

GULF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

WHAT WILL BE OUR CONTRIBUTION TO THE FUTURE?

December, 2006, Al Ain, UAE... Shrouded by thick fog on a cold, rainy day, a diverse group of Gulf leaders gathered in a tent on Jebel Hafeet to discuss this critical question: *How can regional businesses, academia, and governments cooperate to create a legacy of sustainable economic development for our children?*

"We're here to free our minds from the present and look out the window of the future," said **Salim Al-Aydh**, Senior Vice President of Saudi Aramco Engineering & Operations Services (E&OS), in opening remarks at **The Al Ain Dialogue, Diversifying the Oil Economy... Seeking Regional Solutions for Sustainable Development** held December 11-12, in Al Ain, United Arab Emirates (UAE). The event was the brainchild of the Gulf Society of Organizational Learning (Gulf SoL), a local chapter of the international Society for Organizational Learning (SoL). One hundred eighty (180) assorted leaders—representing business, academia, and government in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries—collaborated at the event. Current Saudi Arabian



HRH Prince Sultan said, "Learning is critical today. It's a new and different world, changing by the hour. People who don't learn don't get up to speed and are left behind."

Secretary General for the Saudi Supreme Commission for Tourism (and former astronaut) **HRH Prince Sultan bin Salman bin Abdulaziz** presented "Building Innovation and Learning in Government."

Sparked by the growing realization that oil alone cannot sustain GCC economic growth over the long term, conference participants engaged in facilitated dialogues to explore core issues, as well as alternatives, for securing long term economic, social, and environmental well-being of Gulf communities. Creating sustainable development now translates into a higher quality of life the current generation can leave to those that follow.

During his keynote speech, Salim S. Al-Aydh stressed, “We have a window of opportunity right now. With capital from this second oil boom, we can invest in endeavors that will create new opportunities for our children and grandchildren.”



“The value in dialogue is that it serves as a catalyst for moving forward. We are here to ask ourselves and each other a critical question: *What will be our contribution to the future?*” Dr. Peter Senge explained.

Dr. Peter Senge – author of “The Fifth Discipline,” global expert on organizational learning, renowned business strategist, MIT Senior Lecturer, and SoL Founding Chair – facilitated strategic dialogues in AI Ain to enrich discussions with diverse perspectives on issues critical to a healthy economic future in the Gulf.

The dialogues were kicked off with a variety of presentations on strategic topics.

Dr. Nahed Taher, CEO of Gulf One Investment Bank, presented her insights on economic trends in the region. Taher said, “We need to face our problems in the GCC economies, and work hard to overcome them *as soon as possible*. We need to create wealth, not just manage it. We need to create jobs for our children.”

Challenging the common practice of importing labor in unskilled job categories, **Dr. Peter Cappelli**, Senior Advisor to the Economic Development Board of Bahrain and Professor of Management at the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania, stated that international research indicates “... using local labor improves job conditions and increases productivity.”

Capelli also described a variety of ways that local labor can become more attractive than imported labor to employers. These include: **1)** Provide a system allowing employers the right to dismiss employees “with cause” because arbitration systems and insurance for layoffs are in place; **2)** Improve skills of local employees through enhanced educational content and collaborative efforts between employers and educators to provide practical experience in training; **3)** Require skill-based credentials; and **4)** Promote the success of inexperienced employees by improving the transition between school and the work situation.’

Corporate sponsors of the event included **Saudi Aramco, Saudi Bin Ladin Group, Zamil Industrial Investment Company, The Xenel Group, Nesma Holdings, and Naizak. UAE University** administrators and students assisted Gulf SoL in conducting the AI Ain Dialogue event. UAEU students guided participants on a learning journey through AI Ain Palace Museum, former residence of UAE visionary Sheikh Zayed. On the palace grounds, the students sprinkled the journey with leading questions aimed toward linking the past and future with traditional values. The students also introduced keynote speakers throughout the conference.

Director of E&OS Continuing Excellence, Abdulhaiy Nazir, said, “Our purpose here is to learn from each other. Gulf SoL has gathered leaders from diverse sectors of society to address a major issue that one sector alone can’t effectively impact... economic sustainability. To stimulate new thinking and grow innovative ideas, our dialogues are designed to sharpen the focus on the economic opportunities and challenges that could impact all of us.”



Afternoon discussions on December 12 were separated into three separate tracks:

- 1) Sustaining What Matters: Local Identity in a Global Economy,**
- 2) Building Workplace Skills: Collaboration between Education and Business, and**
- 3) Promoting Local Innovation: Regional Experiments to Enable Research and Business Incubation.**

Concluding the conference, **HRH Prince Sultan** sent participants back to their countries, businesses, and universities with this message of hope, “When you have your heart in the right place... you love your people and you love your soil... you can do great things.”

Speaking of great things, the AI Ain Dialogue was planned, designed, and executed by Saudi Aramco E&OS Continuing Excellence team.