

Environment and Sustainable Development Unit (ESDU)

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Highlights on ESDU activities October 1, 2012-August 31, 2013

During the academic year 2012–13, ESDU implemented several projects covering a budget of 200,000 USD from private sector and from different international donor agencies mainly the International Development Research Center (IDRC).

Regional Networking: “KariaNet”

Knowledge Access for Rural Inter-connected Areas Network is a regional network for the management and sharing of knowledge, information and experience in agriculture and rural development in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. A competitive call for an expression of interest to host KariaNet was launched and the ESDU was selected to be the hosting organization. ESDU is assuming the responsibility of moderating the regional knowledge management network. This Network, inspired by ‘open access principles’, seeks to empower its members, through the use of ICT and non-ICT tools, to make knowledge available and timely accessible to farmers and practitioners involved in rural development. ESDU hosted a regional workshop “Social Media for Knowledge Management and Knowledge Sharing and Prospects for KariaNet Network Sustainability” which was attended by 11 representative members from the following nine countries: Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, Sudan, Tunisia and Yemen as well as the Senior Program Officer of the Regional Office of IDRC Cairo (International Development and Research Center).

Capacity Building: “Mainstreaming Evaluation Theory and Practice in the MENA Region”

The project is funded by IDRC and provides capacity development, small R&D grants for MENA specific evaluation research and publications, “Arabization” of evaluation methodologies and publications as well as virtual and face-to-face meeting and networking opportunities. One of the positive unintended outcomes of the project was the emergence of a MENA Development Evaluation Association (“EvalMENA”). ESDU is now developing the first of its kind online training course on development evaluation in Arabic: together with ten EvalMENA members from Jordan, Egypt, Lebanon, Palestine and Saudi Arabia, with the involvement of EvalPartners and the International Organization on Cooperation in Evaluation (IOCE) and the technical support of UNICEF which has been instrumental in providing the e-learning platform. Another initiative is translating the eight webinar series of AEA (American Evaluation Association) &

Better Evaluation to Arabic, as a complement to the Arabic material which will be available through the online training course.

Research study: “Urban Agriculture and Food Security in the Middle Eastern Context: A Case Study from Lebanon and Jordan”

This study initiated in 2011 and funded by Georgetown University, Washington, through its Center for International and Regional Studies at its campus in Doha, Qatar, assessed existing urban agriculture activities in two low-income towns in Lebanon and Jordan respectively. The research findings is being published by the center as a chapter in the book “Food Security and Food Sovereignty in the Middle East”, Suzi Margani and Zahra Babar editors, Hurst Publishers.

Community Development:

“Promotion of organic and local healthy products through a weekly farmers’ market”

The project is funded by Waterfront City Cares (Majed Al Futaim Holding) started in September 2012. Currently, the project is implementing a weekly farmers’ market “Souk Aal Souk” on Wednesdays at Zico House, Spears to promote organically produced goods and build linkages between residents and local producers. In addition, a series of training sessions is targeting small-scale producers on organic production, food safety, and organizational and managerial skills to sustain the market.

“Community-based Healthy Kitchens to provide locally-produced food aid for vulnerable groups affected by the Syrian Crisis”

A partnership with the International Orthodox Christian Charity (IOCC) was initiated through pilot activities to establish community kitchens where ESDU implemented trainings for women on food safety practices and managerial skills.

Workshop: “Organic Agriculture: The Danish Perspective and a Lebanese Update”

ESDU received from the part of the Danish ambassador in Lebanon an invitation to attend a three-week course on organic agriculture in Denmark sponsored by the Danida Fellowship Center (DFC) and facilitated by the Knowledge Center for Agriculture. As an outcome of this cooperation with the Danish embassy, a workshop was organized on the Potential of Organic Production in Lebanon based on the Danish experience under the patronage of Danish Ambassador Jan Top Christensen.

New Academic Program: “The RCODE Master of Sciences Program in Rural Community Development”

The RCODE program, initially developed in 2003, was updated by ESDU and approved by the Faculty of Agricultural and Food Sciences and the AUB administration. It is registered at the Lebanese Ministry of Higher Education. The program was reviewed and evaluated by Dr. David Brown from Cornell University (Professor at the Department of Development Sociology and co-Director of the Community and Regional Development Institute CaRDI at Cornell University) who visited AUB and highly recommended the program. The RCODE is currently in the process of registration in New York State Education Department and is expected to be launched in 2014.

Strategic Challenges:

- To attract students for RCODE Master Program
- To sustain KariaNet regional knowledge management network
- To put Local Food Systems on the R&D regional and international agenda