7
NORDIC STORIES
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7 Nordic Stories

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Introduction

Everybody knows about the Nordic Passport Union. Most people have heard of the Nordic Council Literature Prize. More and more recognise the Swan ecolabel.

But what about the rest? What about all of those things that are integral parts of day-to-day life in the Nordic Region, which make lives easier and enrich our leisure time? Many of them are taken for granted, but they are actually the result of a unique partnership between five countries that has lasted no fewer than six decades so far.

Each of the seven stories that you are about to read, in its own way, makes Nordic co-operation tangible – for the reader, for the inquisitive individual and for all those who are already part of the Nordic project and work to make Nordic co-operation an even more dynamic element of everyday life in the Region.

We hope you will enjoy reading them.
WHAT ABOUT THE LITERATURE PRIZE THEN?

“BUT SURELY YOU KNOW ABOUT THE NORDIC COUNCIL LITERATURE PRIZE?”

TALK OF PASSPORT UNION, ECOLABELS AND THE CLOSE AFFINITY BETWEEN THE NORDIC COUNTRIES HAD NO DOUBT MADE SOME KIND OF AN IMPRESSION, BUT MICHAEL ANGELE OF THE GERMAN CULTURAL MAGAZINE DER FREITAG WASN’T EXACTLY NODDING EMPHATICALLY IN RECOGNITION.

The whole point of the interview had been to gauge recognition levels – how well is the Nordic Region recognised beyond its borders? It’s an encounter with an outsider, someone who has noticed the burgeoning Nordic profile and wants to know more. Something tangible.

Angele had listened with interest as the catalogue of Nordic co-operation’s political achievements was rattled off, but his eyes really lit up at this question:

“The Literature Prize? Oh yes, of course. Obviously,” he responds. “The prize money may not come close to the big European and American literature prizes. But what makes it so special is that five countries have opted to pour public spending on culture into a single prize. For an outsider this might be difficult to understand, but in its own way that very fact actually seems to enhance the popularity and literary credentials of the prize.”

There it was – the recognition and acknowledgement – when asked about
one of the brightest stars in the Nordic firmament, the Literature Prize. It has just turned 50. Most people – proudly Nordic or not – mention the prize as one of the things they associate with Nordic co-operation. Or, at the very least, it is something that springs to mind when talk turns to the Nordic Council and Nordic co-operation. But why, precisely, has this particular prize become such a prominent symbol for co-operation?

Perhaps it is precisely the combination of the tangible and the symbolic, of the political and the popular, that triggers recognition and speaks to people. To the individual and to the population of the Region as a whole. Something that really means something for the individual but also has a place in the bigger picture. The artistic and political picture.

Perhaps it is because the prize – the recognition – encapsulates it all. That which is so difficult: putting words, pictures or sounds to what it means to be a Nordic citizen. Or an artist in the Nordic Region.

The Danish author Naja Marie Aidt was awarded the prize in 2008 for her work *Bavian* (*Baboon*). In her acceptance speech, she put it like this:

“*Bavian* is about being a person in the Nordic Region, for good and ill. That’s why I’m so happy to receive the Nordic Council Literature Prize today. It is a great honour and an indescribable joy.”

At any rate, the Literature Prize literally recognises and acknowledges the artistic experience and the expression of Nordic self-understanding. So do the Film Prize and the Music Prize. And the fact that they are backed by the political will of five different countries was perhaps the very thing that the German journalist noted as something unique. And this political will has its roots in a major ambition shared by all five countries.

The actual policy goal behind
the Prize is to increase interest in the literature and languages of the neighbouring countries and in Nordic cultural affinity. That is how it was put in the founding charter half a century ago, and it still holds true. And there is no doubt that Nordic authors and the literati often describe the Prize as – next to the Nobel Prize – the greatest and most prestigious award to which a Nordic author can aspire. There is no doubt that journalists, opinion-makers and critics use the prize to really celebrate Nordic literature with gusto.

