

JIHANE AJIJI

Head of Business Development, Digital and Communication within OCP Africa

Patrick NICOLET

We now transition to the enterprise and we will review later what two start-ups are proposing as practical solutions. Here it is my pleasure to welcome Jihane Ajjiti who works at OCP, which is a well-known company in Morocco as we all know, notably working in the fertilizer industry. She will show us how a large corporation can also contribute and how much it is committed as well.

Jihane AJIJI

Good afternoon. My name is Jihane Ajjiti. I am 35 years old, born and raised in Marrakesh, so I hope you are enjoying your stay here in this beautiful city. I am Head of Business Development at OCP Africa. OCP is a world-leading phosphate fertilizer company, based in Morocco, but operating throughout the world. My personal background is a long way from agriculture or the fertilizer sector. I have a business background and for several years I worked in a strategy consultancy firm, working for different clients across the world.

At some point, I really wanted to reconnect to my continent, so I took a long leave and travelled in East Africa where I did some volunteer work. This is where I really first encountered the effects of climate change on real people. In the [inaudible] they had the farm and every day at the end of school the kids gathered, and we went to fetch water. I also used to do that at my grandparents' house when I was a kid, but the river was generous and there was plenty of water. I was shocked when I went the first day to fetch water to realize that what I thought was a river was only one meter wide and not even a meter deep and the water was brown. It was because the dry season was too long, and it is becoming increasingly frequent that the rainy season is short, and the dry season is getting so long.

This is when I really decided to make a shift in my career, and this is also what pushed me to join OCP in Morocco. It was mostly for the vision that the company had for Africa, so let me share some more about that. Let us start first with setting the scene this year and let us imagine ourselves in Africa in 2030. If nothing is done to dramatically change the way we consume and actually address the climate situation, we will be facing almost 100 million hectares of land that will be unusable for agriculture. This is because of urbanisation, desertification, as well as water scarcity in certain regions. We will also have almost 200 million people living in extreme poverty, suffering from water scarcity as well, which will obviously lead to major population movements. Almost 3.5 million Africans a year will be moving, displaced from their home countries or cities because of climate change or unrest in the different countries. We should also consider that Africa is struggling to feed itself. Today, we already import almost USD 35 billion of food, mostly from the US and Europe and it is estimated that population growth and changes in diets will increase that to almost USD 100 billion. This money could be used for infrastructure, for example, to build ports which are really lacking on the continent.

However, we can also try not to see this sort of catastrophe scenario and we hope that we also see a different Africa. An Africa that is green, self-sufficient and with water natural resource management policies, connected and attractive for investments and with a growing economy. This will be possible if we change how we view Africa a bit. Here, let me share an example, especially in the context of climate change. We have a growing population and we will hit almost 9 billion people in 2050. To feed that growing population we will need to improve our productivity in agriculture by almost 77%. That cannot be done only by using extensive arable land. We also need to increase yields, and Africa in particular has among the lowest yields in the world. Taking the example of fertilizer, we talk in kilograms per hectare for the quantities that are used. The world average is 130 kilogrammes a hectare; in Africa on average it is below 15 kilogrammes per hectare. That leads to very low yields that are barely sufficient to self-sustain a family in Africa.

At OCP we are trying to change the narrative about Africa a bit, so that it is not only seen as the cause of the problems but also as a source of the solution. Let me also invite you to look at the map and review the continent and the land we have. Africa is as big as the United States, China, India and Europe combined. We do not usually have a sense of how big the continent is. We do have a lot of fertile land. We have abundant water resources, that are not well-distributed, but we do have them and more specifically, we have a young and attractive agricultural labour force that can help Africa to feed itself.

However, we have another problem. One of the major sources of CO₂ emissions is deforestation. It is said that deforestation around the globe accounts for almost 20% of the CO₂ emissions around the world. However, deforestation is caused partly, especially here and I will give you the case of Côte d'Ivoire, where in the 1990s the forest almost covered the entire country. Today, only 11% of the land is covered by forest and this is mainly due to the lack of modernisation of agriculture. For example, in the cocoa sector because the farmers lack the means to buy fertilizer and do not have proper, modern agricultural practices, when the soil is depleted and poor, they cut down trees to benefit from the fertility of those nutrient rich soils. This is actually what really leads to deforestation in Côte d'Ivoire.

