

Ways the Middle East is reducing food waste

Author:

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DUBAI: As the world shifts to meet the UN's Sustainable Development Goals related to hunger, food security and nutrition, a number of regional initiatives are seeking to help the Arab world. From Kuwait and Lebanon, to Palestine, Iraq, Egypt and the UAE, the Middle East is coming up with new sustainable solutions that are redefining the agriculture, farming and food industry.

Re:Food in Kuwait is one of them, having started in 2014 when its founder Maryam Aleisa and her family would take home-cooked food to people in need. After studying abroad, Aleisa came back to Kuwait with a mission to give back to her country. "Kuwait generates so much waste and 50 percent of that is actually organic waste," she said. "Most of it is food, and we have a huge waste culture when it comes to food, which is very disappointing and very sad. We have an abundance of products which leads to an abundance of waste as well, unfortunately."

Re:Food was created as a solution to the food waste problem, after Aleisa acquired her environmental awareness from the University of Oregon, which gave her a perspective on recycling, waste management and reducing the carbon footprint. "That's something I wanted to take with me to Kuwait," she said. "I was looking at how best to tackle the issue of food waste from different channels and ways to manage it after looking at international models like the Greater Boston Food Bank and in Saudi Arabia."

Most of the food waste takes place very close to the expiry date. And although Aleisa did not find a model to replicate, she created her own, catering to Kuwait.

"The easiest way to tackle it was through the fast-moving consumer goods sector," she said. "I found a lot of resistance from suppliers at the beginning because they were not used to rechannelling the waste to something more useful. They were used to either selling it or just throwing it away."

A major obstacle encouraging a lack of motivation among suppliers to collaborate was the absence of taxation from the Kuwaiti government when food is wasted, although it spends a lot to manage this waste. "It was a challenge," Aleisa said. "I had to speak to the humanitarian side of people to get their attention about the problem because there's a lack of environmental awareness in Kuwait."

Following her mother's monthly initiative of handing out food to needy families, she started building a database of local beneficiaries. "It grew into something huge, with more than 2,000 volunteers, gradually increasing to a full-time team," she said.

Of Kuwait's 17,820 square kilometers, more than 18 sq km are occupied by landfills, pointing to an urgent need to reduce food waste.

So far, the company has collaborated with more than 30 food and beverage companies in all food sectors. Most of the products received are organic, ranging from dairy, chocolate, pasta, dry milk and oil, due to their high

cost and suppliers refusing to discount them.

FASTFACT

820 m – Number of people who are hungry today.

11% – Level of world hunger in the past three years.

50% – Proportion of Kuwaiti landfills that are filled with organic waste.

1,700 – Number of families who benefit from Re:Food's packages in Kuwait.

70 – Hectares: Size of Egypt's desert that was revitalized by Sekem.

800 -Number of farms Sekem works with.

It also started distributing packages to more than 1,700 families, with the aim of reaching 2,000 by the end of the year, and individual packages began a few days ago.

The youth-founded initiative won the Kuwait Youth Award for Excellence and Creativity of 2018, and Aleisa has been recognized as one of the 30 Arab Hope Makers of 2017.

Hessa Alfadgosh, part of the managing team, spoke of a prevalent food waste culture in the region. "We always cook more than we can eat," she said. "Leftover food (can still be eaten) and, at the same time, companies produce excess food without thinking about leftovers. We were shocked that most of the wasted food isn't expired but, because of lack of space, they throw it away."

Also tackling food waste in the region is Philippe Rahbe, who has just launched Too Good to Waste in Lebanon. The French-Lebanese plans on collecting leftover food from supermarkets and grocery stores and transforming them into five-star dishes thanks to the help of chefs. They will then be sold to those in need at a cheaper price through pop-up meals in specific neighborhoods.

"I've been in the food sustainability industry for the past five years, starting in France," he said. "Then I was a grocery store manager in Lebanon and found out there is too much food waste on the retaining phase of the food industry. I saw a terrible figure that said that a third of food is wasted globally, which is also the case in Lebanon and the MENA region, so I said I have to do something about it."

"I was looking at how best to tackle the issue of food waste from different channels and ways to manage it after looking at international models like the Greater Boston Food Bank and in Saudi Arabia.

