Mon, 2020-02-03 22:17

DUBAI: Millions of vulnerable families around the world do not drink, cook, or bathe with clean water – a basic resource that is too often taken for granted.

Water is a fundamental human need and a driver for sustainable growth, yet water scarcity affects more than 40 percent of the global population and is projected to rise.

The numbers can be intimidating: Three in 10 people on the planet lack access to safe drinking water; one in four primary schools lack drinking water; and more than 700 children die every day due to poor sanitation and unsafe water.

The second edition of the Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum Global Water Award, supervised by the UAE Water Aid Foundation, Suqia, highlighted last month the contributions of individuals, innovators and research centers working to solve this pressing problem.

The efforts of 10 individuals and entities, from eight different countries, in developing “sustainable and innovative solar-energy solutions to the problem of water scarcity” were recognized through the awards in Dubai.

Dr. Mahmoud Shatat, a sustainable energy and water specialist at the University of Nottingham in the UK, won the \$40,000 Distinguished Researcher Award in the Innovative Individual category.

His invention promises big reductions in energy consumption. “I couple the technology with solar and renewable energy,” he told Arab News.

“Heat pumps are linked to solar and wind energy and, right now, solar is a promising technology. My project is still in the research stage, but I will use this grant to further develop the technology.”

Shatat, a Palestinian national, said his technology is designed for “people who live in remote areas or conflict zones” where water can be hard to find.

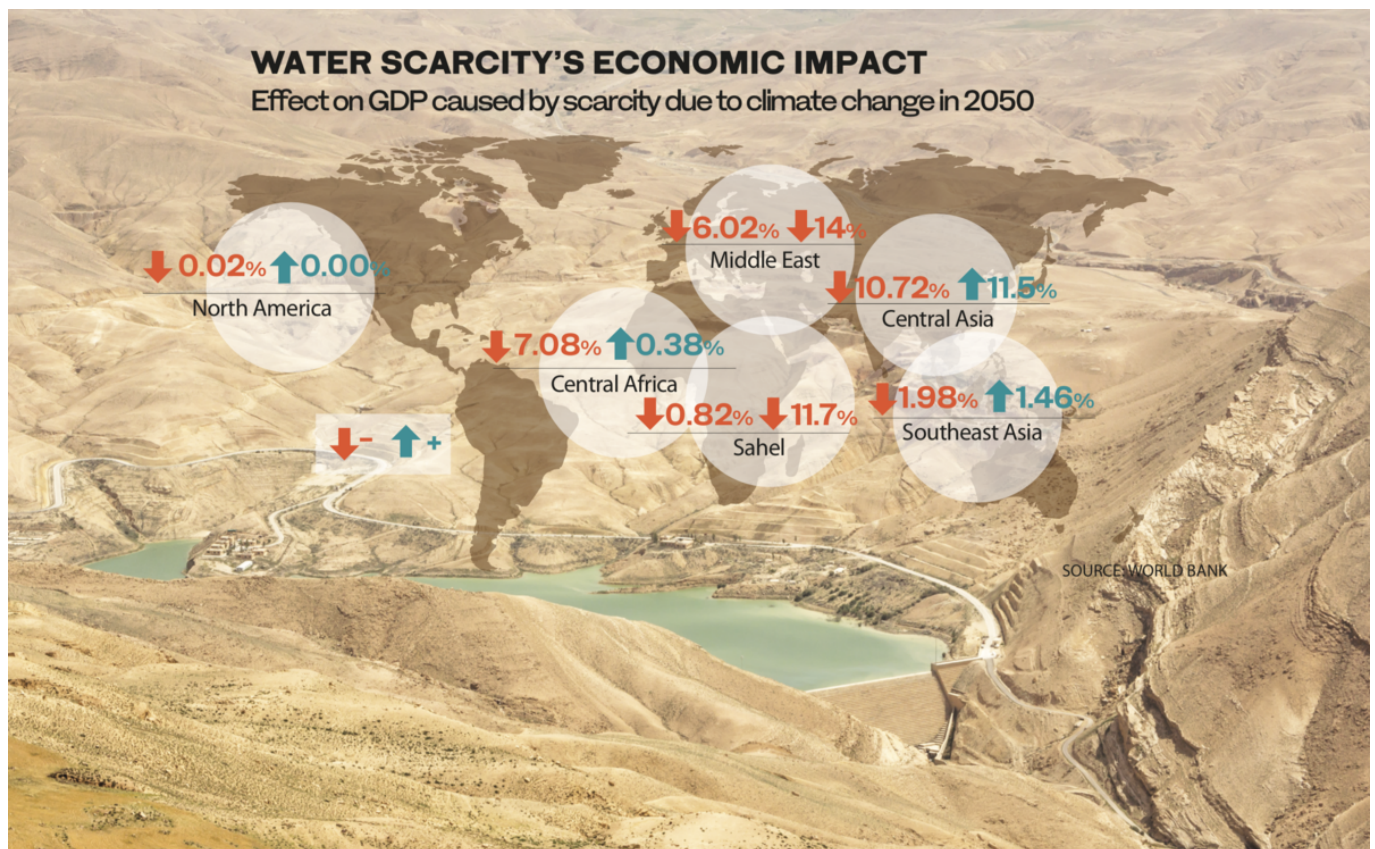
“I developed a solar water-desalination system to convert salty or dirty water into fresh water at a minimal cost that vulnerable people and communities can afford,” he said.

