



Cleaner production implementation through ECO support

By Lars Siersen

As the world becomes increasingly aware of the need to move towards eco-friendly manufacturing processes and outputs, organisations and institutions are re-assessing the impact of their presence on the environment. In this age of heightened awareness of the value of conserving the earth's natural resources, and protecting it from further contamination at the hands of toxic by-products, it is important for enterprises to reduce the waste of resources and increase productivity. By doing so, not only will energy be saved (electricity, fuel, water), but in most cases, also raw materials, leading to an all-round improvement in Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) and creating a safer, better workplace.

To most enterprises, the notion of saving on materials is appealing but daunting -- firms are often unable to conceive of where and how the cuts will take place. Yet research shows that in most cases savings of 40-60 per cent of energy and water consumption can be achieved without the burden of additional investment.

In 2001 the Egyptian and Danish governments, supported by the Danish International Development Assistance (Danida), initiated the Environmental Sector Programme (ESP), under whose umbrella the Environment Compliance Office (ECO) falls -- hopefully serving as a founding model for nation-wide industrial reform.

The ECO has positioned itself in the market to aid the process of assessment and implementation -- acting as a pro-active consultant to the process. Input on ECO's part includes initial assessment, planning, good housekeeping and low cost/no cost options, staff training, full environmental assessment, access to soft loans (LE80,000 for pilot projects), workshops, and the possibility of access to larger soft loans (up to LE3 million).

Under the ECO umbrella three co-ordinators serve four industrial sectors -- textile, food, engineering and metallurgical -- comprising a total of 90 small-and medium-sized enterprises (SME). These companies receive comprehensive facilitation and implementation plans, not only to clean up their production processes and thereby save on natural resources, but as well to sustain the change.

Work phases under this environmental impact reduction programme are segmented, beginning with seminars introducing the cleaner production model to local industry. Following feedback and tallied interest, screening of factories will take place -- using factors such as commitment, company records and current environmental impacts -- to assess suitability for participation. Following extensive assessment and surveying,

implementation is commenced, the final target being the reduction of resources and increased productivity.

The ECO model is one tailored to adapt to any industry in any nation. Increasingly, aid organisations collaborating with developing governments are recognising the need to introduce models in which sustainability is factored. Too often in the past aid organisations have watched their efforts fall apart upon departure -- the locals unable to continue with the programme imposed on them.

In this regard the ECO is premised on one fundamental principle: that the only ones who can implement changes in a given enterprise are the management and staff. Hence the ECO's designated officers act solely as experienced consultants: assisting the enterprise in the formation of project organisation and with drafting a work plan; pointing out the options for savings by reducing waste and improving normal working methods; helping the enterprise implement designated improvements and drafting an action plan to control the progress of the work. A consultant entering a workplace must also assist the enterprise to establish a simple, non-bureaucratic environmental management system (EMS) that will facilitate daily dealings with environmental issues. In order to reach optimum efficiency an EMS must consist of a minimum four elements: an environmental policy, a monitoring plan, an action plan, and a management review.

Incentive, in any such project, is critical to success. That starts with transparency -- crucial on the part of international agencies. That equation also entails extensive training of local industry staff, plus the assurance of continued access to the latest training and technological developments in the sector.

Taking the ECO project as an example, pilot phase loans (LE80,000 for small investments) are used as an initial incentive, with five to 10 enterprises being selected at a later stage for a soft loan of up to LE3 million to support cleaner production.

The Danida model is hoped to generate not only a documented shift in production and its impact on the environment, but also an increase in interest across all production sectors nationwide. While Danida support to the ESP will end in 2008-09, the goal is to ensure that communication does not end there. It is apt to look at Danida as a catalyst -- prodding Egypt towards cleaner production processes. It is hoped that local industry then serves to initiate a domino effect -- spreading the acquired expertise further afield, across the country and, eventually, to neighbouring nations and around the world.

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