

Light shines for climate change meeting

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Denmark is playing host to COP15, the United Nations Climate Change Conference in December. The event will see nearly 200 countries meet in Copenhagen to negotiate a post-Kyoto agreement on climate change that is expected to come into force in 2012. Denmark is hopeful for a binding global climate agreement that will be applied to the period 2012. VIOLET MENGU writes on the road to COP15.

ZAMBIA is said to be spending US\$500 million a year on the importation of crude oil to meet its annual fuel energy demand for running vehicles and industries. With the dilapidated machinery at factories especially Indeni Oil Refinery, the country has had to incur even more costs in efforts to ensure that there are enough fuel stocks to meet the demand. For years Government has struggled to find means of reducing the cost on fuel as well as avoid shortages that arise as a result of frequent closures of the only oil refinery plant in Ndola.

There is now a shift to producing biofuel and renewable energies as an alternative cheaper and effective source of energy. While Zambia grapples with the problem of addressing the challenges of fuel, countries like Denmark have been quite successful in beginning to use renewable energies. Denmark is a front runner in wind power and bio-energy and provides a unique showcase thanks to its steady economic growth and stable energy consumption. Danish energy-friendly technology is one of the fastest growing exports and has tripled over the last decade. The Danish experience shows that through persistent and active energy policy focus on enhanced energy efficiency, it is possible to sustain high economic growth and at the same time reduce fossil fuel dependency and protect the environment. "In terms of production, Denmark is one of the most efficient users of energy compared with the other European Union EU Member States and Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

This also applies to carbon dioxide emissions in relation to production," said senior advisor at Danish Technical University, Riso National Laboratory Leif Sonder Petersen. Mr Petersen said despite relatively low energy consumption, Denmark is among the best in the EU and the OECD at continuously reducing its energy dependency and carbon dioxide emissions. He said that in an international perspective, Denmark belongs to a group of countries that have relatively low energy and carbon-dioxide (CO₂) intensities, while over the past 25 years, being able to achieve above-average reductions in energy and CO₂ intensities. "Since 1980, the Danish economy has grown by 78 percent, while energy consumption has remained more or less constant, and CO₂ emissions have been reduced. This development reflects an increase in energy and CO₂ efficiency," he said.

A majority of countries have seen underlying increases in their energy and CO₂ efficiencies, but the Danish increase is among the greatest in the OECD area. Furthermore, the composition of

energy consumption in Denmark has changed significantly as a consequence of energy policy measures to promote the use of renewable energy. Renewable energy today makes up more than 19 percent of final energy consumption. This has increased the security of energy supply and has contributed considerably to fulfilling Denmark's climate goals. Mr Petersen said that from 1990 to 2007, economic activity in Denmark increased by more than 45 percent, while CO₂ emissions (adjusted for fluctuations in the weather and in cross-border exchange in electricity) were reduced by more than 13 percent.

Today, Denmark's energy efficiency is one of the best in the EU and continues to improve year by year. Danish energy intensity is thus the lowest in the EU. Energy intensity is measured as the ratio of energy production to real GDP. Since 1980, Denmark has reduced its energy intensity by more than the OECD average, and by noticeably more than for that of the world as a whole. At the same time, Denmark has one of the lowest energy intensities. However, several countries have seen a development in energy intensity similar to Denmark.