Shatat trains PhD students in water technologies and desalination at Palestine’s Al-Azhar University’s Water and Environment Institute, when he is not busy advising international agencies working in water desalination.

Among them are GIZ, a Germany-based service provider in international

cooperation for sustainable development and education, and the US Agency for International Development.

“I traveled to Yemen to train engineers on solar water desalination, and in Gaza as well,” Shatat said. “I trained my lovely people and my community.”



Despite there being sufficient supplies of freshwater, millions of people who live in dry-land conditions are forced to live without it.

The majority of those people live in isolated rural areas and spend hours walking to collect and transport water for their families every day.

That water is often unclean and contaminated, leaving people sick with waterborne diseases such as diarrhea, cholera and typhoid.

Not only does walking long distances while carrying 20 liters of water cause severe health issues, but it also keeps children out of school and wastes time that families could be using to earn an income.

Against this backdrop, the Innovative Individual Award in the Youth Category of the Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum Global Water Award went to Dr. Muhammad Shahzad of Pakistan and Jan Radel, of Germany.

Radel has specialized in rainwater harvesting in remote locations, which provides safe drinking water for 1,500 children in three schools in Tanzania.

His system purifies water by an ultra-filtration process driven by gravity. “In order to overcome the pressure that we needed to elevate the water into a tower, we used solar-powered electrical pumps,” Radel told Arab News.

“It’s innovative to have this industrial technology – which normally requires a lot of pressure, chemicals and complex processes – (replaced by) a very low-tech application that doesn’t require a lot of energy but delivers the same performance as the industry.”

The technology could find a market in countries such as Saudi Arabia, which has been trying to lower the cost of water extraction and increase its utilization of renewable energy.

“We already have the innovations,” Radel said. “So what we need now is concepts and using these applications.”

Experts say many innovations meet or exceed expectations in the lab or in small pilot studies, but the real test comes in the field.

Suqia says it has so far positively influenced the lives of “over nine million people in 34 countries by providing them with access to clean water” with the help of its implementing partners.

“Humanitarian work has become a daily practice in UAE society,” said Saeed Mohammed Al-Tayer, who serves as the chairman of Suqia’s board of trustees.

“UAE foreign aid focuses on improving the quality of life of those less fortunate by implementing projects helping nations in need. Water is the cornerstone of economic, social and environmental development.”

Al-Tayer notes that boosting the supply of potable water is a vital element of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, which aim to ensure the availability of clean water and sanitation.

Also among the 2020 award winners were the UAE’s International Business Ventures, in partnership with Zero Mass Water from the US, Germany’s Boreal Light GmbH, the UAE’s Khalifa University, Ghana’s Project Maji, Chile’s Plasma Waters and Singapore’s Liquinex Group Pte Ltd.

