



**2** COP delegates prefer cars

**4** African woman ministers to meet

**5** Triple trouble for oceans

**6** Expo in images

## Electric cars impress all at COP17 expo

By Thobile Hans

Not so long ago, the idea of having a 100% electric vehicle running on South African roads was inconceivable, but believe it or not, this week Durban streets have seen at least ten Nissan Leaf sedan cars transporting delegates back and forth between hotels and the International Convention Centre for the COP 17 conference.

The electrically powered cars are not yet available on the local market, so South Africans will have to wait for some two years to buy these vehicles while negotiations between the Nissan company and government are underway. Negotiations will cover, among other issues, a period for the setting up of appropriate recharging infrastructures and mobility services.

François Crisias who is in Durban to promote Nissan and Renault cars says, "We are currently in talks with government on incentives that could possibly be introduced to aid the Leaf's roll-out in South Africa, such as lower import duties, or lower company tax on electric vehicles."

He adds, "...the plan is to introduce these cars in South Africa by 2013. The first sale of the Leaf was in San Francisco in December last year and just more than 20 000 units have been sold in Japan, US and Europe. Our next move is to reach out to Australia, South Africa and South America." The target is to sell more than

200 000 all over the world.

### Two ways of charging

"We're here to demonstrate that zero-emission vehicles are a real and affordable solution for reducing CO2 emissions," says Mia Nelson Nielsen, of the Renault-Nissan Alliance. "These cars are also extremely easy to use and extremely easy to recharge. In fact, with an EV you will never need to go to a gasoline (petrol/diesel) station ever again. You can simply recharge from the comfort of your home."

Crisias adds that all Nissan dealers would provide a free charging service on their premises, but elsewhere it would be the decision of the owner. It will nevertheless be eight times cheaper than normal fuel (petrol and diesel). For example in Ireland and Portugal the service is freely provided by the government, so that is what we would negotiate with South Africa. But if that fails, the costs will be far less.

There another dedicated public infrastructure called quick charging service that could be found in supermarkets, restaurants or normal filling stations. This service will take for thirty minutes to recharge the car at least 90%. This service will be applicable to all other electric vehicles.

### The cost...

According to Crisias, Nissan Leaf is 20% more expensive than a conventional car but negotiations with the government to



*South Africa's Deputy Energy Minister Barbara Thompson admiring a new electric vehicle at the COP17 Expo. Pic: Steven Lang*

provide incentives could reduce the price considerably. This means that the South African government may have to incentivise the use of zero emission electric vehicles, similar to what has been the case in other parts of the world. In California, for example, electric vehicles receive an incentive of between \$7 000 to \$8 000 per car, as they are still much more expensive than a standard petrol or diesel vehicle of comparable size.

### What's the difference?

The Leaf doesn't have the range of a conventional car, it doesn't have the top speed, it costs more and it takes forever to refuel, assuming you have a place to

refuel it. The advantage is that electricity costs less than gasoline. Most important, Nissan and the entire automobile world will learn how e-cars operate in the real world.

Equipped with a 340 volt battery pack and a 107 horsepower electric power drive motor, the five seat Leaf hatchback has an estimated range of 160 kilometres, though this will vary with weather, terrain, driving style and how much you carry in passengers and cargo.

Nissan has three other electric vehicles in the pipeline. These vehicles will reduce noise our roads and they are 100% carbon monoxide free. What more can you ask for?

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**2 December 2011**

**09:00**

International Forum on climate change communication, this panel event looks at how Chinese government develops climate change communication.

**09:30**

Green building in China: the policies and actions to address climate change in China's construction sector.

**13:00**

What's new in financing climate change: global figures and concrete innovations?

