

UAE IS A HUB OF INNOVATIONS



Officials honour winners of Wetskill Challenge hosted by The Netherlands pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai.

DUBAI: "In the last half-century the UAE has developed into a living hub of innovative business," according to Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte.

"This same forward looking dynamic approach is needed more than ever by the UAE, and others in the gulf region, post the announcement of net zero commitment by 2050," he added while virtually addressing the Abu Dhabi Sustainability Week (ADSW) Summit on Monday.

The ADSW Summit as part of the Abu Dhabi Sustainability Week is hosting more than 80 global leaders, including heads of state, policy makers, and international business leaders, as UAE aims to take the global sustainability agenda forward and accelerate pathways to net zero.

The Dutch Prime Minister said that the real challenge is now only beginning. Reaching the milestones laid out over the next few years will be crucial after COP 26 [Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)], he pointed out.

"The ideas and methods that made us prosperous are no longer the answer. We need smarter, more sustainable economies. There is no easy solution to the climate change problem, but also there is no other option but to take up the challenge," Rutte emphasised.

Citing The Netherlands pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai as an example, he said it highlighted three crucial requirements for life, water energy and food.

The Prime Minister said they were not treated as separate themes with their own individualistic solutions, but instead the Pavilion took a holistic approach, each linked with one another.

Rutte said that the new way to address climate change issues is "joint-up-thinking". The Pavilion that extracts water from air to grow plants, and once Expo ends, its every scrap of material will be taken down and given a new purpose, is an example of this new way of thinking, he noted.

The Dutch leader hoped "this small scale demonstration of circularity provides a small demonstration of how innovation can help address the climate crisis".

Rutte pointed out that "climate change is not simply an economic crisis, it's also a social crisis". He said the world's poor are being hit hardest, leading to greater inequality.

In his closing remarks, the Prime Minister added that "we need to be even more ambitious than we have been."

Thanks to demographic changes, economic development and international trade, demand for fresh water, energy and food can only increase, so we need to align our policies and technologies around the natural nexus of water, energy and food".

He concluded that "we need to be more

ambitions and lead to a world sustainable future for all".

ADSW 2022 is the first major sustainability event after the COP26 climate change conference, and acts as a global catalyst for COP27, which will be held in Egypt in 2022, and COP28, which will be hosted by the UAE in 2023.

Meanwhile, Wetskills' first event Wetskills Challenge in UAE hosted at the Netherlands Pavilion which started on Jan.5 when 20 -25 local and international students

came together in Al Ain is dubbed as a great success.

Wetskills Foundation uses a new way of authentic learning and international networking for students and young professionals with a passion for water.

In multidisciplinary, international teams, the participants work on real life cases from companies and governmental organisations.

In diverse teams these participants were given a real-life water challenge,

formulated local and international sector partners. on Sunday, Wetskills concluded its exciting challenge programme in UAE at the Netherlands Pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai.

Lady Embrechts, Netherlands' Ambassador, UAE said: "The Netherlands Pavilion is a perfect place to host the Wetskills Finals as the pavilion's theme of sustainable initiatives and innovations resonates well with the programme. I want to congratulate each one of the teams for the brilliant ideas that they have presented.

These practical, diverse and creative solutions can actually be implemented in UAE and other regions. They can truly bring a change for a sustainable and eco-friendly future. Excellent team work!"

In a hybrid format, participants from countries such as the UAE, the Netherlands, Colombia, India, Nigeria and Germany are working together in four teams. The teams each work on a challenge, provided by sector partners like Witteveen+Bos and PureBlue Water.

19 participants from 10 different countries joined this first Wetskills event in UAE (and 53rd event since 2010). An international jury panel announced Team Falaj 2.0 as the winner. Team Members Silvio Kaiser (HZ University of Applied Sciences in The Netherlands) Meera AlKaabi, Azza Alshamsi, Ayesha Alam (all UAE University) and Laura Pulido (King Abdullah University of Science and Technology in Saudi Arabia) created an out-of-the-box but applicable concept to improve water management on small farms in UAE.

Privately owned farms of a size between two and six are very common in the UAE, and mostly rely on groundwater for crop irrigation. In recent years, the productivity of many of these farms has been threatened by increasing groundwater depletion and salinization. Various management strategies have been proposed to slow down groundwater deterioration and/or sustain agricultural production under increasing salinity.

Tools to facilitate such water management decision making are so far not available. It will maximize revenues at the farm level, and/or create an overall long-term sustainability and environmental safety. Winning case owner, UAE University impressed the panel of jury with their practical solution and presented a tool to support an individual farmer or decision identifying the most feasible water management strategy for UAE's small farms.

Rick Hogeboom, Program Manager for Wetskills and one of the supervisors of this event: "The Wetskills programme challenges participants to leave their comfort zone and come up with out of the box solutions. Supervisors likewise need to step outside the box to make the Programme a success, especially in times of Covid and hybrid formats for team work. But the best achievements come about by remaining dedicated even in surprising and unknown circumstances. Leveraging digital means to collaborate, discussing and getting to know one another, you'll find that the solutions the teams came up with are of highest quality and will inspire many."

The challenge final also marked the last part of the Wetskills' 10 Year Jubilee Celebrations. The programme started at Expo 2010 Shanghai China, and the last UAE edition of Wetskills bridged the two World Expos and looked back at the results over the last 10 years.

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