

THE HEAT IS ON – THE TIME TO ACT IS NOW ADM HOSTS CLIMATE CHANGE SUMMIT

**By Judy Ngoloyi
(Picture taken by Akhona Ngqinambi)**

EAST LONDON: The Amathole District Municipality hosted a Climate Change Summit at the Christian Centre in Abbotsford, East London on 4-5 June 2009. The summit was the first of its kind for the Eastern Cape and was well attended by various public and private sector stakeholders from the district and elsewhere in the province. Speaking at the summit, the Executive Mayor of Amathole District Municipality, Alderman Sakhumzi Somyo, said now is the time for communities to take the issue of climate change seriously. He said one way or the other the subject, which had not been vigorously debated in our society, in the long term would impact negatively on our lives. Somyo said we needed to act now as the near future may be too late to safeguard the environment which is reported to have changed dramatically in the past few years.

He said the future of our children was in our hands and that the participants at the conference should come up with long term solutions that would sustain our environment.

Somyo took the opportunity to cite some of the climatic challenges that are currently facing local municipalities. He stated that the protection of the environment was something that should have been addressed a long time ago. Somyo said all of us need to pull up our socks and put our heads together with the aim of changing the existing picture which is said to be serious. “There is an urgent need to plan together so that we do away with the habit of pointing fingers at each other. People have to wake up, as the time for blaming each other is long gone,” he advised.

Somyo said the Amathole District Municipality’s experience had made the institution wiser and as a result now things were being done differently. He said that a severe drought had affected the district in the recent past which saw the Adelaide and Bedford dams dry up completely. This had not happened for the past 53 years and it had a major impact on the ADM as the Water Services Authority. “The dam levels supplying Haga-Haga, Chintsa and the other coastal areas have also run perilously low in a summer when we expected lots of rain. The questions we need to pose ourselves are what are the causes, what role are we expected to play to normalize the situation that has taken us all by surprise? Are there educational activities to mitigate such negative impacts on the environment? What is it that we need to do to sustain our environment for the future? What are we doing that is impacting negatively on our environment and contributing to our carbon footprint. What can we do to restore the situation to its original state?” asked Somyo.

He admitted that even here at home, South Africa was faced with huge challenges that sometimes forced the country to take some very risky decisions. He asked: “Do we want to invest in nuclear energy, and will that not at some point put us in a very tight corner?”

Somyo said the onus was upon government to maintain the environmental standards so that nature was at least kept relatively in its original form. He emphasized that the government could not achieve this alone.

The conference also saw the awarding of prizes to five schools in the Amathole District. The two winning schools, Teko Springs JSS and Zizamele JSS, both won prizes to the value of R5000 each. Both winning schools have chosen to use their prizes to buy materials to erect fences around their vegetable and herb gardens that the schools are developed and to buy gardening tools and seeds. Three highly commended prizes of books to the value of R500 were awarded to Ncapai JSS and Nzululwazi SS.

Resolutions taken at this summit are expected to be mainstreamed into various activities of the stakeholders that are within Amathole and will be included in the reviewal of the district's Growth and Development Strategy which is due to take place in July 2009.

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