**15:30**

Kyoto Protocol – past and future emissions

# OPINION

## Difference in a day at COP17

By Sam Schramki

In the middle of the self-styled “Occupy Durban” space adjacent to the hubbub of one of the most important meetings on the international calendar, a group of activists toyi-toyi and speechify, airing their grievances. There are at most 40 of them, from countries as far away as Peru, and neighborhoods as close as the KwaMashu township. Meanwhile men and women in expensive tailored suits with light-blue lanyards walk by in droves, bothered more by the sweltering KZN heat than anything the protesters can muster. “Keep the coal in the hole and the oil in the soil!” they shout, yielding a few smirks.

The 17th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Durban (COP17), was predicted by many to be divisive from the start. From whether or not the key international treaty on climate change is to be renewed, to the need for international financing for poor countries to adapt to the predicted natural disasters and food shortages to come, to the way countries will value trees and forests, the event in South Africa’s “warmest place to be” has not quite lived up to the amiability the city’s official slogan imparts.

But while recent COPs received more hype in many respects, from the star-studded delegations that met in Copenhagen in a failed attempt to cap greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions (COP15) to last year’s meeting in Cancun that green-lighted the way the UN would deal with the carbon contained in the world’s most imperiled forests (COP16), the 17th version is not inconsequential. It is just that the outcome seems more certain on the biggest issue of the day: to renew or not renew the signature treaty of climate change negotiations over the past couple of decades, known as the Kyoto Protocol.

The feeling of fait accompli is felt by many in attendance.

“We are not part of the discussion. The

way that COP works, civil society does not have a shared role,” asserted Anabella Roseberg, Policy Adviser for the International Trade Union Confederation. “The non-official parties, most of the rest of the world, are at a structural disadvantage and process disadvantage—we are marginalised.”

The requirements of Kyoto, set to expire next year, set binding targets for 37 developed countries and the European Union (EU) to cut their emissions by an average of five percent (using 1990 figures) during the 2008-2012 periods. When asked about the prospects for an extension, even the most optimistic members of the environmental movement tend to be glum.

“Things do not look good right now; no good solutions [for climate change]. The big polluters just simply aren’t coming up with anything comprehensive,” noted environmental author and journalist Bill McKibben told an audience of young environmental activists at the counter-conference hosted at the University of KwaZulu Natal.

In recent days the official negotiations have seen a schism forming between the EU and developing countries, like South Africa, that have normally counted on the group of nations to act as a counterweight to the United States, the world’s largest per-capita GHG emitter. If the Europeans are too hardline in their demands for international legislation, Kyoto’s successor could be imperiled earlier in the conference than previously thought. Meanwhile, the negotiator for arguably the most powerful developing country in the world, China, has called the European position “untenable.”

Nevertheless, while COP17 may seem like an impossible mire at the international level, some regional delegates and exhibitors in the splashy show halls see reason for hope, even if the different parties are not able to hash out an agreement. In the local government tent, Khanyiso Wonci, a manager in the environmental unit of the Eastern Cape’s Amathole District Municipality, expects good things to come from the strong showing of policy and opinion-makers in his surroundings.

“All these councilors, these ministers and others who are around us, they are getting the word that we need to address climate change. At the local level—the grassroots is where we’re going to change things. That is where we see good things now.”



## Our inner African rhythm

By Mike Loewe

The Drum Cafe is getting hundreds of Durbanites to find their inner African rhythm. Funded by eThekweni Municipality, the drumming group hands out 100 drums to interested beachgoers who sit in a stand looking down on drummers who led them in building up a mass of unified beats. The group runs three or four sessions a day, and all the drums find eager hands. The sound is tremendous and exciting – all of it aimed at getting across the green message on large UNFCCC boards mounted around the space, and an exhibition of school and professional art mounted in a unique public gallery nearby. Pic: Mike Loewe

## Climate change delegates prefer cars

By Mike Loewe

Lots of capacity, little enthusiasm ... The promised free ride on South Africa’s national bike, Shova Kalula, did not have a big take-up from COP17 delegates today. This was the Bike Park at lunchtime – full of the brand new bicycles. One reason is that taking the bike for the day requires a credit card deposit of R500, which is paid back, also electronically, when the bike is returned. People have come offering cash, but this is not how the system works. Other reasons are that delegates actually prefer to use conference transport, mainly smart, air-conditioned kombis, and with temperatures ranging from muggy to sweltering, this also makes sense. Another reason is that Durban traffic is intense and you need to have your helmet firmly attached to your noggin if you want to take it on. On the positive side, the route from the beachfront to COP17 is paved with cycling lanes which are spacious and safe.



