

CASE STUDY TITLE: ASTER: ENERGY BILL RELIEF VIA SOLAR POWER

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THEME: RENEWABLE ENERGY AND SUSTAINABLE HOUSING

Case study description:

Thousands of social housing units in the Belgian region of Flanders are set to receive much-needed energy bill relief through the installation of solar panels on their rooftops.

The project, to be carried out by a cooperative company called Aster, will see over €150 million spent on 400,000 solar panels for low-income households in Flanders.

With many people staring down an energy crisis this winter, the plans could not come at a better time. “We are definitely in an energy crisis and people are afraid. They don't know whether they will have the means to pay for the heating this winter. They don't know whether they will be able to put on the lights when their children have to do their homework this winter. So as a social housing sector, we must absolutely do something about it,” says Sven Van Elst, Aster General manager.

Tenants will soon benefit from lower electricity bills, due to the fact that they will be generating their own green energy from the sun.

“When our social tenants need energy and they start using energy when the sun is shining, they will benefit from it because the Flemish government will decide on the tariffs they have to pay for this solar energy, but they are assured that these tariffs will always be lower than the social tariffs and the commercial tariffs,” Van Elst added.

“And on the other hand, there is, of course, also an ecological impact when we produce energy, green solar energy, all people will benefit from it.”

With the help of the European Investment Bank, Aster, which is made up of 62 Flemish cooperative companies, aims to provide up to 50,000 social housing units in Flanders with their own solar panels, in what will be the largest solar panel project in the region.

In the town of Temse, where the project has already started, one tenant expressed that he is concerned by the energy crisis, but that the solar panels are expected, to some degree, to help alleviate financial difficulties related to bills.

But Adel El Gammal, secretary-general of the European Energy Research Alliance (EERA) in Brussels, says that more needs to be invested in renewable energy projects if the EU is to meet its target of reducing carbon emissions by 55% by 2030.

“We have decreased investment in fossil fuel infrastructure over the last year, which was a very good thing for the transition. But on the other hand, we didn't invest to the level expected to speed up the deployment of renewables at least fast enough,” says El Gammal.

He added, however, that while the war in Ukraine has resulted in renewable projects speeding up, it is also seeing the use of carbon-emitting fossil fuels increase.

Environmental and/or social effects:

The following factors constitute important environmental and social effects in relation to this case:

- Low-income households and energy crisis
- Sustainable housing and energy-efficient design
- Solar panels and renewable energy
- Climate change and carbon-emitting fossil fuels



Discussion questions:

What is the problematic situation Aster is trying to solve? (problem)

Why did they decide to solve it? What drives them? (purpose)

What are Aster’s activities? What do they do to solve it/them? What other steps would you take to solve the problem? (solution)

What is their target group? Who are their clients? Who are their customers? (customer segments)

How will Aster’s activities change the world or the situation for the better? (impact)

And how will they know that they achieved that? (key metrics)

So what does Aster do differently? What do their customers perceive as the biggest value? (unique value proposition)

In which ways do they deliver their products or services (channels)

What are their main costs and what is the main source of their revenue? (revenue)

STAKEHOLDERS: (1) LOW-INCOME HOUSEHOLDS, (2) SOCIAL TENANTS, (3) FLEMISH (ENERGY) COOPERATIVES, (4) BANKS, (5) GOVERNMENTS

ETHICAL ISSUES (POSITIVE, NEGATIVE) IN RELATION TO THE SCENARIO: (1) SUSTAINABLE HOUSING, (2) RENEWABLE ENERGY, (3) SOCIAL HOUSING, (4) INEQUALITY, (5) CLIMATE CHANGE

GREEN SKILLS ADDRESSED: DESIGN SKILLS, LEADERSHIP SKILLS, MANAGEMENT SKILLS, CITY PLANNING SKILLS, LANDSCAPING SKILLS, ENERGY SKILLS, FINANCIAL SKILLS, PROCUREMENT SKILLS, WASTE MANAGEMENT SKILLS, COMMUNICATION SKILLS

SDGS ADDRESSED: GOAL 1: NO POVERTY, GOAL 7: AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY, GOAL 9: INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE, GOAL 10: REDUCED INEQUALITIES, GOAL 11: SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES, GOAL 13: CLIMATE ACTION