In his acceptance speech in 2011, the Icelandic author Gyrðir Elíasson was both proud and humbled:

“I don’t believe authors write in order to win prizes. Most seem to adhere, consciously or not, to Ralph Waldo Emerson’s maxim that ‘The reward of a thing well done is having done it’. And yet, I am delighted to accept this prize today. An author’s work is lonely.”

Politics or not, the prize – the recognition – is there. And it is given, accepted and seen. In the Nordic Region and beyond. By artists and all of the rest of us. And the act of giving generates a level of artistic and political attention that helps boost self-perception in the wider Nordic community.

FACTS

The Literature Prize is the highest accolade awarded for a work of fiction in the Nordic countries. First awarded in 1962, it is the oldest of the four prizes awarded by the Council.

The prize goes to a work of fiction in one of the Nordic languages – a novel, play, poem, short story or essay collection – that meets the highest literary and artistic standards. The objective is to generate interest in the languages and literature of the neighbouring countries and the wider Nordic cultural affinity.

Major figures such as Sofi Oksanen, Lars Saabye Christensen, Sjón, Naja Marie Aidt, Per Petterson and Kerstin Ekman have been awarded the prize, authors who subsequently won widespread international recognition and who have, by virtue of the specifically Nordic nature of their oeuvre, helped increase interest in literature from the Region.

The DKK 350,000 Literature Prize is handed over at a ceremony during the annual Session of the Nordic Council, as too are the prizes for music, film and environmental work.
AN INFECTIOUSLY FINE EXAMPLE

SOMEBEAND OUTSIDE BEIJING, A HEN WITH FLU INFECTS ITS OWNER, WHO SHAKES HANDS WITH A NORDIC JOURNALIST, WHO INFECTS HIS FELLOW PASSENGERS ON THE WAY HOME … MILD, SMALL-SCALE OUTBREAKS OF DISEASE GENERALLY ATTRACT LITTLE ATTENTION, BUT EVERY ONCE IN A WHILE A MORE SERIOUS EPIDEMIC BREAKS OUT. ADEQUATE CONTINGENCY PLANNING REQUIRES CO-OPERATION THAT TRANSCENDS SECTORS AND THE POLITICAL WILL TO LOOK AT THE PROBLEM HOLISTICALLY.

“...the Nordic Region constitutes a unique example of international co-operation to prevent and manage infectious diseases, both in terms of its ability to tackle issues collectively and the way in which the work is funded,” according to Henrik Wegener, Provost of the Technical University of Denmark.

“Investment cannot just be made once a problem arises,” he says. “Responsibility for human health is shared between the health ministries and the ministries for agriculture, the environment and food. The barriers between these organisations are lower in the Nordic Region than in many other parts of the world. As early as the 1990s, responsibility for health and the environment was made part of the remit of the ministries of agriculture.”

One world – one health
Wegener shows us around one of the laboratories at the Technical University of Denmark, where he was appointed Provost in November. Due to his solid background in food safety, he was a member of the expert group convened by the Nordic Council to examine Nordic efforts to date as well as opportunities to contribute to the global strategy One Health in the future. The One Health concept seeks to improve the health of people and animals in the environment in which they live. Cross-border work is the
The One Health concept recognises the connections between human and animal health and the environment in which they coexist. An international strategy bearing the same name applies a holistic approach to the understanding of the origins and spread of infectious diseases.

In 2011, the Nordic Council Citizens’ and Consumer Rights Committee set up a working group to gather the views of experts on the most important technical and policy issues relating to multi-resistance and One Health. The working group proposed priorities to the Danish EU Presidency.
“THE BIG ECONOMIC INTEREST GROUPS PRESENT A CHALLENGE BECAUSE HUGE AMOUNTS OF MONEY ARE INVOLVED IN BOTH MEDICINE AND ANIMAL PRODUCTION. MEDICINES ARE USED NOT ONLY TO COMBAT DISEASES, BUT ALSO TO MAKE PRODUCTION MORE EFFICIENT, WHICH IS A PROBLEM. IT IS UNACCEPTABLE FOR ANTIBIOTICS TO BE USED FOR PURPOSES OTHER THAN COMBATING DISEASE.”

