Webwatch

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United Nations Framework on Climate Change

<http://unfccc.int>

The United Nations Framework on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is an international treaty agreed upon at the Earth Summit, organized by the United Nations in 1992 and held in Rio de Janeiro. Its central goals are the control of the main greenhouse gases anthropogenic emissions in such a way that no significant changes to current climate and environmental conditions occur due to those emissions. Although the treaty does not define specific goals or compromises for its signatories, or any enforcement mechanics, it came into action in 1994 and currently it has more than 192 parties.

Since its creation the UNFCCC has evolved considerably. For example, the 1997 Kyoto Protocol has defined specific targets for different nations, according to their relative degree of industrial and economic development. Besides that, many meetings in specific areas and subjects related to climate change are held under the umbrella of the UNFCCC. An example are the meetings for the preparation of incoming United Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen, COP15 (to more information please visit <http://en.cop15.dk/frontpage>), where new goals and agreements will be defined among all parties of the UNFCCC.

This website tries as much as possible to present all the main aspects of the UNFCCC and its past and ongoing activities. In the left top corner of the entrance page the links for some of the main specific mechanisms of the

UNFCCC can be assessed directed. They include the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM), the Technology Transfer Clearing House (TTCLEAR), the Climate Change Information Network (CC:iNet), and the Joint Implementation (JI) process. In each section specific information on meetings, news, publications, and other relevant information can be found, most of them freely available. Information on specific topics, such as parties involved, committees dealing with specific questions or problems, contacts of people at governmental or private organizations responsible for particular areas, among others; can be directly from the menu presented in the left part of all the site webpages. Also available are the main ongoing or past agreements worked out under the UNFCCC umbrella, greenhouse emissions data, national reports, among other important information. Specific areas for public or expert participation are also available, as well as resources for a wide variety of areas, such as education, industry, media, etc.

A quick-finder pull down menu is presented in all pages to take the user to the areas considered to be the most important. Also a search facility is available people looking for specific bits of information. Some information, as for example the newsletters, are available only upon registration on the site. Nevertheless, this is free and provides a deeper access to the information available. Even though the site is well designed and simple, in some pages there is a large volume of text with a small font, making it harder to read.

The site does a good job in trying to address the needs of a wide range of people working, or with interests in the field of climate change, including policy makers, environmentalists, industrialists, among others. As climate change is an increasingly important global problem, there are a lot of ongoing and future events and activities. Hence, regular visits are required to keep updated.

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Earth System Science Partnership

<http://www.essp.org/>

The Earth System Science Partnership (ESSP) is a group of organizations and individuals created under the auspices of the International Council for Science (ICSU) (please see <http://www.icsu.org> for more information on this organization). Its main focus is the integrated study of the Earth and its interconnecting systems, including the interactions between the biotic, abiotic, and human spheres. The ESSP main goals are to analyze, identify, and quantify as much as possible the implications of current changes in the environment and human societies, in the perspective of global and regional sustainability.

The ESSP was founded as a response of the Amsterdam declaration on Global Challenge, signed at the first Global Change Open Science Conference held in Amsterdam in 2001. To better address specific problems, the ESSP was divided in four main areas: DIVERSITAS, that deals specifically with biodiversity (<http://www.diversitas-international.org/>), International Geosphere—Biosphere Program (IGBP) dealing with change on a global scale (<http://www.igbp.net/>), International Human Dimensions Programme (IHDP) that studies the influence on the human societies and in the economy (<http://www.ihdp.unu.edu/>), and the World Climate Research Program (WCRP) that deals with climate change and its consequences in the environmental, economic, and societal dimensions of sustainability (<http://wcrp.wmo.int/>). Each particular research program has an independent website, which one can be easily accessed from the main ESSP site.

In each main focus area of ESSP develops its activities through joint projects with a wide variety of partners, including research institutions, governmental, and private organizations. Examples of activities include integrated regional studies, capability creation, and events such as the Open Science Conferences. A full description of the past and ongoing activities of all partners can be found at the website, including their main results, most of them freely available, or with links to websites presenting more information and details of the projects. Each project website has a particular layout. Yet, it is easy to navigate, and each page a search facility to help people quickly find the information needed. A resources/publications area exists in all the site pages, where a large quantity of information can be found, including reports, newsletters, books, multimedia materials, and other documents, most of them downloadable for free. Special parts of the site are reserved for news and education. The contacts of each partner and instructions on how to participate in the ongoing or future projects of ESSP are available at site. In fact, the participation is encouraged, as a way to better fulfill the main goals of ESSP. RSS feeds and e-mail newsletters that can be

subscribed for free are available to help people remain updated on ESSP activities and publications.