Before going on to that, let me share the perspective of OCP as a fertilizer producer. We are promoting balanced fertilization. Africa needs to increase its yields to be able to feed the growing population in the context of climate change and to do that, we need to support the agricultural value chain throughout the continent, to be able to invest and modernize agriculture. This can be done in a lot of different ways. My role at OCP is in business development, but the way we see it business development is really oriented towards the farmer in Africa. We have launched really the first farmers initiatives where we started doing awareness campaigns, recommendations, providing farmers with decision tools that could help them know and assess how to invest and where to invest, the amount of fertilizer they need so that they do not over consume or use too little. There is a motto, 'more with less', and the idea is to only give the soil what it really needs. Since the beginning of the farmers' initiatives programme three years ago and today, I am very proud of that, we have supported almost 500 000 farmers across the continent. We are trying to provide them with innovation, technology and digital and to bridge the distance we have from them, because of the remote areas and the lack of infrastructure.

OCP has also tried to start first with its own industrial assets and turning to a new ecological transition. We have launched a very ambitious programme and actually it is a dedicated executive direction for the circular economy within the company. The idea is to really be able to lower our carbon footprint by trying to work in a closed system. First, for example, with electricity we are very happy that almost 70% of our energy is clean energy within all our industrial assets and let us say for Morocco, we have one of the biggest industrial complexes in the world. Also, in terms of water consumption we have tried to have a closed system where we only use and recycle the water we use in our industrial systems. We also try to regulate the mines where we mine phosphate by replanting trees. A lot of other different activities have been launched to be able to support the company's ecological transition.

Last, we also try to know the importance of R&D and innovation. OCP is really working very hard to build bridges between the research and academia to transform agriculture, especially with a focus on Africa. We have launched a university, the Mohammed VI Polytechnic based in Ben Guerir, which is also trying to invest resources for research in areas that are not always covered. For example, how to do agriculture in a desert environment, how to grow specific seeds that will adapt to climate changes. We also have a specific masters launched to support the new and upcoming generation. Lastly, again on digital, we have launched an incubator to support start-ups. It is based at the university and the idea is to incubate start-ups that are oriented towards high-tech and biotech.

To finish, let me just quote Nelson Mandela to emphasise the importance, especially in looking at the context of climate change: 'There are few better ways to show one's love for one's country and the wellbeing of one's nation than by working on the soil.' Thank you.

Patrick NICOLET

Thank you for the presentation of the OCP evolution to address climate change. You told us at the beginning that you left, took a sabbatical and then came back because you wanted to do something with a purpose.

Jihane AJIJI

With impact, yes.

Patrick NICOLET

What have you personally achieved through this because I understand the industrial programme, but I am not sure that I see Jihane in this?

Jihane AJIJI

As I said, Jihane is in the farmers initiatives programmes. OCP is not actually working with the farmers, we are more a B2B oriented company. What actually drove me to OCP was the launch and the inception of a programme oriented to smallholder farmers, where we give them support. We have mobile laboratories that go to the remote areas and provide the farmers with free soil analysis, to be able to guide them on the quality and health of their soils and to better use the fertilizer in good agricultural practices. There is also training and the use of digital tools to help them in the assessment of the P&L of their farms, for example. Just a basic thing.

There is another programme called Agri-Booster, where we try to connect the farmers with their ecosystem. The idea is to be able to de-risk the farmer's investments. We go and first find an off-taker and aggregators and secure markets for the farmer, so that when he invests in the fertilizer or seeds, he is able to secure the sale of his harvest. Thanks to that we have collateral and we can go to the banks and provide micro-credits to the farmers, so they can pay for the months. The idea is to support them to move from self-sufficient agriculture to a more modern and commercial agriculture. Again, in three years since we launched the programme, we have supported and helped and had an impact on the lives of 500 000 farmers. I am very proud, and the company is also very proud.

Patrick NICOLET

That is significant.