

Promoting science in the Gulf

INTERVIEW WITH DR ADNAN SHIHAB ELDIN

DIRECTOR GENERAL, KUWAIT FOUNDATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF SCIENCES



ADNAN SHIHAB ELDIN is the Director General of the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences. Prior to joining KFAS, Dr Adnan was the Acting Secretary General and Director of Research at OPEC. He has also served as a board member or advisor to a number of public and international institutions such as UNESCO and the Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research and is currently the Vice-Rector for Academic Affairs at the University of Kuwait.

Please provide an overview of KFAS and its activities.

The Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS) was established on 12th December 1976, by the late Amir, Sheikh Jaber Al Ahmad Al Sabah supported by the Kuwaiti Shareholding Companies represented by the Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry. KFAS funding is provided through the annual contribution of the shareholding companies representing 1 per cent of their net annual profit. The policy of the foundation is to re-invest its revenues in an efficient and beneficial manner to the Kuwait society. HH The Amir of Kuwait, Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al- Jaber Al-Sabah is the chairman of the Board of Directors.

The Foundation's main objectives are to contribute to the development of scientific infrastructure and promote the advancement of science technology and innovation (STI) in Kuwait and the Gulf Region.

KFAS has established programmes with internationally renowned organisations and universities in the US, UK, and Europe. These programmes have been designed to offer Kuwaitis from the business, academic and research sectors the opportunity to augment their sector-specific knowledge and simultaneously develop other capabilities that would be of immediate and practical application within the Kuwaiti market. This form of capacity building has the added benefit of developing further research knowledge on issues of relevance to Kuwait. One of the partnerships that KFAS has established is with the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). The Kuwait Programme at LSE is a partnership between the Foundation and the London School of Economics and Political Science to establish a prestigious multidisciplinary global programme on development, governance, and globalisation. The Kuwait Programme at LSE is an opportunity to broaden and deepen knowledge about Kuwait and the Gulf States at a time when the role of this region in world affairs is more prominent and critical than ever before.

What role is KFAS playing in helping Kuwait move toward becoming a knowledge-based society?

The Board of Directors has adopted a new five-year strategy for 2012-2016 to ensure that the needs of Kuwait's scientific infrastructure are addressed efficiently. The strategy aims to support and develop an effective STI system in national priority fields such as

water, alternative energy, and the environment, and to disseminate the culture of science and technology. The new strategy also entails partnerships with the private sector as this will contribute to the development of a knowledge based economy. The new strategy is built on four pillars: To contribute to the development of a strong advocacy platform for science; to enhance and integrate research and development capacity; to support innovation and assist in developing the required links to commercialisation; support the development of the private sector's scientific and technological capacities and participate in building a knowledge economy.

KFAS is involved in several initiatives to help protect the environment among them the Environmental Research Programme. Please explain and define the activities of this programme.

KFAS is developing long-term strategic plans to facilitate high quality multi-disciplinary environmental research, relevant to national priorities. The Environmental Research Programme at KFAS ensures the enhancement of environmental sustainability, leading to a better quality of life, and conservation and management of biodiversity of Kuwait. Currently, efforts are focused on the promotion of eco-innovative solutions, ecosystem-based environmental management approaches, implementation of multi-disciplinary flagship projects for conservation of biodiversity in Kuwait and the establishment of a cleaner production programme for small and medium enterprises.

Another of KFAS' important initiatives is the annual Kuwait Science Fair Please outline the concept and objectives of the fair.

The Kuwait Science Fair is a five month long competition held annually for students from more than 200 public and private schools across Kuwait inviting students to submit their ideas. Students with the best 100 ideas will be asked to build their projects with the support of mentors and the Kuwait Science Fair team, and are judged and showcased in an exhibition. KFAS also set up the Sabah Al Ahmad Center for Giftedness and Creativity (SACGC). SACGC works on identifying gifted youth in government schools whilst administering specialised examinations and evaluations in collaboration with John Hopkins University and Purdue University.