



REVOLUTIONISING FOOD SUSTAINABILITY

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ABOUT VOICES OF SUSTAINABILITY

Voices of Sustainability is a thought leadership platform launched by the Zayed Sustainability Prize to explore the challenges and opportunities of the global transition to an inclusive and

prosperous future. Each month, the series hosts some of the top global thought leaders to discuss the latest trends and themes in the sustainability agenda.



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INTRODUCTION

The Zayed Sustainability Prize broadcast the 29th episode of its virtual fireside chat series called Voices of Sustainability in honour of World Food Day on 16 October 2023. The episode featured Ahmed Sourani Co-founder & General Coordinator, Gaza Urban & Peri-urban Agricultural Platform (GUPAP); David Auerbach, Co-founder, Regen Organics; and Curt Bowen, Executive Director & Co-founder, Semilla Nueva; and moderator, Charlotte Kan.

The insightful dialogue served as a platform to introduce the Food finalists and to allow them to share their innovative approaches to tackling food sustainability challenges as well as their insights on COP28 UAE, which promises increased awareness and action on food-related matters.



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SUMMARY

In honour of World Food Day 2023, the 29th episode of Voices of Sustainability brought together the three finalists from the Zayed Sustainability Prize's Food category. Their engaging discussion, titled "Revolutionising Food Security: Meet the Prize's Food Finalists," featured Ahmed Sourani, the driving force behind Gaza Urban and Peri-Urban Agriculture Platform (GUPAP), David Auerbach representing Regen Organics, and Curt Bowen from Semilla Nueva. Charlotte Kan guided the conversation with her insightful moderation.

To kickstart the dialogue, each finalist provided a concise introduction to their respective organisations and the impact they're striving to achieve. Ahmed Sourani illuminated GUPAP's mission, which centres on nurturing community-led food security initiatives within the challenging context of Gaza.



We have developed a regenerative and strategic approach called 'Community-led Solidarity Marketing (CLSM). Through CLSM, we help and support women and vulnerable families who need to access food in such a protracted crisis.

Ahmed Sourani
GUPAP



Soil often gets overlooked yet strengthening it can boost yields over multiple growing seasons and enhance agriculture's resilience to climate change by retaining nutrients and water, as well as withstanding extreme weather.

David Auerbach
Regen Organics



David Auerbach conveyed Regen Organics' vision, focusing on the production of regenerative agricultural inputs in Kenya, poised to revolutionise farming practices. Finally, Curt Bowen expanded on Semilla Nueva's pivotal role in breeding more nutritious and resilient corn varieties for Guatemalan farmers, effectively addressing a critical need for food security in the region.

The conversation then delved deep into the finalists' strategies for safeguarding food security, especially among the most vulnerable populations, amidst the formidable global challenges.

Ahmed Sourani placed a powerful emphasis on community empowerment and the creation of robust connections between local, regional and global networks. He underscored the pivotal role communities play in identifying their unique needs and crafting tailor-made solutions suited to their specific contexts.

This entails a concentrated effort on capacity building and the training of local leaders who can effectively spearhead the scaling up of sustainable food solutions.

All three guests were then asked about their expectations for COP28 UAE, with a focus on the importance of actionable outcomes and tangible progress. They emphasised the need for COP28 to go beyond pledges and lead to concrete actions to address food security and sustainability. The three speakers called for governments and investment funds to support progressive and radical ideas, particularly in the areas of climate change and food security.

Additionally, the speakers stressed the significance of COP as a platform for stakeholders to engage with government officials and advocate for meaningful change. They agreed that success at COP28 would be defined by the translation of discussions into action, increased investment in food and agriculture, and productive engagement with government representatives.

As the discussion drew to a close, attention turned towards the question of how these global organisations could collaborate to implement their solutions on a global scale. Ahmed Sourani proposed a multifaceted approach that includes research and development collaboration, the exchange of best practices, and a unified advocacy effort to promote policies that support sustainable food systems. David Auerbach envisioned the establishment of a global network comprising sustainable food producers who would work collectively to amplify their impact and extend their reach to a wider audience. Curt Bowen suggested a priority on capacity building and leadership training, enabling local communities to take ownership of sustainable food initiatives and drive lasting change.



We need to empower vulnerable populations to make their own decisions about their food security and to be more involved in the development of food systems.

Curt Bowen
Semilla Nueva

David Auerbach staunchly advocated for investment in soil health and the promotion of local food production as foundational strategies for constructing resilient food systems. These efforts not only equip communities to endure the adverse impacts of climate change but also contribute to the crucial reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and the generation of much-needed employment opportunities in rural areas.

Curt Bowen, with a pragmatic approach, challenged the audience to be more discerning in its approach to the multifaceted issues surrounding food security. He encouraged a laser focus on strategies with the highest potential to effect substantial and tangible change.

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PARTICIPANTS



Ahmed Sourani

Co-founder & General Coordinator
GUPAP

Ahmed Sourani is an expert in organisational development, policy change, and networking for agricultural resilient development. With a focus on participatory learning and action research, he utilises the Participatory PM&E approach. Ahmed boasts extensive experience with prominent local and international NGOs and actively engages in local, national, regional, and global agricultural development initiatives. He holds a master's degree in Participation, Power & Social Change from the University of Sussex (IDS), UK, as well as a High Institute Certificate in Good Governance, Public Policies, and Civil Society from the University of Castilla La Mancha, Spain. Ahmed also possesses a High Professional Diploma in NGO Management from Bir-Zeit University and a bachelor's degree in English Literature from the Islamic University of Gaza. Currently, Ahmed serves as the Co-founder & General Coordinator of GUPAP, a multi-stakeholder platform dedicated to policy influencing, networking, and empowerment.



Curt Bowen

Executive Director & Co-founder
Semilla Nueva

Raised on a small organic farm in Idaho, Curt travelled to Guatemala after graduating from Whitman College and co-founded Semilla Nueva. A decade of experimentation and asking hard questions led Curt and his team to a scalable solution to malnutrition and rural poverty: high-yield, climate-resistant, biofortified maize seeds. Curt's accomplishments have been recognised by Forbes 30 under 30, fellowships from Ashoka and Mulago, and the Muhammed Ali Prize.



David Auerbach

Co-founder
Regen Organics

David Auerbach is a Co-founder of Regen Organics, part of the Sanergy Collaborative, a US company which manufactures organic fertiliser and insect protein from residual organics in fast-growing cities in emerging markets. Regen's circular economy approach both solves environmental challenges and promotes regenerative, local agricultural production. Previously, David built partnerships at Endeavor and the Clinton Global Initiative. David is an Ashoka and Echoing Green Fellow. He holds an MBA from MIT and a BA from Yale University. He has lived in Nairobi, Kenya since 2011.

The conversation was moderated by:



Charlotte Kan

Journalist & Editor

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OUTCOMES



Communities play a crucial role in tailoring food security solutions to their needs



Soil health and local food production are essential for resilient food systems and environmental benefits



Realistic strategies, like capacity building and local leadership, drive impactful change



Collaboration among local, national and global entities at COP28 UAE will be crucial for ensuring food resilience



Tailoring solutions to communities ensures relevance and effectiveness



Sustainable food systems offer hope in the face of global challenges, but governments must adequately fund such efforts

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