“We were able to eliminate 100 percent of viruses and bacteria in highly polluted water through the transformation of a continuous flow of contaminated water into plasma,” said Joaquin Troncoso, head of engineering at Chile’s AZ Foundation.

“Through a sharp pressure drop inside the reaction chamber, the water is transformed into biphasic liquid gas stream. The biphasic flow is exposed to an electrical current field that ionizes the water particles, generating a stable plasma state.

“The water elements are then recombined and condensed as potable water suitable for human consumption.”

It took the Plasma Waters team almost nine years to develop the system, said Troncoso.

“Everything we learnt was from the lab,” he told Arab News. “It was a great challenge but we’re really proud of what we’ve achieved already.”

"We have had a project running for three years in Chile and we recently started a project in Nairobi in Kenya.

"It's very important because the water crisis is a big problem – you can't solve the water crisis without technology and that's our mission."



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How the Middle East can tackle the problem of water scarcity

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## [Egypt steps up preventive measures in hospitals to combat coronavirus threat](#)

Author:

Mon, 2020-02-03 21:50

CAIRO: The Egyptian Ministry of Health has stepped up preventive measures in hospitals throughout the country to combat the threat of any outbreak of the deadly Chinese coronavirus which has spread to more than 24 countries.

The ministry's preventive medicine sector has called on hospitals to investigate all patients admitted into emergency units with flu-like symptoms such as sneezing, coughing and fever.

The steps are part of Egypt's precautionary measures to protect the country from the coronavirus which has so far killed more than 360 people, mostly in China where there are at least 17,000 confirmed cases.

Outside China, there have been at least 150 confirmed cases of the virus – which causes severe acute respiratory infection – and one death, in the Philippines.

Egyptian health officials added that the country's free therapy and medical license sector was also intensifying measures to fight viruses, including the coronavirus, in private hospitals and clinics.

The moves came as 345 Egyptians from the Chinese city of Wuhan, where the coronavirus outbreak started, were flown back to Egypt on Monday.

The ministry said it was carefully monitoring the situation but confirmed there had been no reported cases of coronavirus in Egypt thanks to strict checks in place at airports and seaports, especially on travelers from China.

Ayman Emam, the ministry's director general of quarantine, said that airports and seaports had been provided with health-monitoring cards which allowed access to information on passengers arriving from abroad which could be recorded on the ministry's database. The cards also offered the possibility of monitoring people for 14 days, the incubation period of the virus.

Emam noted that the quarantine procedures were in constant operation to prevent any epidemic from spreading. Masks and gloves had also been provided for airport staff to prevent the transmission of infections.

He added that the ministry had specialized medical equipment to screen all visitors from Wuhan, and that hospitals in all of Egypt's 14 governorates had been designated to treat people suffering from infectious diseases.

The Egyptian health ministry was coordinating with all airlines to protect passengers "anytime, anywhere," and he pointed out that a series of seminars had been held to raise awareness on preventive measures for viruses and infectious diseases.

A total of 345 Egyptians living in Wuhan returned to Cairo on Monday. Medical crews were on board the plane to accompany the passengers and their families. The team wore protective suits and face masks and provided sanitizers and face masks to the Egyptian passengers before they boarded the plane. They will be held in quarantine for 14 days.

Marwan El-Fiqi, an Egyptian resident of Wuhan, thanked the Egyptian authorities for their quick response in bringing people back to Egypt.

El-Fiqi, a professor of communicable diseases at Benha University's school of veterinary medicine, said that in China they had to buy masks as ordered by

the Chinese authorities. They also sanitized their clothes, shoes and luggage. "We sanitized our belongings before boarding the plane. The process was repeated at the airport and the evacuation was timely."

Egypt sent 10 tons of medical equipment to China as a gift to the Chinese people on board the plane that transferred the Egyptians living in Wuhan back to Cairo. Egyptian Minister of Health Hala Zayed said the aid included preventive equipment such as face masks and alcoholic sanitizers.



