
SAEON's Pre-COP17 Schools' Awareness Initiative

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During November last year, SAEON organized six schools' awareness events to raise awareness among learners about environmental change and of the causes and impact of environmental change in South Africa and the global environment. The significance of the 17th Conference of Parties (COP17) under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was also highlighted during these events which were held at the locations of the six SAEON nodes, namely Phalaborwa, Kimberley, Pietermaritzburg, Grahamstown and Cape Town.

Presentations by a wide range of scientists from various organisations were followed by interactive workshops to drive home the message of climate change, the impact of human activities on the environment and the possible interventions to reduce this impact. The various activities at the events ranged from debates where learner groups represented developed and developing countries affected by environmental change, to learners calculating the carbon footprint associated with local versus imported produce.

Of note is that learners had the opportunity to be addressed and interact with a number of scientists who are members of the GSSA. At the Phalaborwa event Dr Tony Swemmer (SAEON Ndlovu Node) shared the concerns associated with the rise in global temperatures due to Climate Change. Learners were shown graphs of Phalaborwa's temperature trends and had the opportunity to engage in hands-on activities using thermometers and downloading data from a weather station.

At the Kimberley event, Dr Hugo Bezuidenhout (SANParks) and Dr Loraine van den Berg (Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries), the current GSSA Vice-president, was part of a group of Northern Cape-based scientists addressing high school learners about the current and expected Climate Change impacts on various environmental themes, such as biodiversity and hydrology. Dr van den Berg specifically addressed how the agricultural sector will be impacted; focusing on food security and the important role agricultural scientists has to play.

SAEON would like to Thank:

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The Department of Education – without the Department’s permission and support it would not have been possible to organise these events



Figure 1: Some of the scientists who addressed educators and learners at the event. From left to right: Mr Erik Hermann; Dr Loraine van den Berg and Dr Hugo Bezuidenhout



Figure 2: Feedback session from the school kids