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Interview with Diana Sfeir Fadel: a pioneer in the fight for the environment and eco-sustainable development in Lebanon

On the occasion of International Women's Day, the founder of Fondation Diane, an essential partner of SCP/RAC within the framework of the SwitchMed Green Entrepreneurship programme in Lebanon, talks about her commitment to eco-sustainable development as well as the role that women have to play.



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Lebanon is an exceptional land due to its unique natural heritage – its mountain cedar forests, coastline and Mediterranean climate. There is no need to travel from its big cities to admire its natural beauty. Aware of these innumerable beauties as well as their relative fragility, Diana Sfeir Fadel has made the environmental her personal fight and made eco-sustainable development the pillar of her work at [Fondation Diane](#).

With the ambition to make Lebanon a pioneer of eco-sustainable development in the Middle East, Diana launched her NGO in 2012 with three main objectives, namely: education, mobilization and investment. The mission of the foundation is to create a civic awareness while increasing the eco-sustainable development through four complementary pillars: a green investment platform, a civic circle, an industrial incubator and a chair for education on eco-citizenship and eco-sustainable development: "To achieve eco-sustainable development, we need good citizens. If they are not well informed, convinced and mobilized, we cannot achieve eco-sustainable development in this country." In the field, Fondation Diane is taking action by providing support to green businesses. Fourteen start-ups are currently receiving daily support. Diana

"Women are intelligent, they have ideas"

has only invested in projects that she defines as very young and risky, but in which she has confidence. This audacity will necessarily mean the loss of her own personal funds. Despite this, she has no hesitation in moving forward and is proud of what she accomplishes day by day with her team. She says more than half of start-ups are expected to be viable, a figure above the average for more traditional incubators.

A determined woman can overcome all obstacles. Diana never lets herself be discouraged, whatever the challenges, including the hardest. During the summer of 2010, two months after starting a master's degree in sustainable development at the prestigious Harvard University in the United States, she was diagnosed with two cancers and was forced to stop her studies. Three years later, she finally beat the disease and came out of this difficult ordeal stronger than ever, with new energy and the will to dedicate her time to contribute to a cleaner environment in Lebanon.

Interested in environmental issues from a young age, she was even more determined to promote eco-sustainable development when she came back to Lebanon: an increasing waste crisis, quarries that "devour" the mountains, the widespread destruction of forests, the absence of any restructuring programme ... it was a real shock for a nature lover who is deeply attached to her country. She then decided to devote herself entirely to the mission of her foundation, even if her contribution to the protection of the environment is "only a small drop in the ocean", Diana feels the need and the urgency to set an example by tackling the environmental issues of Lebanon. "Après moi je veux laisser sur la terre, un sillage environné de lumière" (Behind me I want to leave on earth, a wake surrounded by light): these are the words of the song she learned with the Girl Guides as a teenager that would guide her in her journey. She decided to devote herself to this trail of light that she wants to leave behind her through the actions of Fondation Diane.

On the role of women in Lebanon, she says things are starting to change. She observes that there are more and more women at the head of green companies, in the field of eco-sustainable development, but this evolution remains relatively slow. She considers that women "are intelligent, they have ideas and initiative, and when they have the opportunity to show what they can do, they can be very efficient because they have a very well-developed professional conscience." However, women need to invest more in other areas, in particular in the political sphere, where they are not sufficiently represented: "Women have a role to play, directly, indirectly, with regard to themselves, society and those around them and we can never emphasise enough in how many areas women can be effective." As far as the foundation goes, she surrounds herself with a team of trusted women, convinced as well that it is necessary that Lebanon finds a way out of this situation. She also encourages the companies that women run. The foundation is there to guide their projects and help them "build up their muscles", to make the impact of their companies stronger.

To advance the cause of the environment and eco-sustainable development, Diana has many projects underway as well as the constant desire to do more. Among other things, Fondation Diane follows a strategy of partnerships with organizations that target the environment and enable it to multiply its actions. Thus, it collaborates with [SOP/RAQ](#) within the framework of the establishment of the [SwitchMed National Switchers Support National Partnership \(SSNP\) of Lebanon](#). This SSNP [implements the SwitchMed Green Entrepreneurship programme](#) by improving the capacity of the national system to support new or already existing green and circular businesses, thus making an effective contribution to eco-sustainable development in Lebanon.

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