Martin Kolberg (NO), Nordic Council Citizens’ and Consumer Rights Committee

“WE HAVE A CLEAR INTEREST, WHICH IS ALSO ECONOMIC, IN STOPPING THE SPREAD OF ANTIBIOTIC RESISTANCE AROUND THE WORLD. WE ARE FACING A GLOBAL PROBLEM AND SO, BASED ON SOUND NORDIC EXPERIENCE, WE ARE PUSHING ANTIBIOTIC RESISTANCE UP THE EU AGENDA DURING THE DANISH PRESIDENCY.”

Mette Gjerskov, Danish Minister for Food, Agriculture and Fisheries
The 64,000 inhabitants of Drammen, south-east of Oslo in Norway, are receiving more visitors than normal. The local authority in Østlandet is renowned for its fossil-free energy network, which includes Marienlyst School, the first school in Norway to be housed in a passive building, i.e. one built according to sustainability principles that minimise the use of energy.

“We get many visitors from home and abroad, and the school is one of our main attractions,” says Geir Andersen, technical director of Drammen Council.

All of these guests want to hear more about the technical solutions that enable the school to be virtually self-sustaining in terms of energy. In summer, the school actually acts as a supplier, as its underfloor pipes carry excess heat to the nearby Drammensbadet outdoor swimming pool – the largest of its kind in Norway.

Drammen was one of 14 local authorities nominated for the Nordic Energy Municipality award in 2011, but it was not the only one to attract international attention. Many of the 44 entrants report significant interest in their initiatives from other local authorities in the Nordic Region, as well as from local districts and companies in Europe and elsewhere.
Global leader
Albertslund, near Copenhagen, won the competition with its energy-efficient renovation project, known as the Albertslund Concept. This involved the renovation of existing buildings in the area – specifically, prefabricated buildings built between the 1960s and the 1980s. The aim was to develop and demonstrate standardised energy-renovation solutions.

The competition jury also praised the Drammen projects, which were awarded the runner-up prize, and the waste-treatment initiative in Lidköping, which was awarded a Special Mention.

“The Nordic countries prioritise green growth and we can be global leaders in this area,” said Finnish Prime Minister Jyrki Katainen, as he handed over the prize at the meeting of Nordic prime ministers in October last year in Copenhagen. “Green growth creates jobs, affects the environment in a positive way and provides fantastic competitive opportunities in the global market.”

The Nordic Energy Initiative is a collaborative effort between the Danish and Finnish presidencies of the Nordic Council of Ministers in 2010 and 2011, respectively. It was implemented by the Danish Energy Agency and Finland’s Ministry for Employment and the Economy.

“The Nordic countries are good at planning for the future and using local resources pragmatically to generate local growth,” says senior adviser Vivi Yieng Kow of the Danish Energy Agency, part of the Ministry of Climate, Energy and Building.

Nordic diversity
The jury, chaired by Marie Donnelly of the EU Commission, noted the breadth and diversity of Nordic resourcefulness – as Vivi Yieng Kow affirms.

“These local-authority projects represent a broad spectrum of creative solutions,” she says.

She also points out the wide variation within the Nordic countries: “In Denmark alone, there are marked differences between, say, the west coast of Jutland and the island of Bornholm. Different local areas have access to different resources. Yet they also have a great deal in common. To a large extent, we all have the same approach to solving problems, and we are good at working together.”

She notes that the Nordic countries have produced a wide range of ideas and projects for the use of local resources or for making greater use of rail transport, as in the Gothenburg project.

“Examples abound, and taken together they form a catalogue that provides inspiration and motivation for new projects elsewhere, which will benefit the climate and local job creation. In fact, the results have been so positive that we are already working on the next round,” concludes the senior adviser.

World tour
Some of the local authorities’ energy and climate solutions were presented to a global audience at the UN Climate Change Conference (COP17) in Durban, South Africa, in November last year, at the Danish Architecture Centre’s exhibition Nordic Climate and Energy Solutions/Sharing Nordic Solutions.