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Saudi students evacuated from coronavirus-hit Chinese city placed in quarantine

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## [‘Open an embassy in Jerusalem,’ Netanyahu tells Uganda](#)

Author:

AFP

ID:

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Mon, 2020-02-03 17:20

ENTEBBE, Uganda: Israel's Benjamin Netanyahu on Monday 'held talks with Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni and called for the opening of missions in each others' countries, during a visit aimed at boosting ties. Netanyahu last visited Uganda in July 2016 to mark the 40th anniversary of a hostage rescue at Entebbe airport, in which his brother Yonatan died. "There are two things we very much want to achieve... one is direct flights from Israel to Uganda," Netanyahu told Museveni at a joint press conference. "And second... you open an embassy in Jerusalem, I'll open an embassy in Kampala," he added. "We are studying that," Museveni replied. Traditionally, most diplomatic missions in Israel have been in Tel Aviv as countries maintained a neutral stance over the status of Jerusalem. But US President Donald Trump shocked the world in December 2017 by recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital and shifting the US embassy from Tel-Aviv to that city. In recent years, Israel has boosted its links with African nations, improving ties following a difficult period when many post-independence African leaders sided with Israel's Arab rivals, and viewed Israel's support for apartheid South Africa with intense suspicion. Israel now has diplomatic relations with 39 of 47 sub-Saharan African states. Netanyahu is on his fifth visit to Africa in less than four years. The continent is a lucrative market for defense equipment and the agriculture sector. As Israeli expertise in military and agricultural technology has developed, the opportunity for trade with Africa has grown.



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## [Lebanese security forces pepper spray demonstrators outside US Embassy](#)

Author:

Sun, 2020-02-02 23:46

BEIRUT: Angry Lebanese and Palestinian protesters staged a sit-in on Sunday outside the US Embassy to protest the "deal of the century," which US President Donald Trump announced last week.

The Lebanese Army and the Internal Security Forces set up a perimeter using barbed wire and iron barriers on the Dbayeh Highway leading to the US Embassy in Awkar, 11 km north of Beirut.

The protesters raised Palestinian flags as well as the flags of Lebanese parties, including the Communist Party and the Syrian Social Nationalist Party. They chanted in support of Palestine and in denunciation of the deal. Protesters shouted: "Down with the deal of disgrace. All Palestine is for the Palestinians, their children, and grandchildren."

The protesters called on all Arabs to take to the streets and stressed that "this deal will fall before the will of the Palestinian people as did the Sykes-Picot Agreement and the Balfour Declaration before, and Palestine will remain for all Palestinians."

The sit-in became violent when the protesters attempted to remove the barbed wire to reach the perimeter.

They threw stones at the security forces. The military responded by using pepper spray, leading to protesters fainting and suffocating.

Ghassan Ayoub, a representative from the Palestine Liberation Organization, told Arab News: "The Palestinian factions did not participate in the sit-in as the call for the sit-in was Lebanese, and the Palestinian participation was symbolic." He said that the Palestinian camps in Lebanon have been in a state of anger since Trump announced his deal.

"Palestinian refugees express their anger by staging sit-ins inside their camps and holding seminars that explain to the refugees the disadvantages and risks of the deal to the Palestinian people," he added.

The US Embassy warned its employees 24 hours before the sit-in to avoid the



area of the demonstration.

## **HIGHLIGHT**

**The sit-in became violent when the protesters attempted to remove the barbed wire to reach the perimeter.**

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas announced during a meeting of Arab foreign ministers in Cairo on Saturday that “the Palestinian Authority decided to cut all ties with the US and Israel, including security relations, after rejecting the US Middle East peace plan.”

Trump’s plan, endorsed by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, calls for the establishment of a demilitarized Palestinian state under near-total Israeli security control. It also calls for the US recognition of Israeli settlements in the West Bank and of Jerusalem as the unified capital of Israel.

Hezbollah Deputy Secretary-General Sheikh Naim Qassem said on Sunday: “Trump and Netanyahu must know that the resisting Palestinian people and the peoples of the region will not let this deal pass and will not allow Israel to occupy and legitimize its occupation at the same time.

“Palestine is on all the soil of Palestine, from the sea to the river, and the capital is Jerusalem, east and west, not East Jerusalem alone. This is what we believe in, and we believe it is possible to achieve it. It requires some sacrifices and time.”