Maryam Aleisa, Founder of Re:Food in Kuwait

The idea kicked off as a trial through community-based event Disco Soup, where he would visit fruit and vegetable markets and cook dishes from their leftovers. "We found people were very interested in this and it encouraged us to keep going," Rahbe said. "A third of the Lebanese population experiences hunger so I decided to do something about (it)."

Nassim Caesar is another Lebanese who believes in preventing food waste. His company, Caesar Cider, works with 250 small apple producers in the country. "Lebanese apples used to be imported through Syria inland to our big markets like Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and sometimes Iraq," he said. "So border closure has meant exports by sea, which has increased the cost." Other crises, such as currency inflation in Egypt, increased competition from European apples in the GCC and climate change, have weakened the Lebanese apple industry. "Climate change has impacted agriculture as a whole, as well as a water shortage," said the agricultural engineer and rural development specialist.

"We had hail in spring too and a lot of pests invaded, so we need a holistic pest management program for our farmers."

Given that most of the farmers are older and set in their ways, implementation has proven tough, with many having to cut down their orchards or slow down their production. "Our mission is to create a push for a circular economy, producing local, consuming local," Caesar said. "We work with apple farmer groups or cooperatives, we buy unwanted apples too, either scratched or damaged, collect juice, ferment it and transform it into fresh apple cider."

He spoke of a prevalence in food waste in a once-a-year harvest crop. "It takes a lot of water to produce these apples and it's a loss just to have them being thrown," he said. "So we should keep local production and make use of it."

In Egypt, Sekem is using more sustainable biodynamic agricultural methods to revitalize 70 hectares of the country's desert. From herbs and fruits, to vegetables and other crops, it works with more than 800 farms in the region, with the returns partly reinvested into social and cultural activities, such as children's education and a medical center.

"When I visited Egypt in 1975, I realized the bad circumstances that it had got into," said Sekem's founder, Dr. Ibrahim Abouleish, who had moved to Austria in 1956 before returning to Egypt in 1977.

"I developed the Sekem vision out of my own experiences in the past years: Sustainable development toward a future where every human being can unfold his individual potential, where mankind is living together in social forms reflecting human dignity, and where all economic activity is conducted in accordance with ecological and ethical principles."

In 2003, the Schwab Foundation selected him as one of the world's outstanding social entrepreneurs. That same year, he received the "Right Livelihood Award," also known as the Alternative Nobel Prize, for "demonstrating how a modern business model combines profitability and success in world markets with a humane and

spiritual approach to people while maintaining respect for the environment."

In the UAE, a number of initiatives have also taken root, from My Arabian Almanakh, an urban gardening journal which creates awareness even in urban environments such as Dubai, and the Ramadan Sharing Fridges Campaign, with about 200 fridges spread across Dubai allowing people to donate food to the

needy.

And the world is in need of more action as the number of people who suffer from hunger has slowly increased. More than 820 million people – about one in every nine people – are hungry today, according to the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization.

After decades of steady decline, the 2019 State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World revealed that the trend in world hunger reverted in 2015, remaining virtually unchanged in the past three years, at a level slightly below 11 percent.

In the Arab region, countries affected by conflict, such as Syria, Iraq and Yemen, are the most affected, with an almost doubling in the number of undernourished between 2010 and 2018.







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Civilian death toll mounts as Syrian offensive widens

Author:

Sat, 2019-08-17 22:28

BEIRUT: Airstrikes have killed more than two dozen civilians including 11 children in opposition-held northwestern Syria in the last two days in an escalation of a Russian-backed offensive, a war monitor and local activists said on Saturday.

An airstrike in the village of Deir killed seven people, mostly children, on Saturday morning, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said. On Friday, airstrikes in the village of Al-Haas killed 13 people. The dead included a pregnant woman and her unborn baby, local activists and the Observatory said.

They had been seeking shelter after fleeing another area.

Rami Abdul Rahman, director of the Observatory said the regime's aim appeared to be to force civilians to flee from areas that had been relatively unscathed in a military escalation that began in late April.

"They are bombing the towns and their outskirts to push people to flee," he said.

'No military positions'

Ahmad Al-Dbis, safety and security manager for the US-based Union of Medical Care and Relief Organizations (UOSSM), which supports medical facilities in the northwest, said the bombardment had widened into populated areas where there were no military positions.