Against this backdrop, Denmark seems most suited to host the COP15, the United Nations Climate Change Conference in December. While preparations have reached an advanced stage, the Danish Government is putting all its efforts into obtaining an agreement that combines respect for the environment as well as sustainability for the people. A visit to the Bella Centre, the venue for the COP15, revealed that final touches were being made for the hosting of between 12,000 to 15,000 people. Ministry of Foreign Affairs COP15 working group assistant manager, Per Johansen, told journalists during a tour of the centre that all was in place for the meeting. Johansen took the journalists to the conference hall where ministers of energy from 200 countries are expected to have their debates and agree on the way forward. "No one has been left out. We have made provisions for all people that will have the chance of coming here, the media, civil society, and ordinary delegates will have their place. Car parking and rooms for coats and jackets all have been catered for," Mr Johansen said. The Bella Centre has installed its own wind turbine to reduce carbon emissions by 20 per cent before the event. We have already doubled the number of hotel rooms compliant with the Green Key environmental certification - there will be 7,000 rooms ahead of the event. By the end of 2009, Choice Hotels is aiming to have all ten of its Copenhagen properties ISO 14001-compliant. The new Crowne Plaza, which will open near the Bella Centre before December, is being built to exceptionally high environmental standards. It will be the country's first hotel built with a ground water-based heating and cooling system. Then there is the Scandic Hotels, which is a leader in sustainability and won a green award at Imex last year.

The meeting will be the 15th Conference of the Parties (COP) under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Running from December 7 to 18 in Copenhagen, the COP is the highest body of the UNFCCC and consists of environmental ministers who meet once a year to discuss the convention's developments. "It is expected that ministers and officials from approximately 200 countries will take part, at least 12,000 people will attend as observers. Industry and non-governmental organisations are also expected to attend the conference," said Kattrine Krough who is the advisor to the minister on the Reduction of Emission from Destruction and Degradation (REDD) and Climate Change. Ms Krough said the goals of the climate change convention are to stabilise the amount of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere at a level that prevents dangerous manmade climate changes. She said this stabilisation should occur

in such a way as to give the ecosystem the opportunity to adapt naturally in order not to compromise the food safety and that the potential to create sustainable social and economic development must not be endangered. "A global climate change agreement is necessary so we can limit the negative manmade effects on the climate system for future generations. This is what will determine the success of the meeting, getting a binding of the Kyoto protocol," she said.

In 1997, during the COP meeting in Japan, an agreement was made to reduce greenhouse emissions by developed countries and that this covenant would run from 2008 to 2012. The agreement, called the Kyoto Protocol, was negotiated in 1997 in Japan and specified greenhouse gas emission targets for developed countries. It also specified that the first commitment period would run from 2008 to 2012. It is intended that the COP15 meeting will finalise a new agreement. If the world's nations are to decide upon a new agreement to enter into force before the Kyoto Protocol expires, 2009 is the final opportunity to do so.

Mr Krough said global climate changes have always taken place: there have been ice ages and warm periods. Ice core drilling has shown how temperatures and emissions of greenhouse gases have fluctuated over the last 650,000 years. She said greenhouse gases in the atmosphere have not been the decisive factor for the temperature swings, but man has contributed to intensifying them. She said climate changes in themselves are nothing new but what is new is that man-made emissions have led to the volume of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere being increased massively, and that global warming was happening significantly faster than predicted. "The most important thing this conference can achieve is to raise the profile of the climate change issue. We cannot find a solution to the climate change challenge without a majority of people understanding the issue. There has been so much happening in Denmark to raise awareness among the people," she said.

COP15 will however put Denmark under the microscope. If a new agreement is reached in Copenhagen, it will be a shining star on the country's reputation, said Peter Iversen from the Ministry of Climate and Energy. The likelihood of a new global climate change agreement in Copenhagen is what the developing nations also would like to see as these countries have been calling for dialogue, because historically they are not responsible for the emissions but are the worst affected by these climatic changes. "There is reason to be optimistic. I believe that we can reach an agreement this year, one which will be a big step forward from Kyoto protocol, and a strong political will is needed for this to be possible. The most important thing this conference can achieve is to raise the profile of the climate change issue. We cannot find a solution to the climate change challenge without a majority of people understanding the issue," Mr Iversen said. Denmark hopes to generate between 25 million Pounds and 40 million Pounds. The impact from a marketing perspective will also be huge. "There is a lot at stake for our planet at COP15. Denmark is well aware of its responsibility. Our ambition is to find innovative ways for all parties to the convention as well as civil society representatives to cooperate efficiently and in a sustainable way in order to reach an ambitious deal," said Jakob Anderson, an advisor at the Ministry of Climate and Energy.

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