One of the aims of the exhibition was to present the Nordic Region as a single entity working consciously towards the countries’ common goals of freeing themselves from fossil fuels, reducing CO2 emissions and creating growth through green technological innovation.

“There was a great deal of interest from many agencies during COP17. We are using the exhibition to collate experience for broader marketing initiatives,” says Vivi Yieng Kow.

She also points out that the idea is for the solutions and experiences gained from this year’s projects to be made available to others, in the Nordic Region and beyond:

“It is all about reaching companies, public bodies and groups that are interested in sustainable solutions.”
NEW NORDIC FOOD – Food Diplomacy

THE FOOD MINISTERS ADOPTED THE AARHUS DECLARATION ON NEW NORDIC FOOD IN 2005. THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS HAS HELPED TURN NEW NORDIC FOOD INTO A HUGE SUCCESS VIA A NUMBER OF INITIATIVES AT HOME AND ABROAD. THE LATEST EXAMPLE IS FOOD DIPLOMACY – FOOD AS AN EXPRESSION OF NORDIC CULTURE, NATURE AND SOCIETY.

Ambassadors will now be able to lead the way in promoting New Nordic Food, and use food to raise the profile of their countries.

Nordic Food Diplomacy is the title of a new concept that uses food to promote Nordic values. The Council of Ministers would like food to be seen as an integral part of the Nordic image, on a par with music, visual art, design and the performing arts.

Theme dinners
Charlotta Ranert, project manager at the New Nordic Food Secretariat, is responsible for helping, supporting, inspiring and guiding diplomats in the use of food. Part of her remit is to publish an online toolbox.

“The toolbox will have an A–Z guide so that any of our diplomats will be able to run food-based events,” she says. “It will cover everything from invitations and preparations to advice about raw ingredients and how to serve the food, and well as suggestions for theme dinners based on New Nordic Food, e.g. on the theme of Selma Lagerlöf or Hans Christian Andersen. It will also include recipes and suggestions for using national, regional, local and seasonal raw ingredients.”

“The challenge is to come up with useful tools and innovative concepts...
for the foreign services, diplomats and the export councils. Later, we also hope to involve other institutions and companies that work with Nordic food abroad,” she continues.

**Nordic food in Cannes**
The project, which was launched in autumn 2011, is provisionally scheduled to run until the end of 2012. A reference group has been set up, consisting of chefs and food celebrities, and interviews are being conducted with chefs and embassy staff to collate information about needs and potential. Hopefully, these interviews will also generate ideas for new items in Nordic Food Diplomacy’s online toolbox.

Two pilot projects have also been launched. A joint event will be held along with the Nordic Game Program at the Game Developers’ Conference in San Francisco in spring 2012. The idea is to develop “New Nordic Computer Food” – suitable for busy gamers at their desks. In a similar vein, the Council of Ministers incorporated New Nordic Food into Climate Day by asking children and young people to invent healthy snacks.

As part of the preparations for the San Francisco event, a competition was launched at Nordic Game Jam to develop a computer game on the theme of Nordic food.

The other pilot project is being run in collaboration with the Nordic Film & TV Fund, and will culminate at the Cannes Film Festival in May 2012.

**Simple and ethical**
All of the projects focus on the pure, fresh, simple and ethical nature of Nordic food. This reflects the fact that the New Nordic Food concept is based on a number of core values, e.g. sustainable lifestyles, respect for nature and natural resources, ethical treatment of animals, efficient use of resources, and good working and employment conditions.

Following on from these ideals, Ranert stresses that diplomats should resist the temptation to involve Nordic food in absolutely every event. There is no reason to fly or sail raw ingredients to the ends of the Earth. Localism is another important principle in New Nordic Food and it should be possible to source ingredients locally.

“Food Diplomacy can be used to tell a story, to communicate a message through Nordic food and its unique values,” she says. “In fact, it can be used in conjunction with all kinds of Nordic meetings, at business dinners and exhibitions, at cultural and other events, and in export drives. It can also be used within the Region. Food Diplomacy makes the meal a conscious, visible and integrated part of the event, enhancing the experience and highlighting the theme.”