# Children feeling the heat, says Plan

By Wisdom Mdzungairi

Climate change is a development challenge in Africa and is the biggest global health threat to children in the 21st century, Africa-based non-governmental organisations have said.

Regis Nyamakanga, who is the Head of Regional Communications (Eastern and Southern Africa) of child development agency, Plan, said no-one will be immune to the effects of climate change. He pointed out however, that children under the age of five will be one of the most seriously affected groups. "Today, most child deaths occur in the world's poorest countries and communities. Children are dying from a small number of preventable and treatable diseases and conditions, including diarrhoea, malaria and malnutrition. An estimated one third of the entire global childhood disease burden is attributable to changeable factors in food, soil, water and air," Nyamakanga said.

"Because the effects of climate change on children are so significant, national governments and the international community must work together to chart a way forward. First, the effects of climate change on children need to be documented and recognised. Finally, as it is still possible to avoid the worst predictions of climate change, governments must commit to a bold and binding international agreement to reduce greenhouse gas emissions during COP 17."

In an interview with Reporting Development Network Africa, Nyamakanga said his organisation is particularly concerned about the impact of climate change on girls. "Plan argues that governments must support girls to better understand the specific hazards and risks they face, and ways of managing them. Investing in children's education, including about how to adapt to climate change, is a cost-effective form of climate insurance. Focus on equal access to and more gender-responsive education for girls and boys to address underlying negative gender norms head on," he added.

"Girls as well as boys can offer astute, unbiased observations about underlying drivers of vulnerability and should have greater opportunity to share their views and have these acted upon, in planning, implementation and monitoring."

He said decision makers at the COP17 meetings should prioritise children's best interests and deliver a fair, ambitious, binding and effective climate change global

agreement, by:

- Committing to short-term reduction goals on green house gas emissions as well as long-term goals by 2020 and 2050, in line with latest scientific research;
- Increasing funds committed to adaptation in countries at risk, with adaptation funds to be controlled by countries most at risk and
- Ensuring that National Adaptation Programmes of Action and other international, regional and national strategic plans on climate change both protect and involve children.
- Parties should also acknowledge children as official stakeholders, providing formal mechanisms for children to join the dialogue and contribute to decision making on climate change.

"Governments should ensure full accountability for commitments made on mitigation and adaptation by developing monitoring and evaluation mechanisms which provide for the contribution of children's views, encourage civil society organisations engaged in climate change to establish formal mechanisms for children's participation and emphasise the significance of children – in terms of differentiated impacts and children's 'agency' – within the 5th IPCC Assessment Report," Nyamakanga said.

Save the Children also recommended that donors and parties should strengthen and 'climate proof' health, water and sanitation systems in developing countries with high levels of child mortality.

"Adaptation to climate change should involve children and support interventions that have been proven to respond to their needs and priorities. Children have the right to participate in decisions that affect their lives, and as such, adaptation planning, particularly national adaptation programmes of action (NAPAs), must involve children in identifying appropriate interventions," the NGO said.

UNICEF UK Climate Change Policy Officer Jazmin Burgess said: "The Durban climate talks present an opportunity for world leaders to come together to work towards an agreement that will safeguard children's futures from climate impacts."

Plan has partnered UNICEF and Save the Children Fund (UK) to advocate for children's rights and climate change.

UNICEF UK has also campaigned for children in 2011 with its 'Get Children Climate Ready campaign'.