Although the way the information is organized may vary, each one of the five websites under the umbrella of ESSP deserves a comprehensive visit. The materials available and the activities of ESSP address the needs of many people with interests in the field, from researchers to industrialists and policy makers. These are sites that merit regular visits to keep updated on ESSP activities.

CleanTechies

<http://cleantechies.com/>

The CleanTechies is a privately supported organization currently based in San Francisco that was founded in 2008 by three entrepreneurs with strong interests in the promotion of sustainable solutions. The CleanTechies main goal is the creation and expansion of a business and career network in the green and environmental business sector, thus facilitating the identification of business opportunities, fostering the creation and development of partnerships between different stakeholders, and providing relevant information and insight for people with a direct interest in clean technologies and related subjects. Although not restricted to CleanTechies main focus areas are renewable energy, resource efficiency, green buildings, and transportation.

The website is a key part for fulfilling these goals, providing people with news, jobs announcements or partnership opportunities, and presenting information on sector trends, laws and regulations, serving also a meeting point for people with interests on the CleanTechies focus areas. Therefore, the main page features the most recent and relevant news or blog posts, topical stories on particular subjects, and career opportunities. Two menus positioned on the top and left side of the website facilitates the browsing and gives access to information on specific subjects, such as climate change, energy, finance, events, among many others. Of particular interest are the blogs, on particular subjects and open to everyone with interests in the green economy sector. Instructions on how to post comments, news, and job offers or requests are provided at the site. To keep updated, a newsletter, RSS feeds and e-mails warnings can be subscribed freely at the site. Also, Tweet, Facebook, and LinkedIn sites and groups are available for those who want to discuss matters in a more freely and direct way.

In an overall appreciation the site does a very good job and a lot of information can be found at the site suiting the needs of a wide range of people. The navigation is easy and the structure well organized with a search facility available in all pages. However, some pages are somewhat cluttered with the large amount of topics presented. The site was

recently awarded some prizes for best environmental blog, and it is a good starting to the people interested in doing business or pursuing a career in the environmental business sector.

The Equator Principles

<http://www.equator-principles.com/>

The Equator Principles are a set of voluntary guiding principles developed to assess and manage the social and environmental risks in project financing. They were developed by a group of banks and financial institutions, led by some of the largest North American and European banks, to serve as a common and consistent set of guidelines and policies that can be applied globally by private financial institutions. The Equator Principles were published in 2003, with a revision already been done in 2006 to increase their scope and strengthen the process. Since then, a large number of organizations from countries around the world have adopted the guidelines and are implementing them in their day to day project financing activities. The Equator Principles are relevant also to lending institutions, as they impose restrictions concerning the projects development, in particular in how their social and environmental aspects are taken into account. That way the negative impacts are minimized or even avoided, promoting also good practices and the environmental awareness of all stakeholders.

Thus, the website serves this purpose by making available for download the Equator Principles and other relevant documents. The principles themselves can be found in several languages to facilitate their dissemination and global application. In the Frequently Asked Questions

(FAQ) section, some typical questions about the principles and how they may be applicable to particular conditions of a given project are available. The more recent news and activities about the Equator Principles, as well as a list of the current financial institutions that use them, and reports on their application of the principles can also be found at the site. The information contained in the best practice section is helpful for the implementation of the Equator Principles, in project evaluation, and even in the development and submission of proposals that better take into account the environmental and social dimensions.

The website is simple and small, focusing mainly in presenting and making available to the general public the Equator Principle guidelines. The site pages presentation is not very good and it is hard to read, as the text is too packed together. Some information is available on the particular implementation of the principles, although no practical cases are given. As many large financial institutions have adopted the principles, and more are expected to do so in the near future, more detailed information will certainly be made available in the website, having in mind all the relevant stakeholders.

Final words

We will return on the next issue with a fresh selection of sites. If you know of sites that are worthy of being presented, send us all relevant information to the following e-mail address: amartins@fe.up.pt. Any suggestions will be considered with great attention for possible publication. In that case the contributors names will be acknowledge in this column. Surf well.