### FACTS

**Nordic Food Diplomacy: recommendations**

- Food and meals served at meetings within the Nordic Region should, as far as possible, reflect the season and area in which the meeting is held, as well as the other values that underpin the concept of New Nordic Food.
- Food and meals served at international events should convey something about the Nordic Region.
- Raw ingredients for all meals should be produced according to sustainable principles.
- Food and meals should be inspired by traditional Nordic food culture, but also by new opportunities and an innovative mindset.
- Food and meals should be developed in collaboration with the cultural sector.
- Food and meals served at all Nordic meetings and events should be wholesome, healthy and nutritious. The values associated with the food, and the concepts that inspired it, should be communicated clearly to all of the participants in the event.
What are the target groups for Nordic Food Diplomacy?

- Embassies and consulates
- Trade organisations
- Export promotion bodies
- Individual companies
- Tourism organisations
- Local authorities
- Nordic bodies

Read more about Nordic Food Diplomacy at www.nynordiskmad.org/en/themes/public-food-diplomacy
Contact: Project Manager Charlotta Ranert, charlotta@charlottaranert.se
RESEARCH EXCHANGES IN THE NAME OF DEMOCRACY

NETWORKING AND KNOWLEDGE-SHARING BETWEEN BELARUSIAN AND EUROPEAN RESEARCHERS ARE IMPORTANT ELEMENTS OF THE DEMOCRATISATION PROCESS IN BELARUS. THE NORDIC NGO PROGRAMME FACILITATES THE PROCESS.

The Nordic Council of Ministers’ NGO programme brings young Belarusian researchers into contact with groups of experts from abroad. In 2011, the project Enhancing Research Centres’ Activities in Belarus provided ten young researchers with the opportunity to work as interns elsewhere in Europe.

The general objective was to encourage co-operation between groups of Belarusian experts and their peers abroad, and to bring Belarus into the independent European academic fold, particularly in the field of political science.

Highlighting the situation in Belarus

Ahniya Asanovich was one of the young Belarusian interns abroad in 2011. Working at the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI) let her integrate into a network of researchers and political analysts.

“I saw knowledge being applied in practice, and learned to be flexible and respond to academic challenges. I also improved my organisational skills by participating in conferences and panel debates organised by NUPI, at which I was able to make use of my knowledge..."
of the situation in Belarus in an effective manner,” says Ahniya Asanovich.

Asanovich previously studied at the Belarusian university in exile, the European Humanities University, which also enjoys the support of the Nordic Council of Ministers.

As far as NUPI is concerned, the exchange programme added to its networking activities.

“When we take part in programmes like this, we are thinking long-term,” says Helge Blakkisrud, NUPI’s Head of Department of Russian and Eurasian Studies.

The democratisation process

Providing a boost to research in Belarus is also key to the future of the democratisation process in the country.

“Expert groups and the research community help generate an alternative, independent discourse on political affairs. They formulate alternative ideas on governance, development and the future of Belarus, paving the way for the unavoidable reforms of the future,” says Justinas Pimpe, head of the Eastern Europe Studies Centre (EESC). EESC is a Lithuanian NGO that works to build up civil society and strengthen democracy in Eastern Europe.

The project has already produced positive results. It has not only enhanced the skills and knowledge of young Belarusian researchers, but by encouraging the establishment of expert groups, it has also helped to bring together the Belarusian research community in a more formal manner.

Incubating new initiatives

The project has also paved the way for other initiatives in the area. Based on the experiences gained during the current project, the EESC is now engaged in designing new initiatives to boost democracy and research in Belarus.

“Our experience of best practice will inform the new projects. We will focus in particular on young, up-and-coming Belarusian researchers by providing them with methodological, financial and other support so that they will be able to design and run high-quality research programmes and present them to their peers abroad,” Pimpe explains.

