



PHOTO MIKKEL ØSTERGAARD

Our responsibility

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It is now a year since I came to Ethiopia. I am sitting in my living room and looking out into the garden where the rain is pouring down. The rainy season has finally come to the capital but the rain hasn't been so good in some parts of the country, and the number of hungry people is on the rise. Ethiopia's evil hunger continues. Climate change only ensures continued chronic and seasonal hunger, making the poor even more vulnerable than they already are and standing in the way of progress. Kassa and his family still struggle to put food on the table. Millions of poor families in a world hit by climate change are doing the same thing.

It isn't just on the UNFCCC homepage that the clock is ticking. The world is crying out for action. According to the report, "The Anatomy of a Silent Crisis" from the UN's former Secretary General Kofi Annan's Global Humanitarian Forum, climate change is already costing the lives of 300,000 people per year and has an impact on 300 million people. The report predicts that ever more violent heatwaves, floods, storms and forest fires will be responsible for 500,000 deaths a year by the year 2030! Developing countries pay almost a hundred per cent of the price in human lives as a result of the climate change that we in the West have caused.

The report's authors recognise that it is difficult to assess the exact consequences of climate change for man because it is linked with so many other

factors such as population growth, the way in which the soil is treated, natural climate variability, and how a country is governed. Figures may therefore be higher or lower and must be interpreted as trends – but they are frightening nonetheless.

Not to act now would not just be immoral, it would also be incredibly expensive. The report estimates that climate change costs more than 125 billion dollars per year – more than the cost of all the relief and development aid that is carried out around the world! By 2030 the bill might run to 600 billion dollars per year. The need for help given by rich countries to poor countries will also grow. Climate refugees need a place to flee to. And we will probably lose all the money and energy that has already been invested to fulfil the world's 2015 goals for ensuring better living conditions for the world's poorest. The first goal of halving hunger and poverty in the world will be difficult to achieve.

However, seen through development eyes, I can mark a difference here in Ethiopia that is worth noting. Climate change has really arrived on the agenda. In the English language newspapers there are regular articles on the impact of climate change for Africa and Ethiopia. The international climate negotiations are also being mentioned, especially since Ethiopia's Prime Minister Meles Zenawi was chosen at the end of August by the African Union to lead the delegation that will negotiate a deal on behalf of Africa at the COP15 Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen December 2009.

Ethiopia's national delegation of two men has

also now been reinforced. Relief and development organizations have been attentive to the consequences of climate change for Ethiopia's development - and this will hopefully lead to climate-focussed development projects out in the local communities if support comes from the rich part of the world. A more conscious society, with the involvement of associations, organizations and grassroots movements, can also help to ensure that climate change doesn't fall off the government's agenda following the big bang - hopefully - in Copenhagen.

What can I do?

I must admit that I'm completely overwhelmed by the thought of how enormous the problem of global warming really is, and the effect it has already had, and will have, on the poor part of the world. But even if this huge challenge appears insurmountable, there is actually a great deal that we can do ourselves to pull the rest of the world in the right direction.

Most importantly, we have to put pressure on our own politicians and get them to take moral responsibility for global warming, a responsibility which extends beyond election terms. Europe, and especially Denmark, is among the most CO₂-emitting regions in the world. Our governments must invest more in sustainable and renewable energy resources and be ahead of the game when it comes to living up to the obligations that we have signed up to in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

The poor countries shouldn't have to wait to get the compensation and help they are entitled to in order to adapt to climate change and thereby save hundreds of thousands of lives and improve the living conditions for millions of people. The poor countries and the developing countries such as China and India mustn't be made to wait for support for the technology transfer from the West that can help to ensure that their development isn't as dirty as the development that we have had.

It is our lifestyle and development in the West that is responsible for global warming. My lifestyle and your lifestyle. Lifestyles that we ourselves are the masters of and have the power to change. If I look at my own daily life in Denmark, I surround myself with energy draining appliances and machines. Everything is electric and sits there on standby most of the time. With a very few changes in my usage and with the purchase of energy-saving appliances, I can easily reduce my personal emissions of CO₂. For example, I can hang the washing up instead of using the tumble dryer three times a week. This would reduce my CO₂ output by 200 kilos a year, and at the same time I'd save a hundred and fifty US dollars on the electricity bill.³⁸ I can change three regular 60 watt bulbs that are on for four hours a day for energy saving bulbs and thereby reduce my emissions by 100 kilos and save seventy US dollars. I can switch the TV, stereo and DVD off completely rather than leaving them on standby and thus reduce my emissions by 75 kilos per year and save fifty US dollars. Changing a B-efficiency rated fridge for an AAA+ rated fridge would relieve nature of 175 kilos of CO₂ per year. Paradoxically, I would

save myself ninety-eight US dollars at the same time. I can also cut down on exotic travel and take the bike instead of the car. Turn down the underfloor heating and curtail my long showers.

The list is long and they are all things I am able to change. The question is whether I will always think so sensibly. Unlikely. Therefore, our governments must help us to make the right energy saving choices by making such choices accessible and attractive. The government can, for example, give subsidies or tax advantages for green solutions which can reduce energy consumption in our homes such as, for example, installing and using solar panels. Tougher environmental criteria for new cars and attractive subsidies for environmentally sound cars is also an option. Cheaper and better public transport will also motivate us to leave the car at home. And if we choose an option that pollutes, we should have to pay the price for polluting - we can well afford to. Income from duties on, for example, flights, which are one of the most CO₂ emitting forms of transport, can be used to compensate for our pollution by funding research into more environmentally friendly fuels and helping poor countries adapt to climate change. Our governments can also choose to levy taxes and duties on technology that pollutes if there are alternative green solutions.

There are many things we can do and change through taking care of our shared climate. Most importantly of all, this we can do for families like Kassa's who, although not responsible for the problem, must struggle against the changed climate that we have helped bring about. We have to get started. Now.