

1000 Cranes Blog

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Laila Iskander and the Role of Egyptian Recycling at the Social Enterprise World Forum

As I was reflecting upon the speeches I heard this week at the Social Enterprise World Forum, I had mentioned to another delegate at the conference that the worldwide nature and cultural differences regarding social enterprise really sank in when we heard Laila Iskander speak on Wednesday afternoon. Social Enterprise for the Egyptians is a way of life and is a matter of survival for several families.



Unfortunately, my delegate friend had missed the event because of an illness, and as I was recounting to her the event, it was one of those situations where recounting it is certainly not as powerful as experiencing and witnessing the speech itself.

Fortunately, I did find a synopsis on [Social Enterprise Magazine](#) where Jon Molyneux truly captured the moment as closely as possible, but honestly folks, you really had to be there.

One of the things that Laila had mentioned is that many multinational companies consider solving the problem of "waste" by creating a big landfill and dumping it there. In her country, she mentioned that there is no such word as "waste" but rather these are "materials."

With the families that literally survive on sorting the plastic that appears everyday, they can harvest enough plastic and valuable "materials" to provide a good standard of living for their families.

Laila had recounted that in Cairo there is a black market of sundry goods that exchange hands when an empty consumer product is refilled with a similar product. In the case of shampoo, for example, people will look for Proctor and Gamble name brand shampoos and then refill them with inferior substitutes and try to sell it as if it were new.

This is where the idea of working closely with the P&Gs of the world to remove the plastic from the black market through these social entrepreneurs. They can separate out the plastic by sight, touch and smell and then shred the plastic so it cannot be used in the black market. The large company can then reuse the shredded plastic for future products and the social entrepreneur can be paid for his/her services.

Albeit, there are some problems with this solution as many times families are exposed to hazardous chemicals, and children are often involved in the business. However, if they didn't participate in this entrepreneurial effort, many would be facing hunger and poverty. It's truly a matter of survival in Egypt rather than just a new revenue stream.

What is your view of Social Enterprise in your country and how does it compare to Egypt?

Does this give you a new view of what you throw away on a regular basis?

If you were to replace the word "waste" with "materials", how would you view what you throw out day-to-day?

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