
BRIEFING REPORT: EfD SIDE-EVENT TO THE UN CLIMATE CHANGE CONFERENCE IN DURBAN

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EfD had a noticeable presence at the UN Climate Change negotiations held in Durban last December. On the Thursday of the second week of the talks, EfD hosted an official side-event at the Durban Exhibition Centre entitled “Leading by example – Swedish leadership in global climate change policy”. The side-event was organized in collaboration with FORES, a leading independent Swedish liberal economic think-tank. Drawing attention to Swedish leadership on both domestic and international stages, the session was comprised of two parts: (i) Sweden, Climate Change Negotiations and Fairness and (ii) Engaging Developing Countries. Given the reputations of panelists including Lena Ek, Swedish Minister of Environment, and EfD’s Dr. Thomas Sterner, Professor of Environmental Economics at the University of Gothenburg, the side-event drew in a strong attendance, between 20-30 individuals, who were interested in learning more about Swedish efforts.

EfD’s own Dr. Martine Visser, Associate Professor at the University of Cape Town, opened the first session where she presented her research on issues of fairness in the climate change negotiations. Using applied game theory, she demonstrated that individual-country specific contributions are more effective than basing contributions on equity principles alone. This lends credence to a bottom-up approach where emissions targets are based on national policies as opposed to a top-down approach such as the Kyoto Protocol. Dr. Visser was succeeded by none other than the Swedish Minister of Environment, Lena Ek, who gave a broad overview of Sweden’s negotiating position followed by some inside information on how negotiations were proceeding. The final presentation of the session was given by Martin Ådahl of FORES. Using the example of Sweden, his presentation explained how a mix of policy measures had permitted Sweden to reduce its domestic emissions and how this experience might serve as a model for other countries to adopt.

The second session on Engaging Developing Countries was opened by Dr. Thomas Sterner. His presentation had two purposes. First, it served to highlight the EfD experience, especially the increasing emphasis EfD is placing on climate change—as exemplified in a new climate change PhD programme being developed. But second, his presentation included some recent empirical work published as a book entitled “Fuel Taxes and the Poor”. The key message here is that fuel taxes in developing countries need not be, contrary to popular opinion, regressive. Because of economic inequalities within developing countries, few of the poor currently afford fuels that would be subject to taxation. Dr. Sterner’s presentation was also unique in that he gave it from Sweden using technology available at the Durban Exhibition Center—thus saving significant amounts of CO₂!

Dr. Sterner was followed Sabine Henders, PhD candidate at Linköping University, who presented on a new Swedish research network known as FOCALI which focuses on climate change, forests and livelihoods. Launched in 2008, FOCALI is focusing on three thematic areas: (i) review and analysis of existing global REDD+ instruments, (ii) how to make REDD+ work for the poor and (iii) strategies for a sustainable forest production that are socio-economically responsible and climate smart. Finally, the last presentation was given Mark Purdon, PhD candidate at the University of Toronto and EfD Research Associate. Reporting on results from comparative fieldwork into CDM afforestation projects in Tanzania, Uganda and Moldova, he argued that projects tend to generate a greater number of genuine, “additional” carbon credits when they were implemented by state forest agencies who were

able to maintain latent technical capacity despite uncertainty about the price of carbon that bedeviled private sector operators.

Despite a very tight programme, there was still some time for questions from the audience. In the first sessions, the Minister was questioned about the status of negotiations as well as Sweden's negotiating position. A rare and frank conversation ensued. In a final query of the session, Dr. Visser was asked to consider how her empirical research was reflected in negotiations and prospects for future agreement. At the close of the second session, time was more restricted, but a few questions were posed about the future work of EfD and FOCALI while one audience member showed a surprising interest in Tanzanian afforestation.

At the close of the event, EfD was able to present a package of materials to the Swedish Minister of Environment, including a copy of Dr. Sterner's book on fuel taxes. Other materials that had been made available at the back of the hall were found to have swiftly disappeared. The side-event was clearly an excellent venue to disseminate research findings and build partnership for future collaboration. Indeed, by designing a side-event around Sweden's domestic and international efforts, the event demonstrated that true leadership on climate change requires action on both fronts. In closing this brief, EfD would like to warmly thank FORES for their time and effort in helping to organize a truly successful side-event in Durban.