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“Before we start talking about mitigation, adaptation, or vulnerability, much less climate change evaluation, we need to first raise awareness about the basics.”

According to Hala Yousry, people working directly on climate change issues in Egypt are few and far between, and little information about the issue is being disseminated outside the borders of a small expert community. In addition, the international donor community deals with high-level government institutions, such as ministries, in efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, but there is still not

enough awareness of the importance of measures, such as fuel switching, to mitigate climate change.

“The Egyptian population at large, including the educated, doesn’t know enough about why the changing global climate is a critical issue, especially for Egypt,” Yousry says.

To demonstrate her point, Yousry, who besides her main work as a socioeconomist at Egypt’s Desert Research Center is also an active member of the National Council for Women, showcased Al Gore’s “An inconvenient truth” a number of months ago at one of the council’s high-level meetings. The screening sparked lively discussion and debate around the issue. However, for many participants at the meeting, Al Gore’s documentary was their first significant exposure to the issue.

This is the problem, says Yousry. To take steps forward in the fight against climate change, there needs to be a concerted effort to raise awareness so that people with the capacity to act have knowledge on which to base their actions. Then we can talk about evaluation.

Yousry is part of a team at the Desert Research Center working to combat desertification in Egypt. Her role focuses on the human element and looks at ways in which desertification affects people and their livelihoods. Yousry notes that Egypt has had a long history of combating desertification, which is one of world’s biggest environmental concerns with potentially huge social repercussions. But for some reason, even though climate change exacerbates the desertification problem, fighting climate change has not yet made it onto the nation’s priority list.

This is reflected by the low visibility of the issue on the government's action agenda. "Climate change needs to be mainstreamed much more where it counts, such as within the Ministry of Environment and, at the moment, this doesn't appear to be the case," she says.

After participating in the International Conference on Evaluating Climate Change and Development in Alexandria, Yousry is keen to take action. She would very much like to incorporate a climate change component in her desertification work, but capacity would need to be built within the Desert Research Center to do so. This is where the value of this international conference lies for her — in networking. She hopes that the contacts made with climate change researchers, project implementers, and evaluators will help her reach this goal.

In addition, she hopes to help spread the word on climate change and do her part to raise much needed awareness on the issue in Egypt. But it isn't just about spreading the word; she believes that the type of message conveyed is also of vital importance. She finds that even among people who are aware of the issue, the complete picture is sometimes missing or not fully understood. In her opinion, people must understand the bigger picture, and everyone needs to be on the same page, talking about the same thing.

In the meantime, Yousry will continue to push the climate change agenda within her sphere of influence and hopes that soon there will be enough momentum on a national scale to tackle an issue that is not discussed nearly as often as it should be considering the potential consequences of climate change for Egypt, a country with a significant length of coastline and 40% of its industry within minutes of the sea.

For more information on the Desert Research Center, please visit www.drc-egypt.org/