

For Immediate Release



Beirut: 25-6-2019

Water solutions by young Arab leaders in the first Water Innovation Lab in Lebanon hosted by AUB Faculty of Agricultural and Food Sciences

The Faculty of Agricultural and Food Sciences (FAFS) at the American University of Beirut (AUB) hosted the first Water Innovation Lab in Lebanon (WIL Lebanon) for one week in Bekaa Valley at FAFS' Advancing Research Enabling Communities Center (AREC) from June 8 - 14, 2019. Among the 70 participants were 62 from Lebanon, with 13 were from AUB FAFS, five from Jordan, and three from Syria. Young community leaders, engineers, architects, entrepreneurs, professionals and experts joined to explore, study, and resolve some of Lebanon's most pressing water challenges.

“Water is crucial for human security that includes food, water, health and financial needs. The future generation needs to have an understanding of these systems that are impacted and impact water resources. WIL intended to provide this opportunity for young professionals to engage and think creatively about system level solutions to the water challenge in semi-arid environments,” stated FAFS Dean Rabi Mohtar.

With the American University of Beirut, Unicef, and the Embassy of Switzerland in Lebanon as leading partners, alongside many institutional and community partners (Embassy of Canada in Lebanon, UNDP, UNESCO, Injaz Lebanon, USAID, CEWAS, Difaf and more), Waterlution, the Canadian organization that has hosted this program in ten countries to date, focused in this Lebanese edition on addressing industrial, agricultural, and displaced communities' challenges along the Litani River. The team that organized the program was led by Dona Geagea, Waterlution's global lead for Water Innovation Labs; Sara Dia, WIL Lebanon coordinator; and Georges Gharios and Bassel Daher, WIL Lebanon facilitators. Dia, Gharios and Daher are also AUB alumni.

The participants started their WIL Lebanon week with field tours including one of the AREC facility guided by Mrs. Nicolas Haddad, AREC farm and facilities manager, where FAFS students staying at AREC presented their pilot projects. The workshop started at AREC with an

opening presentation by Dean Mohtar on the water-energy-food-health nexus. There were also innovation masterclasses; design thinking training; and mentorship sessions including a presentation by Dr. Nadim Farajalla, director of the Climate Change and the Environment Program at the Issam Fares Institute at AUB, on how to understand the roots of water problems in the Lebanese context. FAFS Professor Hadi Jaafar also gave an inspirational talk on his use of artificial intelligence (AI) in smart water monitoring for agriculture projects. The workshop resulted in 13 collaborative innovation projects designed and led by the young leaders.

The program at AREC included a folklore dance group inviting participants to a dabke, followed by a visit to Baalbak Temple to understand historical and traditional ways of water management. The participants were then divided into three focus groups at AREC: agricultural, industrial, and displaced communities, and were guided through extensive field tours by experts. Field visits in Bekaa were organized with UNDP to Taanayel, Ammik, Qab Elias, Jib Jannine, and Ghazze.

During the workshop, 13 final collaborative and pioneering projects to address water challenges in Lebanon and to improve water use were presented in front of an expert panel, including Dr. Mustapha Haidar, FAFS professor of weed science, which selected the winners. The winners were:

- 1- Fid w Stafid - reusing wastewater from Zahle treatment plant // Swiss Cooperation Office \$5000 Seed Grant
- 2- Moukafahat al Zibar - reducing water waste and heavy metal contamination from olive mills // AUB Seed Grant and Mentorship Award \$5000 value, and CEWAS Mentorship Award
- 3- Time to Act - addressing the problem of bacteria resistant to antibiotics in the Litani river // AUB Seed Grant and Mentorship Award
- 4- HydroCrop - incentivizing farmers to input data into an app to reduce water loss and increase accountability // Berytech Award to participate in an agri-hackathon
- 5- Joud bel May Joud - clever social media campaign to increase awareness of virtual water and reduce overconsumption at a local scale // CEWAS Blue Peace Media Lab Award

From the winning teams, six members were FAFS-AUB students: Time to Act – Lea Dagher and Abdallah Hajj Sleiman (food technology); Fid w Estafid – Ghida Dirani (agriculture); Joud Bel May Joud - Abdulrazzak Doughan (agriculture); Hydrocrop – Anthony Ghandour (agriculture); Moukafahat Al Zibar – Aliaa Dirani (food science).

All this young talent converged at the first WIL Lebanon, to equip Lebanon’s future water leaders with tools to think holistically, design innovatively, and communicate across sectors, creating valuable water solutions. With this resounding success in Lebanon, plans are in place to organize this event again next year.

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Note to Editors

About AUB

Founded in 1866, the American University of Beirut bases its educational philosophy, standards, and practices on the American liberal arts model of higher education. A teaching-centered research university, AUB has more than 900 full-time faculty members and a student body of about 9,100 students. AUB currently offers more than 120 programs leading to bachelor's, master's, MD, and PhD degrees. It provides medical education and training to students from throughout the region at its Medical Center that includes a full-service 420-bed hospital.

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