

DI conference in Denmark: September team report

In December, as part of the Development Instructor training program, the September team from CICD went on a six-day visit to Denmark. Here we participated in a development conference, held at the University of Roskilde, and other events running parallel to the main United Nations climate conference in Copenhagen. The focus of all of these events was perhaps the major question facing Humana People to People, we development instructors, and the world today: how to avert environmental catastrophe while enhancing the livelihoods of populations in the developing world. The trip was a funded and an integral part of our Development Instructor training.



We were invited to make an exhibition and a presentation to the conference on deforestation, and had a busy time preparing materials in the week ahead, with all members of the team contributing creative assistance and research. Some of us traveled to the airport early to reduce transport costs, others later to complete work on the presentation, and we were reunited at the airport on the day of the flight. After a day spent traveling, arriving a day before the conference gave us an opportunity further to practice our presentation, work with decorations at the conference and help with IT support.

The conference began with an address by Cuban activist Roberto Gonzales who discussed the importance of transition mechanisms for a world dealing with increasing energy scarcity, and strongly defended the view that limiting population increases was neither desirable in itself nor a solution to the world's environmental problems. Another speaker, Jesper Wohlert from Humana People to People, told us about some of the latest developments linked to Humana's projects, including initiatives in sustainable agriculture and exciting innovations in the use of solar power.



Around 150 Development Instructors from all over the world, training at 9 different schools and training places in Europe, made presentations and exhibitions at the conference, and others contributed to its organisation. Our presentation and exhibition, which took

place on the first day of the conference, considered deforestation and inadequate forest management as a worldwide problem, and suggested that solutions comprised more than just the planting of trees or new technical or governmental initiatives, requiring people to work together to produce the best habitats for animal and plant species and local and indigenous human communities.

Other subjects presented included food security, sustainable trade, recycling, and the effect of the environment on human health. We learned of exciting ways in which other schools had set examples of good environmental practice through growing their own produce, saving electricity and organising meatless days, saving money in the process. It was striking also to be reminded that the number of obese people in the world now exceeds the number of people suffering from malnutrition; solutions to problems of poverty, hunger and inequality should really be within our grasp.

On both afternoons of the conference we had a chance to discuss the presentations and respond critically, developing our own ideas. Themes discussed included the environmental problems created by the acculturation of people in the developed world to excessive consumption (something which anyway does not produce happiness), the dilemma of trying to reduce our carbon footprint and environmental damage while stimulating production and wealth in the developing world, and the importance of setting good examples in our schools. The discussions mixed representatives from all the schools present, and we made many new friends and learned new perspectives on Humana's work.

On Saturday, the day after the conference, the September team attended the mass demonstration in Copenhagen calling for international governments to adopt legally-binding new policies to deal with climate change. Ahead of the rally itself, guest speakers highlighted the urgency with which global warming affects many communities around the world. The attendance of tens of thousands of people exceeded the organisers' expectations – with around 100.000 participants it is said to be the largest demonstration ever in Denmark! – representing politically diverse groups all concerned about climate change. In the mass of people our group did well to stick together and not get lost, but it was for me a unique experience, and for all of us an unforgettable spectacle.

Our hosts at our accommodation at “Boserup palace”, the Sjaelland team, helped to organise a menu during the conference featuring many delicacies, and provided an evening program of entertainments each day, memorably featuring a lesson in African dance (taught by Alois from Zimbabwe) and song



(by Kenneth from Malawi). The South Africa boot dance was very good exercise (but please don't ask if I remember the steps).

There was also a performance by David Rovics, an American singer and composer of protest songs (who also performed – despite cold temperatures – throughout the demonstration on the Saturday), and an opportunity to enjoy an open talent evening. There was also ample time during the stay to tour Copenhagen, visit the site of the United Nations conference, and meet people on the street, including the many visitors at the time of the conference from all over the world.

We went away from Denmark with many memories and new friends, having learned much more about the problems facing the world, and with an enhanced determination to work for a better future for everyone.