"They are being targeted to drive the people toward forced displacement," he told Reuters.

Dbis said the number of civilians killed by regime or Russian forces stood at more than 730 since late April. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has said more than 500 civilians have died in hostilities.

Russia and Syria have said their forces are not targeting civilians and are instead aimed at opposition forces including the Nusra Front, an opposition group known today as Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham.

The northwestern region including Idlib province is part of the last major foothold of the opposition to Syria's Bashar Assad.

France called on Friday for an immediate end to the fighting. The French Foreign Ministry added that it condemned in particular airstrikes on camps

for the displaced.

The upsurge in violence has already forced hundreds of thousands of people to flee toward the Turkish border.

A Turkey-backed Syrian opposition force based north of the city of Aleppo, the National Army, said it had yet to send reinforcements to help the Idlib opposition fighters due to technical reasons.

“There is a meeting today among the factions over preparations for the National Army to enter Idlib and we are awaiting the results of this meeting,” Maj. Youssef Hammoud, its spokesman, said.

The regime side has been advancing toward the town of Khan Sheikhoun in southern Idlib province, threatening to encircle the last remaining pocket of opposition-held territory in neighboring Hama province.



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Air strikes kill 15 civilians in northwest Syria
Eight years on, Syria's neighbors weary of war refugees

Heavy downpours wreak havoc in Istanbul, flooding historic Grand Bazaar

Sat, 2019-08-17 22:17

ISTANBUL: Strong rains in Istanbul on Saturday flooded several neighborhoods, as well as the Grand Bazaar, while officials said one person was found dead in the city.

Rain started early in the day in parts of Istanbul and picked up pace around noon.

Footage from parts of the Grand Bazaar showed shopkeepers, ankle-deep in water, clearing the water out of their stores and the halls. It also showed water pouring out of a hole on the wall into the bazaar, as well as a manhole left open to drain the flood.

A homeless man was found dead in the Unkapani area on the European side of the city due to the flood, the spokesman for the Istanbul municipality said on Twitter.

Several roads across Istanbul, including parts of the road on the shores of the Bakirkoy district and a section of one of the city's main highways, had also been submerged, Istanbul municipality's Disaster Coordination Center (AKOM) said.

The rains also flooded an underpass where several shops are located in the Eminonu neighborhood, it said.

Footage on Turkish media showed hundreds of books and goods floating in the water as shopkeepers submerged up to their waists worked to clear the area.

AKOM said 114 kilo of rain per square meter had fallen in the Fatih district, where the Grand Bazaar, as well as the Unkapani and Eminonu areas, are located.



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6,000 migrants arrested in Istanbul crackdown
Deportation of Syrian refugees from Istanbul creates panic

[Libya intercepts boats with over 270 migrants](#)

Author:

Sat, 2019-08-17 21:46

CAIRO, BARCELONA: Libya's coast guard says it has intercepted four boats carrying 278 Europe-bound migrants off the country's Mediterranean coast.

The migrants, including 18 women and two children, were intercepted on Tuesday in separate rescue operations off the coast near the capital, Tripoli, a spokesman said.

Ayoub Gassim said the migrants were given humanitarian and medical aid before being taken to detention centers in Tripoli.

Libya slid into chaos after the 2011 uprising that toppled and later killed ruler Muammar Qaddafi. Armed groups have proliferated, and the country has emerged as a major transit point for migrants fleeing war and poverty in Africa and the Middle East for a better life in Europe.

Meanwhile, a charity that operates a rescue ship carrying 134 migrants off the coast of Italy said on Saturday that it could not guarantee their security, after the boat had spent more than two weeks waiting for a port to disembark in.

The migrants picked up off the coast of Libya, most of whom are African, are waiting to disembark on the southern Italian island of Lampedusa.

Italy's far-right Interior Minister Matteo Salvini has ordered his officials not to let them do so, although on Saturday he made a partial concession, saying he would allow any children to leave the boat.

He added that he had only agreed to this at the insistence of Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte.

The Barcelona-based NGO Open Arms said that 27 minors were to be allowed off the boat.

It also said that the 16 days waiting for a port to disembark in had taken their toll on the migrants, with frequent fights breaking about among them and conditions on board deteriorating.