Dipuo Peters, minister of Energy Affairs. Pic: Steven Lang

## African women ministers to meet at COP17

By Rebecca Quaioco

African women ministers will meet on the sides of the on-going COP17 in Durban on December 6, 2011 in order to adopt a position to be presented to the COP17. The meeting will help harmonise the outcomes of three earlier meetings held at various fora so that the women leaders can present a common front with respect to the outcomes of COP17.

They aim to ensure that decisions taken at the meetings are gender sensitive, and they will make a special effort to ensure that women can benefit from the yet to be established Green Climate Fund.

The meeting will harmonise recommendations made at the meeting of Southern African Development Community Ministers responsible for Gender and Women Affairs held in Namibia in June and the African Union Ministers of Gender meeting held in Addis Ababa held in November, 2011.

South African Minister for Women, Children and People with Disabilities, Lulu Xingwana, said in an interview with reporting Development Network Africa that the caucus meeting will produce recommendations which will ensure that women, children and people with disabilities have access to the fund to secure

their livelihoods.

She said if the fund does not take gender into account, 33 million women farmers on the continent will suffer as a result of crop failures brought about by climate change. "Women are already victims of flood, famine, natural and other man-made disasters..." therefore if the fund is not instituted and made accessible to the least developed countries, the lives of women will be further jeopardised.

Deputy Minister of Environmental Affairs of South Africa, Rejoice Mabudafhasi, added her voice to the cause saying that women need to be empowered to be able to adapt to climate change. She said women need to be given skills training that help sustain them in the face of environmental degradation.

Mabudafhasi said when the Green Climate Fund is established it will go a long way towards empowering women through the use of renewable energy technologies such as solar energy. She cited the example of rural women who will be able to use solar energy to cook and light their homes.

She said, "Women need to be part of the negotiations. We should be in the majority as the issue of climate change affects us most."

# Triple trouble as oceans warm

By Thobile Hans

As huge amounts of financial investments are put into mitigating the effects of climate change on forests and renewable energy projects, marine scientists feel the oceans are being neglected by governments and policymakers.

As much as the land is affected by the climate change conditions, oceans are affected by acidification, warming and deoxygenation which are all detrimental to the marine ecosystem. Climate change influences oxygen levels in the oceans with a particularly harsh effect on the warmer waters as higher temperatures reduce oxygen solubility. Ocean acidification and nutrient run-off from streams and rivers can contribute to deoxygenation. These effects combine resulting in interconnected triple trouble for the oceans.

Dr Anthony Ribbink, CEO of Sustainable Ocean Trust in South Africa, and programme manager for the South African Institute for Aquatic Biodiversity, provides a human analogy where the world has two lungs – forests and oceans.

Ribbink says at the UNFCCC COP 16 in Cancun, billions of dollars were pledged to restore, develop and maintain forests. “This is welcomed as forests play such a critical role in maintaining the atmosphere and accommodating a stunning diversity of species. The focus of COP 16,

therefore, was on one lung of the globe (the forests).”

The ocean covers nearly three quarters of the Earth’s surface, contains 96% of its living space, provides around half of the oxygen we breathe and is increasingly becoming a source of protein for a rapidly growing world population. In spite of this, the ocean is largely sidelined in international climate change discussions such as the current COP 17 conference in Durban, says Plymouth Marine Laboratory’s Dr Carol Turley, who is one of the delegates at the conference.

“But what is less known is that oceans and seas form a major component of the earth system that supports all life in the planet. Our oceans and seas are the natural restorers of a balance that guarantees life,” she adds.

Turley explains, “I am here to take the message to stakeholders and policymakers from a diverse group of organisations including, international science partnerships, oceanographic institutions and an NGO. Often forgotten in such discussions are oceans and the enormous and diverse source it provides, including flood and other resources even half the oxygen we breathe.”