Enhancing Research Centres’ Activities in Belarus was developed and implemented within the framework of the Eastern Europe Studies Centre (EESC).
28 NORDIC STORIES
SINCE 2007, A UNIQUE NORDIC PARTNERSHIP HAS TAKEN THE LEAD IN COMBATING TAX EVASION. AGREEMENT AFTER AGREEMENT HAS BEEN SIGNED WITH OFFSHORE TAX CENTRES, PAVING THE WAY FOR EXCHANGES OF INFORMATION REGARDING MONEY THAT RIGHTFULLY BELONGS TO THE PEOPLE OF THE NORDIC REGION. BILLIONS HAVE BEEN RECOVERED AS A RESULT. THE PARTNERSHIP IS ALSO HELPING TO TURN A GLOBAL PROBLEM INTO A GLOBAL SUCCESS.

EVERY YEAR, TAX EVASION ROBS INDUSTRIALISED AND DEVELOPING NATIONS ALIKE OF BILLIONS IN INCOME. A HANDFUL OF UNSCRUPULOUS COMPANIES AND INDIVIDUALS ILLEGALLY WITHHOLD REVENUE THAT THE REST OF SOCIETY NEEDS BY CONCEALING INCOME AND ASSETS IN OFFSHORE TAX CENTRES. THE MONEY IS NEEDED TO IMPROVE THE BALANCE OF PAYMENTS, PAY FOR WELFARE PROVISION, MAKE COUNTRIES MORE COMPETITIVE IN THE GLOBAL ECONOMY AND PROMOTE INTERNATIONAL FREE TRADE. IT COULD BE SPENT COUNTERACTING THE NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE AND – NOT LEAST – HELPING THE DEVELOPING NATIONS OF THE WORLD TO BUILD UP THEIR NATIONAL ECONOMIES.

“INTERNATIONALLY, THE NORDIC REGION IS OFTEN REGARDED AS A MODEL WHEN IT COMES TO NEGOTIATING INFORMATION-EXCHANGE AGREEMENTS,” SAYS TORSTEN FENSBY, THE NORDIC COUNCIL OF MINISTERS’ PROJECT MANAGER, WHO HAS TRAVELLED THE WORLD TO PROMOTE DIALOGUE AND PAVE THE WAY FOR NEW AGREEMENTS. “THIS PUTS THE REGION AT THE FOREFRONT OF EFFORTS TO COMBAT TAX EVASION. OUR GOAL IS TO CONCLUDE AGREEMENTS WITH ALL OF THE STATES THAT HAVE BANKING SECRECY ARRANGEMENTS AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.”

ALTHOUGH THE CURRENT ROUND OF NEGOTIATIONS IS DUE TO END IN SUMMER 2012, THE VARIOUS NATIONAL AUTHORITIES WILL CONTINUE TO WORK TOGETHER. A TOTAL OF APPROX-
approximately 40 agreements is expected. Several of the informationexchange agreements have come into force since the first one was signed in 2007. They facilitate insight into the banking records of other countries, in cases where criminal activity is suspected, to see who has been withholding Nordic tax revenue for personal gain.

The tax authorities have not been slow in making use of this unique new opportunity, and the agreements have made an immediate impact. Not only have people been forced to pay both tax and penalties, but billions have been brought in by individuals voluntarily changing their tax status. The authorities predict that the sums involved will increase in the future. They also report indirect effects, e.g. the net inflow of payments from certain countries has increased in recent years. The agreements also have a preventative effect, so fewer people are likely to withhold tax in future.

Global pressure needed – the Nordic Region shows the way

In 2009, the G20 countries adopted tough measures to stop tax evasion and have been exerting pressure on offshore tax centres to agree to a minimum of 12 information-exchange agreements each. The main beneficiaries have been rich countries with strong negotiating positions. However, the move also provided a boost to the Nordic project because it enables offshore tax centres to negotiate seven agreements at the same time. The general consensus is that only global action will put an end to tax evasion, improve transparency and lead to collaboration on tax issues.

“Of course, we welcome the G20 initiative, but global pressure needs to be clearer and stronger if all countries, including developing nations, are to be accorded the same opportunity to combat international tax evasion effectively,” says Halldór Ásgrímsson, Secretary General of the Nordic Council of Ministers. “Only global pressure will turn this global problem into a global success.”
The world economic crisis has sown seeds of doubt about the credibility of many of the traditional financial institutions, and confidence in the capital markets has been severely shaken. The Secretary General believes that more countries need to be involved in the campaign to combat tax evasion.

