POST COPENHAGEN: A Greener Workforce?

The Climate Conference in Copenhagen in December 2009 was essential for the world’s climate, the Danish government and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in injecting solid efforts in outlining the Copenhagen Accord to deal with global warming and climate change.

Nonetheless, the Conference ended only with vague commitments contained in the non-binding Copenhagen Accord. Diplomats had raised concerns that there was insufficient negotiating time scheduled to resolve the many deadlocks and it was this factor that marred the Copenhagen meeting.

A series of problems remain unresolved, ranging from the long-standing stand-off between rich and poor nations over the scale of emissions targets and climate financing, through to technical issues relating to carbon trading, emission reporting and even the structure of the negotiations. Even representatives of the world of work—employers, workers and governments—who came together as the International Labour Organization (ILO), are aware and ready for the profound changes in production, consumption patterns, and the transformation of enterprises, jobs and employment patterns that will be impacted as a result of the Copenhagen Accord.

Post Copenhagen, many initiatives appear to be discussed in many industries and sectors to make the workforce much “greener”. The Green Collar Association (GCA), USA has outlined initiatives for the Federal government to provide targeted financial and regulatory incentives to corporations, labour unions, and non profit organisations that invest in the (re)training and education of skilled workers and professionals to equip them with the skills and tools to address the requirements of a green economy.

The Green Workforce Preparedness Initiative by GCA will result in:

- **MORE JOBS**: Creation and retention of jobs, for professionals as well as skilled workers, in the US and Canada that would otherwise be shipped overseas
- **COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE**: A higher skilled and more capable workforce that will spurn new ideas and innovations, allowing corporations to be the leaders in the new economy
- **CLEANER ENVIRONMENT**: Those working in the green economy become better stewards of their own environment

- **IMPROVED STANDARDS OF LIVING**: Great opportunity for working poor to learn new skills and in doing so elevate themselves and improve their standards of living.

With a labour force increasing internationally by 45 million a year, some 300 million additional jobs will be needed from now to 2015. Although, the world is still struggling to bounce back from the current state of the economy, we cannot afford to delay our response to the climate change challenge. In the past, we have over-emphasised the economy, the financial sector and under-valued the social and environmental dimensions of sustainability.

Over at the national front, in the budget speech for 2010, the Prime Minister of Malaysia announced the establishment of Green Technology Financing Scheme (GTPS) amounting to RM1.5 billion in an effort to improve the supply and utilisation of green technologies. The scheme could benefit the workforce of companies who are producers and users of green technology. Although, the Copenhagen Accord is regarded as a failure, Malaysia can do more to attest to the world that we are conscious of the impact of climate change and we are getting our work force ready for the transformation required to deal with climate change.

The four pillars of the Green Technology Policy have been discussed elsewhere in this issue of IMPAK. Suffice to say that Strategic Thrust 3 of the Green Technology Policy of the Ministry emphasises the intensification of the workforce in green technology. Skilled, qualified, competent and productive human resources are crucial to green technology development.

This could be achieved through: (i) design and enhancement of training and education programmes to improve human resource capacity related to green technology; (ii) provision of financial and fiscal incentives for students to pursue green technology disciplines at undergraduate and postgraduate levels; (iii) implementation of retraining programmes and apprenticeship schemes to enhance competency of the semi-skilled labour required to meet the demands of the green technology industry; (iv) formulation of grading and certification mechanisms for competent personnel in green technology; and (v) exploitation of brain gain programmes to strengthen local expertise in green technology.

Nonetheless, the launch of the National Key Result Areas (NKRA) and National Key Performance Indicators (NKPIs) left the environment out of their six thrust areas (which included: crime reduction, combating corruption, improving education, raising the living standards of low-income households, upgrading rural basic infrastructure and improving urban public transport). It is hoped that at the re-evaluation of the NKRAs, a thrust area “environmental friendly” will be included with pre-defined NKPIs.

Improving public transport has direct relevance to greening the workforce. Transport is a major contributor to CO2 emissions and consequently climate change. An efficient public transport system should reduce drastically the number of single passenger cars on the road and consequently help towards a reduction in our carbon footprint discussed elsewhere in this issue. Office work spaces built on our Green Building Index should be another priority of the government if we are to meet a 40% carbon reduction pledge.

In conclusion, post-Copenhagen, there are movements nationally and globally to gain commitments from developing and developed nations to prevent further climate change catastrophes. Only with concerted and holistic efforts by all the stakeholders can we achieve the intended goals of the Copenhagen Accord.

**References**


Source

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COP 15: The Copenhagen Accord
A positive step but not ambitious enough...

In the lead up to the United Nations (UN) climate summit in Copenhagen in December 2009, it was repeatedly said that this was “the last chance to save the climate.” This was based on the assumption of business-as-usual. If emissions continued to grow on current trends, then, with little time left to put on the brakes and de-carbonise a growing global economy at a sufficient rate, the task would be totally unfeasible.

About 45,000 participants traveled to the summit in Copenhagen last December - the vast majority convinced of the need for a new global agreement on climate change. Representatives from about 200 nations gathered for two weeks with the goal of hammering out a meaningful, fair, binding international environmental accord.

Such an accord might have included two tracks: one track extending and strengthening the legal requirements applicable to the Kyoto parties, the other track binding both Kyoto hold-outs like the United States and rapidly industrialising countries like China and India to appropriate reductions. What was needed was firm emission reduction targets and firms achievement dates on both tracks, including ambitious short-term targets. Also needed were firm funding commitments and financing mechanisms to assist the least developed but hardest-hit countries to adapt to the severe environmental changes they have already experienced and are certain to face in the decades to come. (1)

However, despite intense discussions and late-night negotiations, just two days before the close of the meeting it appeared as though the summit was deadlocked in chaos and headed for failure.

World leaders knew that they were taking a massive risk with the climate. While they were aware of what they needed to do to reduce the risk to a scientifically acceptable level, they could not or would not quite do so because they were hemmed in by economic and political aspirations.

The end of the meeting saw leaders of the US and the BASIC group of countries (Brazil, South Africa, India, and China) hammering out a last-minute deal, which on the final day of the summit, produced, what came to be called, the ‘Copenhagen Accord’.

The logical conclusion is that this is the arrangement that the big players (meaning the US and the BASIC group) now prefer – an informal setting, where each country says what it is prepared to do – where nothing is negotiated and nothing is legally binding. Many felt deflated and disappointed with the overall outcome.

A US government official described the agreement as a “historic step forward” but conceded it was not enough to prevent dangerous climate change in the future. The US President Barack Obama said the deal would be a foundation for global action but there was “much further to go”. He said the US, China, Brazil, India and South Africa had “agreed to set a mitigation target to limit global warming to no more than 2°C and importantly, to take action to meet this objective” and added “we are confident that we are moving in the direction of a significant accord.”(2)

Opening ceremony of the United Nations Climate Change Conference 2009 on 7 December 2009 in Copenhagen

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