Lebanon’s Maronite Patriarch Bechara Al-Rahi said: “The deal of the century is a slap to the Palestinian cause and the decisions of the UN and the Security Council taken successively since 1948.”

Al-Rahi expressed his fear that the implementation of this deal would lead to “a new conflict that would increase destruction and bloodshed, and as usual Lebanon would not be spared the outcomes.”



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British FM warns Israel against West Bank annexation  
Israeli Arabs fear for their future under Trump peace plan

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## [Muppets help conflict kids in new Arabic 'Sesame Street'](#)

Author:

Sun, 2020-02-02 23:42

DUBAI: A band of Muppets, both old favorites and new friends, will star in an Arabic retooling of "Sesame Street" with a regional twist.

In its Western iterations, the long-running franchise addresses issues including family breakdown. The new Middle East version instead seeks to help children, especially young Syrian refugees, cope with emotions.

New characters will join Cookie Monster (Kaa'ki), Grover (Gargur), Elmo and others in the new show in Arabic, called "Ahlan Simsim!" (Welcome Sesame).

"We always play and sing and try new things and have many adventures," new puppet Basma, a five-year-old purple girl with a twin twist hairstyle, told AFP on a publicity tour in Dubai.

"We have a lot of friends in the neighborhood, but Jad is my best friend," she added of her new co-star, a yellow boy with a tuft of canary-colored

hair.

Basma, Jad and their gluttonous goat friend Ma'zooza, will take to the airwaves six days a week on Middle East satellite channel MBC 3 from Sunday Feb. 2.

The show is a partnership between the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and Sesame Workshop, which is responsible for the program worldwide.

The aim is to offer "nurturing care to children and caregivers affected by the Syrian conflict," according to a statement.

Since erupting in 2011, the war has displaced over 5.1 million Syrian children, with 2.5 million of them now living in regional host countries including Lebanon, Turkey and Jordan.

"Jad and I are not that similar. He is an artist and a painter. I love to sing and dance and he likes things in order. He thinks and plans while I get bored," said Basma.

"Sesame Street" mainstay Grover, meanwhile, sets out to interview children from across the Arab world, tackling myriad issues including jealousy and how to care for loved ones.

"We are all different from each other," Grover told AFP.

"Some of us like to sing and some of us like to dance and some like to exercise," added the gangly blue character, beloved of children and grownups since his 1970 "Sesame Street" debut.

"But I discovered we are all alike because we love each other."

## **SPEEDREAD**

**In its Western iterations, the long-running franchise addresses issues including family breakdown. The new Middle East version instead seeks to help children, especially young Syrian refugees, cope with emotions.**

The new show is produced in Jordan and is the result of a two-year-long collaboration with numerous child development specialists.

"We have the emotional 'ABCs' and at the same time we present coping mechanisms to deal with these emotions. In every episode, we have a coping mechanism," said executive producer Khaled Haddad.

He said Arab children had difficulty expressing their emotions.

"They don't know what their emotion is, the child does not know he is terrified or angry or even jealous. Through our episodes we talk about these emotions and how to deal with them," he added.

In one episode, Basma and Jad learn from big brother figure Hadi how to handle fear.

"You put your hand on your tummy then you take a breath through your nose – inhale and exhale. It calms you down," Basma said, demonstrating the technique.

Jad's character, who didn't join the trip to Dubai, is portrayed as new to the community.

But "we don't label him as a refugee in the show," Haddad stressed. "He is new to the neighborhood, meets all the kids and becomes friends with them." He noted that across the region, "you have kids going from one place to another."

“Our show speaks to all the children of the Arab world,” he added. “This is not for a certain group.”

The first Arabic version of “Sesame Street,” known as “Iftah ya Simsim” (Open Sesame), aired in the region from 1979 until 1990 and enjoyed immense popularity.

Filming for a second season of the new series will begin in March.

“We hope children will become smarter, kinder and better at expressing their emotions after watching this show,” Haddad said.



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‘Sesame Street’ sues over new Melissa McCarthy puppet movie  
A Muppet with autism to be welcomed soon on ‘Sesame Street’