

Thinking green

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Environmental Legislations in Bahrain

Environmental laws and legislations are a complex and interlocking body of statutes, common law, treaties, conventions, regulations and policies devised to regulate the interaction of humanity and the rest of the biophysical and natural environment. These environmental legislations are aimed at reducing and minimizing the impacts of human activities on the natural environment and restoring and maintaining the public health.

The main areas of concern in environmental law include air quality, water quality, global climate change, agriculture, biodiversity, species protection, pesticides, hazardous chemicals, solid and liquid, hazardous and non hazardous waste management, remediation of contaminated land, sustainable development, management of public lands and natural resources etc.

The Kingdom of Bahrain has been responding to the massive industrial and commercial development taking place in the country and understood that economic development and sound environmental management are complimentary aspects of the same agenda and without adequate environmental protection, development will be undermined. With this aim, the Legislative Decree-law No.21 of 1996 was enacted to establish the Environmental Affairs Agency under the Ministry of Housing, Municipalities and Environment in 1996.

The process of making and enforcing environmental legislation in Bahrain started when the Government formed the Environmental Protection Committee (EPC) in 1983 which was later upgraded to a full-fledged Environmental Affairs (EA) office. Based on the Legislative Decree No. 21 of 1996, two main directorates were formed namely The Directorate of Environmental Assessment and Planning & The Directorate of Environmental Control. The EA was later upgraded and at present is the Supreme Council for Environment (SCE) which is managing and monitoring the environmental resources of the country headed by H.E. Dr. Mohamed Mubarek bin Daina, as Chief Executive.

Bahrain is committed to the cause of environmental protection and has thus decided to incorporate necessary environmental legislations to solve the problems of pollution and environmental degradation. In addition, Bahrain is a signatory of all major regional and international environmental Conventions, Treaties and Protocols. Since past decades, many environmental legislation have been made and enforced related to air, water, waste, chemicals, fisheries and occupational health.

As per the legislation, anybody seeking to establish a facility or industry in the country has to obtain a 'No Objection' permit from the SCE, satisfying the requirements of raw materials, products, by-products, generation of solid, liquid and hazardous waste, chemicals, resource usage (electricity, gas, fuel, water etc.). They are required to submit a statement showing that their project/ activity is not going to harm the occupational and public health and impact the fragile national environmental resources.

The industrial establishments are regularly being visited by the environmental professionals and inspectors to check their compliance with the various environmental attributes. The non-compliance often leads to warnings and repeated offence leads to cancellation of the Commercial Registration License.

The SCE formulates rules, regulation, policies, standards and legislation for the control of any form of pollution, safety at industries, waste management and conservation of environmental resources.

The copy of all environmental legislations enforced in the Kingdom can be obtained from the SCE office. A hotline is also operative whereby, people can call regarding any environmental offence or violations or report any incident or accident that affects the environment. It is to be noted that legislations alone cannot preserve the environmental resources. Each individual has to participate and be aware of their environmental responsibility and to plan and act in a manner to avoid any pollution that may harm us and our future generations.

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(The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the policy or position of this newspaper.)



Aïssata Diakité, agribusiness engineer and founder of Zabbaan Holding juices

Putting Mali in a bottle

Scarlet hibiscus petals infuse their flavour in a giant pot of liquid, where green leaves picked from the west African kinkeliba shrub also swirl. With a pinch of ginger and some baobab fruit, the concoction is ready to be tasted.

Aïssata Diakite's juices are part of an all-natural health startup which the 28-year-old Malian launched in December, blending traditional flavours with an engineer's eye for detail.

The idea of launching a range of entirely natural fruit juices using locally sourced products from the African savannah came from her childhood in Mopti, a region in central Mali through which the Niger River flows.

And it was there, while studying agribusiness in France, that the project came to fruition.

"When I was a student, I used to come back to Mali on holiday and I would drive through rural agricultural areas to meet the farmers, to understand the seasons and how to manage the off-season," she explains animatedly.

And last month, she launched her line of "Zabbaan" juices after meeting prospective buyers at the "Invest in Mali" forum.

The business takes its

name from the zaban -- or saba senegalensis, a shrub-like tree native to the Sahel region which grows predominantly on riverbanks and in woodlands, whose fruit and leaves are highly prized.

Investing in her homeland

The forum was not for the fainthearted: Mali is struggling with a jihadist insurgency across large swathes of its rugged terrain -- including Diakite's home region -- which are currently being patrolled by several international military forces.

"Coming to Mali today is an act of faith," admitted President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita in a speech at the forum's opening.

Nonetheless, investors pledged some 34 billion CFA francs (\$63 million, 52 million euros) to an array of businesses, from solar energy to cement and packaging.

"Producing what we consume, that's how we create jobs and wealth," Industrial Development Minister Mohamed Aly Ag Ibrahim said a week later at the formal launch of Zabbaan.

And he hailed Diakite as "an inspirational young woman" who had "returned from abroad to invest in her country and succeeded in that challenge".

Echoes of an empire

There are 10 juices in the range, each bearing names like "the king", a punchy mango and baobab mix, "the duke" -- zaban and baobab, or "the warrior" which blends hibiscus with mint and baobab, with names evoking the pomp of the Mali Empire, which ruled large sections of west Africa for 400 years.

It was her grandmother who told her stories about Mali at the height of its power when it was a world-renowned centre of learning, she told AFP.

Her recipes are based on leaves, flowers and fruits from the African savannah, "most of them growing wild" with fresh, local products one of the trademarks of the range.

"We work with a network of farmers who supply us, who often work on lands passed down through the family," she says.

"And these products are also used in traditional African medicine."

In order to break into new markets and start exporting overseas, the company is also in the process of obtaining organic certification.

Essence of Mali

Bamako's small but growing middle class is taking note.

Zabbaan now produces around 1,000 bottles a day at its production facility in the capital which are mostly sold at supermarkets in Bamako for 500 CFA francs (\$0.90) a go.

The juice, which is pasteurised, comes in brightly-coloured 300 ml (10 fluid ounce) bottles, which are made of

recyclable plastic.

But even this foothold in a nascent market was hard won. "It's not easy to grow a network of suppliers like that," Diakite said. "It took me about three years."

On the factory floor, where the latest batch is ready, the production team is in full swing.

Before it can be bottled, the product -- "the prince" in this case -- must be tasted. And it's a job for the whole team.

"Some people think that this one lacks ginger, so we are changing that and adding a bit more," says Lala Coulibaly, who is responsible for quality control and hygiene.

With 65 employees on the payroll, Diakite has now set her sights on the export market, with the company due to start shipping juices to France in February.

And she's also working on a new line of products: the extraction and export of pure essences that will also bear the label: "Made in Mali". (AFP)

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