AL-BIA WAL-TANMIA MAGAZINE: A ROLE MODEL FOR ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

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Al-Bia Wal-Tanmia (Environment & Development) magazine has changed public perception of the environment in the Arab world, fulfilling a great need for a credible source of environmental information in Arabic. Established by Najib Saab in 1996, as an independent private initiative, it was the first region-wide magazine on environment, with a monthly circulation of over 38,000 in 22 countries. Its articles were syndicated to 14 Arab newspapers, bringing environmental information to a wider spectrum of readers. In 2006, it was the initiation platform of the Arab Forum for Environment and Development (AFED), the regional organization with a mission to advance environmental policies and action in Arab countries, based on science and awareness. It eventually became AFED’s official magazine.

In 2017, after 20 years of publication, Al-Bia Wal-Tanmia ceased the print edition and turned online. Alongside the monthly magazine, the internet portal www.afedmag.com publishes daily news and commentaries and hosts the complete archive of the magazine since 1996, in addition to AFED’s annual reports on the State of Arab Environment, representing the largest reference on environment in Arabic. It also links to the magazine’s environmental education website www.afedecoschool.org, which includes sections on key environmental issues, with audiovisual material that can be downloaded for use in schools.

The portal attracts over 1.5 million visits per month, and the magazine Facebook page has more than 1.3 million followers.

Although Al-Bia Wal-Tanmia has become a major reference for decision makers in Arab countries, its most prominent success was the environmental movement it created in schools, involving students in environmental action. The magazine is a main source of environmental information for students and educators, and its articles and commentaries are used in curricula and formal examinations.

AFED and Al-Bia Wal-Tanmia developed a comprehensive environmental education program, supported by the handbook Environment at School, available in print and online. The program includes developing national curricula and teacher training workshops. Building on this program, a new Environmental Guidebook for Arab Schools was developed in 2019, including emerging issues such as green economy, sustainable consumption and SDGs.

The magazine organized annual school competitions under the theme “A Better Environment Starts with You,” involving more than 150,000 students and their teachers in environmental work. Training workshops on environmental education were organized for more than 2000 teachers in several Arab countries. This education program helped create hundreds of environmental school clubs.

Al-Bia Wal-Tanmia established the Youth Environment Parliament: 50 elected students from 50 schools, guided by a teachers committee, were involved in field visits, writing reports, and discussions with municipalities, officials and civil society for better environment in their communities.

The magazine produced a quarterly wall chart called Green Bulletin, distributed to schools free of charge. It also produced educational TV Programs and documentaries, and published environment books for different age groups.

Al-Bia Wal-Tanmia has won international environmental awards, including Global 500 from the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) and Zayed International Prize for the Environment. UNEP citation stated that “this influential magazine is used in schools and universities and sponsors over 400 environment clubs. It created a pan-Arab environmental movement that accomplished what official bodies in the region could not develop over the years.”

Raghida Haddad is executive editor of Al-Bia Wal-Tanmia (Environment and Development) magazine, (1996-2016) and AFED communications advisor.