

Economy

Egypt opens Middle East's largest fish farm as it seeks food self-sufficiency

Amr Emam

Cairo

Egypt has taken a step towards achieving self-sufficiency in fish production by starting the first phase of what is expected to be the largest fish farm in the Middle East.

Berket Ghalioun fish farm, which is located in the northern coastal province of Kafr el-Sheikh, is expected to account for nearly 70% of Egypt's domestic fish consumption. It is part of a broader attempt to secure self-sufficiency and revitalise exports.

"This is a dream project that takes us many steps forward on the road to producing enough fish to meet growing consumption," said Hamdy Badeen, head of the National Company for Fish Resources and Aquaculture, an army-backed company that first oversaw the implication of the project.

Its first phase, which was inaugurated by Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi on November 18, included the production of 6,000 tons of shrimp and 13,800 tons of fish every year.

When completed in a few months' time, it is hoped that the project's

● The project has directly provided 10,000 jobs and will indirectly create 30,000 more.

fish and shrimp hatcheries, nurseries and ponds will produce enough fish to bring Egypt close to self-sufficiency.

Egypt, which according to movement figures, consumes close to 2.4 million tons of fish every year, produces just over 60% of this amount at home. To bridge the gap, it has to pay hundreds of millions of dollars every year to import fish.

Egypt spent about \$100 million to establish the new farm. Its first phase includes 4,000 acres of fish ponds, nurseries and hatcheries. The project also includes factories for the packaging of fish as well as those for the production of ice and fish fodder.

According to Kafr el-Sheikh Governor Sayed Nasr, the project has directly provided 10,000 jobs and will indirectly create 30,000 more.

"Kafr el-Sheikh workers were badly in need of these jobs," Nasr said. "The province is among the poorest in Egypt and projects like this one are necessary if our unemployed labour will find work."

The new fish farm is only one of many being established in Egypt and expected to be opened by the country's president before his term comes to an end in June 2018.

Egypt, which has a population of about 96 million, imports most of its food. Available farmland, fish wealth and livestock are insufficient to satisfy domestic demand.

Heavy dependence on imports has continuously landed Egypt in trouble by draining its foreign currency reserves and causing unending food insecurity.

"Some countries take their food



Workers harvest fish in one of the ponds of the Berket Ghalioun fish farm in Kafr el-Sheikh. (Ahmed Megahid)

self-sufficiency for granted, but in Egypt a huge gap between food production and consumption makes this self-sufficiency a dream," said Salah al-Guindi, an economics professor at Mansura University. "I think some serious action is being taken now to make this dream come true."

One of the major actions taken is increasing agricultural output by increasing farmland. The government is reclaiming massive areas in the Western Desert. It has also established 20,000 greenhouses, out

of a total of 100,000 planned to be established over the next few years.

Greenhouse cultivation, agricultural experts say, will help water-poor Egypt produce a lot of food with the smallest amounts of water.

There is also a national plan for raising meat production through the expansion of livestock breeding. Egypt has bought 24,000 head of cattle from Uruguay and Brazil with many more expected to come.

A decision by the central bank to float the Egyptian pound against foreign currencies raised the ex-

change rate and consequently the price of imported products. While many Egyptians have complained about their reduced spending power, one silver lining is that it has forced Egypt's beleaguered domestic agriculture production into overdrive.

"Food self-sufficiency is not impossible to achieve as a goal and I think work being done now takes us many steps on this road," al-Guindi said. "When achieved, this sufficiency will totally alter our economic conditions."

MENA Britain Trade Expo provides unique insight on women in business

Dunia El-Zobaidi

About 600 people attended this year's MENA Britain Trade Expo in London, which focused on business in the Middle East and North Africa region, on November 10. Female leaders of companies spoke about the lack of women in trade and initiatives and encouraged them to enter the sector, not just in MENA but in some well-developed parts of the world as well.

"Governments worldwide have recognised women's participation is critical to economic development, Sabila Din, CEO and founder of Din Consultants in London, said during the conference. "The World Trade Organisation estimates women in trade could add \$28 trillion into global GDP by 2025. Yet if we look in the statistics in the UK, of the 17% female-owned enterprises, only 15% engaged in trade. In the MENA region, of the 6%-10% female-owned enterprises, only 1% engage in trade. Of the 40% of global annual GDP spent on procurement, only 1% is awarded to women suppliers."

Din cited US initiatives to encourage women as an example for the MENA region and the UK to follow.

"We must ask ourselves, what are the barriers to this huge opportunity?" she said. "There are initiatives that are under way such as the International Trade Centre's SheTrades initiative, which aims to connect women to opportunity through different acts of intervention, which include enacting fair policies, strike business deals, unlocking financial services and granting



Support message. Rana Adawi, chairwoman and managing director of Acumen Asset Management (L) and Sue Millar, partner at law firm Stephenson Harwood LLP, listen to Stella Cox, managing director of DDGI Limited, as she speaks at the MENA Britain Trade Expo in London.

(MENA Britain Trade Expo)

ownership rights."

"In the US, 10% of procurement has to be awarded to female-only SMEs (small and medium enterprises). In some MENA regions, there are targets to reward SMEs, but there is no mention of what contracts should be awarded to women. In the UK, we are yet to reach that stage," she added.

● In the MENA region, of the 6-10% female-owned enterprise, only 1% engage in trade.

A particular focus on Egypt was provided by Rana Adawi, chairwoman and managing director of Acumen Asset Management.

"To have an enterprise in import and export, you need to have work experience so if this ratio drops to half, this is one of the reasons why we do not see enough women enterprises," she said.

"The ventures that are set up by women in the MENA region... are normally consumer focused more than business sectors. Women are focused on technological advancement and social media in online businesses that do not have enough finance or empowerment behind (them) to be able to export to successful businesses," Adawi explained.

"The multi-layered bureaucracy is another challenge but challenges are always opportunities. With the 'Arab spring,' women have played a very big role in that. They were the ones on the street that changed things so we will see the 23% increase."

Stella Cox, managing director of DDGI Limited, spoke about her experience as an English woman working in the Middle East.

"I have never experienced gender discrimination working in the MENA region. One challenge I did face a while back is whether my clients would accept a woman dealing with them or if it would be a tough call. As a relationship manager, I needed to go and see my clients where they worked and I couldn't get visas in certain markets," Cox said.

"When I worked in Islamic finance there were no women working with me so that was demotivating. Now things have changed. During the time I was working there, I would say we built history developing our own paths creating role models and mentors. We looked to collaborate with our firms and partners and overcome barriers."

MENA Britain Trade Expo returns to Queen Elizabeth II Centre in London October 26, 2018.