“More countries need to raise their voices against the kind of outdated systems and structures that make international tax evasion possible,” says Ásgrimsson. “They need to demand greater openness and transparency – and, in particular, they need to call for an end to banking secrecy. That would establish a good basis for rebuilding confidence in the financial system.”

According to the Secretary General, the measures adopted by the G20 are a step in the right direction but do not go far enough. The countries represented around the G20 table need to show leadership by cracking down harder on global tax evasion so that the process benefits not only a handful of rich nations, but all countries – rich or poor – all over the world.

The Nordic Region has made up its mind. It is time to consign tax evasion to the history books.
JOINT INITIATIVES TO PROMOTE GREEN GROWTH ARE A TOP PRIORITY FOR THE NORDIC PRIME MINISTERS. ONE OF THEIR OBJECTIVES IS TO PROVIDE SUPPORT FOR GREEN DEVELOPMENT IN THE WORLD’S POOREST COUNTRIES, E.G. BY FUNDING DEVELOPMENT-AID PROGRAMMES, SUCH AS THE NORDIC CLIMATE FACILITY, THAT ARE BASED ON CLIMATE-CHANGE INITIATIVES AND THE ENVIRONMENT.

In November 2011, the prime ministers launched their vision “The Nordic Region: Leading the way in green growth”. The objective is to work more closely together on topics such as energy efficiency, sustainable energy, environmental awareness and research and innovation in general.

One element of the joint vision is to “promote the integration of environmental and climate-change considerations into development work”. A prime example is the Nordic Climate Facility (NCF), a joint venture involving the Nordic Development Fund (NDF) and the Nordic Environment Finance Corporation (NEFCO).

NCF funds innovative development projects that deploy Nordic technology, knowledge and ideas to combat climate change in the poorest developing countries.

“Partnership with the Nordic Development Fund on the Climate Facility has made it possible to support a whole range of innovative climate-change projects in the developing world,” says Magnus Rystedt, managing director of NEFCO.

NCF invites project proposals once a year. To date, 22 projects have been selected: 14 in the first round and, provisionally, eight in the second round (final decisions have yet to be made). The deadline for the third round of submissions was in mid-January 2012.

The response in the Nordic Region has been overwhelming. The themes for the first round were energy efficiency and water resources, and some of the projects have already led to positive outcomes, e.g. promoting local adaptation to climate change and reducing greenhouse-gas emissions.

The first call generated 138 proposals, of which 33 made it to the second round and 14 were selected for project funding worth a total of €5.5 million.

“The unique feature of the Nordic Climate Facility is that it manages to bring Nordic expertise on development aid and the environment together under the same umbrella,” says NCF managing director Helge Semb. “We hope this will facilitate the transfer of environmental technology..."
Nordic Climate Facility (NCF) is a Nordic climate initiative for the developing world. NCF funds innovative projects designed to alleviate the impact of climate change in low-income countries. NCF is funded by the Nordic Development Fund and run by the NDF in partnership with the Nordic Environment Finance Corporation (NEFCO).

The Nordic Development Fund (NDF) was set up in 1989 as part of Nordic co-operation on development aid. All five Nordic countries are members of the fund. NDF’s main activity is to support projects via co-funding with the World Bank, regional development banks (ADB, IDB and AfDB), Nordic funding bodies and the five Nordic development-aid organisations. The NDF budget for funding climate-change initiatives is €30–35 million a year. For more details, visit: www.ndf.fi

The Nordic Environment Finance Corporation (NEFCO) is an international funding body owned by the five Nordic countries under the auspices of the Nordic Council of Ministers. NEFCO mainly funds projects in Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and the Baltic states, as well as climate-change projects in developing countries that have environmental benefits for the Nordic Region. NEFCO’s budget for climate-related projects is around €100 million a year. For more information, visit: www.nefco.org.