

Global forum on marginal environments kicks off in Dubai

Dubai, UAE, 20 November 2019 – Over 300 experts and decision-makers from about 70 countries convened today in Dubai at the Global Forum on Innovations for Marginal Environments ([GFIME](#)) to explore the latest advances in research, innovation, development and policy in agriculture and food production in the world's marginal environments.

Dubbed as the Food Security and Innovation Day, the first day of the GFIME featured high-level panel discussions involving ministers, policymakers and innovators from around the world.

The GFIME is organized by the International Center for Biosaline Agriculture ([ICBA](#)) in collaboration with the Food Security Office and the Advanced Sciences Office of the United Arab Emirates, the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB), the Environment Agency – Abu Dhabi (EAD), and the Khalifa International Award for Date Palm and Agricultural Innovation, and is supported by different partners, including the OCP Group, Morocco.

Addressing delegates at the opening ceremony, Her Excellency Mariam bint Mohammed Almhieri, UAE Minister of State for Food Security, said: "It is estimated that up to 1.7 billion people live in marginal environments, including 70% of the world's poorest. Many of these people are smallholding farmers who are totally dependent on agriculture for their food and income. With populations in these regions projected to rise and with climate change likely to further impact their ability to grow crops because of increased frequency of droughts and temperature rises, there has never been a more important time to explore how we can unlock the latent potential of these regions by employing advanced technology and bioscience to improve crop yield."

Speaking at the ministerial panel on unlocking the value and supporting agriculture and food innovation and the future of smart investments, Her Excellency Mariam bint Mohammed Almhieri added: "The UAE, with its harsh climate and adverse crop growing conditions that include low annual levels of rainfall, poor soil quality and shrinking groundwater levels, is well placed to take a lead in advancing technology-enabled agriculture, especially in the area of marginal environments. Despite being characterized in this category itself, the country has been blessed with other resources – namely fossil fuels – that have provided it with wealth that now enables it to play an important role in this area. The Food Security Office is delighted to be able to host this forum with ICBA and explore methods of increasing crop production and enhancing the economic viability of marginal environments."

Her Excellency Sarah bint Yousif Al Amiri, UAE Minister of State for Advanced Sciences, also participated in the ministerial panel. During the discussion, Her Excellency Sarah bint Yousif Al Amiri highlighted why food security is part of the UAE Advanced Sciences Office's Scientific Priority, providing guidance for scientists and researchers within UAE universities and research centers and directing their research efforts to these areas.

His Excellency Dr. Bandar M. H. Hajjar, President of the IsDB Group, commented: "IsDB believes that economic growth is the best route out of poverty. Since agriculture is the backbone of growth in marginal environments, we need to assist the sector through innovate agricultural research and strategic investment."

"That's why we put Science, Technology and Innovation at the heart of the Bank's work by promoting various initiatives that support agriculture in our member countries."

“At IsDB, our mission is to foster innovative and sustainable solutions to the world's most significant development challenges, as we work towards the Sustainable Development Goals set by the United Nations,” added His Excellency Dr. Bandar M. H. Hajjar.

Her Excellency Razan Khalifa Al Mubarak, Managing Director of EAD and Chairperson of the ICBA Board of Directors, said: “It was a great pleasure to be part of the Global Forum on Innovations for Marginal Environments — the first one in the UAE. I believe smart agriculture strategies, which include introducing and scaling-up climate-smart crops like quinoa, *Salicornia*, and millets can play a massive role in making a positive impact in the lives of people living in marginal environments.”

In her opening address, Dr. Ismahane Elouafi, Director General of ICBA, said: “As a global center of excellence focused on salinity and water scarcity issues in the marginal environments for about 20 years now, ICBA is committed to safeguarding the future of marginal environments, where about 70 percent of the people live in extreme poverty. These areas, where an estimated 1.7 billion people live, are most vulnerable to vagaries of climate change and face issues, including salinity and water scarcity.”

“As the scale and impact of climate change and other factors are increasing at an alarming speed, I would like to call upon all the policymakers and innovators gathered here today to let us work together to ensure a better future for people living in the marginal environments,” added Dr. Ismahane Elouafi.

The forum is organized given the enormous impact of climate change, soil and water salinization on ecosystems, agriculture, livelihoods, and food security in the marginal environments.

The main aim of the GFIME, which also coincides with the 20th anniversary celebrations of the establishment of ICBA by the Government of the UAE and the IsDB, is to identify the right policies and develop innovative solutions to mitigate the impact of climate change and empower smallholder farmers who are on the frontlines of food production.

The second day of the forum will focus on climate impact and sustainability.

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About ICBA

The International Center for Biosaline Agriculture (ICBA) is a unique applied agricultural research center in the world with a focus on marginal areas where an estimated 1.7 billion people live. It identifies, tests and introduces resource-efficient, climate-smart crops and technologies that are best suited to different regions affected by salinity, water scarcity and drought. Through its work, ICBA helps to improve food security and livelihoods for some of the poorest rural communities around the world.

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