"It is terrible, the things that are happening are not only physical but psychological. The conditions in which they were staying in Libya and now in the ship, it is just terrible, with 130 people and two toilets," Open Arms' director and founder Oscar Camps told Reuters on Friday.

France, Germany, Romania, Portugal, Spain and Luxembourg have said they will help relocate the migrants, but the reaction from Salvini's interior ministry has been skeptical.

Salvini issued a statement on Saturday reiterating that Open Arms could have taken the migrants to Spain and that it was to blame for their plight. But he added that he was now willing to allow "presumed minors" off the boat.



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Rights group demands safe return of abducted Libyan lawmaker
80 migrants rescued off Libya coast

[Sudanese army and civilians seal interim power-sharing deal](#)

Author:

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Sat, 2019-08-17 10:00

KHARTOUM: Sudan's main opposition coalition and the ruling military council on Saturday signed a final power-sharing deal that paves the way for a transitional government, and eventually elections, following the overthrow of long-time leader Omar Al-Bashir.

Stability in Sudan, which has been grappling with an economic crisis, is seen

as crucial for a volatile region struggling with conflict and insurgencies from the Horn of Africa to Egypt and Libya. One of Sudan's top generals, Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, who is deputy head of the military council, and opposition alliance representative Ahmad al-Rabie had initialed the agreement on Aug. 4 and were the main signatories on Saturday. Those in the room clapped and cheered and an orchestra played a patriotic song.



Also present were African Union and Ethiopian mediators, who helped broker the accord, and representatives from Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and the United Arab Emirates, all of which see themselves as influential in Khartoum.

The Saudi Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Adel Al-Jubeir led Saudi Arabia's delegation at the ceremony in Khartoum, Saudi Press Agency reported.

Al-Jubeir was accompanied by the Saudi Minister of State for African affairs Ahmed Abdul Aziz Kattan and the Saudi ambassador to Sudan Ali bin Hassan Jafar.

PHOTOS: [Sudanese take to the streets to celebrate transition to civilian rule](#)

Saudi Arabia has and will continue to support everything that guarantees Sudan's security and stability, Al-Jubeir said at the ceremony.

"We look forward to the Sudanese fortifying the partnership agreement and

combating foreign interference.”

Al-Jubeir also said that Saudi Arabia actively participated in supporting efforts to reach the agreement in Sudan.

The African Union envoy to Sudan Mohamed El-Hassan Lebatt said that Saudi Arabia’s role in facilitating the agreement in Sudan was appreciated.



Leaders of Ethiopia, South Sudan and Kenya were also present.

“The coming period will be a test for us, no one will be excluded,” said leading opposition figure Sadiq Al-Mahdi, Sudan’s last democratically elected premier. “We will open the door to everyone to participate in Sudan’s celebration.”

The Transitional Military Council (TMC) has ruled Sudan since April, when the military deposed Bashir following months of protests against his rule during which dozens of demonstrators were killed.

The TMC and the main opposition alliance, known as the Forces of Freedom and Change (FFC), have been negotiating the power-sharing deal since then, but continued unrest, during which more protesters were killed, delayed an agreement and plunged Sudan further into turmoil.

Dagalo, also known as Hemedti, commands the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces, some of whose members have been accused of involvement in killing demonstrators who have repeatedly turned out in huge numbers to press for political progress.

In a speech, Mohammed Nagy Alassam, a leader within the FFC, emphasized the need for an investigation and justice for those who were killed, particularly during the violent dispersal of a protest site in the capital Khartoum on

June 3.

“The martyrs are still with us, they are with the revolutionaries,” spectators in the room chanted.

State television showed dozens of people lined up outside the convention centre where the signing ceremony was held, waving flags and flashing peace signs in celebration.

The make-up of a new sovereign council, which will run Sudan during a three-year transitional period leading up to elections, will be announced on Aug. 18.

According to Saturday’s agreement, the council will comprise five members each from the two sides plus a civilian agreed by both. It will name Sudan’s new premier based on a nomination by the FFC.

The accord also a 300-member legislative assembly to serve during the transitional period, and a cabinet of technocrats.

Bashir is wanted for war crimes in Sudan’s Darfur region by the International Criminal Court, and is awaiting trial in Sudan on corruption charges.