“The health of the ocean is therefore relevant to every one of us on planet Earth and we are concerned about how these three stressors – ocean warming, acidification and deoxygenation – produce a very worrying combination which threatens the ocean and everything it provides us. We have produced

a short ocean stress guide that sums up in clear language. We would urge everyone to read it.”

While ocean acidification has recently been recognised as a high research priority topic leading to a growth of studies, deoxygenation has not reached that level of recognition. The study of warming is more mature but research at the level of ocean ecosystems and bio-geochemistry requires more attention.

Professor Bob Watson, chief scientist for the United Kingdom’s Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), echoed the need for the acceptance of these issues and the potential impacts of them working together.

He says, “The ocean is an incredible source of food and an amazing source of biodiversity. Now we see these irreplaceable resources facing not one but three stressors potentially acting together in ways that we are only just beginning to investigate and understand.

“Highlighting this unholy alliance is essential if stakeholders and governments are to make decisions that will affect everyone on this planet.”

## Addressing poverty in Ghana with solar energy

By Rebecca Quaioco

Ghana generates most of its electricity from hydro and thermal sources. It depends on two hydroelectric power plants and two thermal power plants to generate its electricity supply. Although the West African country has the potential to generate electricity from renewable sources such as solar, wind, biomass and small hydro, these sources are not exploited to any significant degree.

The unreliable nature of the power grid in Ghana means that the country suffers frequent power outages and surges that have provoked those who can afford it to search for other means of keeping themselves turned on.

Over the years, individual companies have introduced energy sources utilising solar and wind power, but all these have been on a small scale targeting rural communities where the national power grid is unable to reach.

One company which is changing the fortunes of the lives of rural people is the Atlas Business and Energy System (ABES), a private renewable energy company based in Ghana and Finland which launched Ghana’s first locally produced solar panels in March, 2010.

According to ABES’ Marketing Executive, Charles Amoah, the company aims to “provide both the low income and middle income home owners with new solar packages and information that would ensure energy savings”.

According to him, adequate and cheap sources of energy such as solar panels

must be used to reduce poverty to accelerate the country’s quest to achieve international targets such as those included in the Millennium Development Goals.

Another company, Energy In Common (EIC), is supplying villages that are not hooked onto the national grid with lamps and baking ovens in order to assist school children to learn when the sun goes down, and to help their parents to generate more incomes with the solar powered ovens.

In the Nkwanta community in the rural parts of northern Ghana, Nkwanta, EIC is piloting its products with a number of individuals and their households who have benefited from solar lamps. This has led to a 70 percent drop in the number of households using kerosene for light.

A third private enterprise that has begun to provide solar energy for poor communities in Ghana is Cadbury Dairy Milk.

The UK-based company is providing solar panels for farmers in remote villages to power the energy needs on their farms as well as in their households.

According to Julie Reynolds, head of marketing for Cadbury Dairy Milk, “Through chatting and working with Ghanaian farmers, we know that through solar panels, it can benefit the lives of communities greatly, doing everything from powering health clinics to giving kids extra study time at night”.

“This is what inspired us to celebrate Fairtrade Fortnight 2011 by donating 20 percent of our profits to funding solar panels.”



# COP17 images

**Clockwise:**

Visitors to the COP17 exhibition centre had a wide variety of scrumptious snacks to choose from. Here Michelle Pather prepares a loophole sourdough flatbread which she smothers in palm hearts, rocket, Parma ham, tomato paste and aubergines. It is incredibly delicious but very messy.

Olivia Barron, a PhD student at the University of the Western Cape, explains how the hydrogen powered Hi Fambeni bicycle works. It was built by students from the Tshwane University of Technology in Pretoria.

Siphindile Myeni and Zandile Ngobese are making soup on wood-burning smokeless stove at the expo.



Sign of the times for anyone who was running low on caffeine. Visitors to the Siemens stand were blown away by this Smart Chopper. It is the first custom made American electric chopper that can travel for 100kms on a single charge.



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