



COP17

CEO BUSINESS FORUM

Launched in March 2011, the COP17 CEO Business Forum is a vehicle for businesses in South Africa to become involved in climate change mitigation and adaptation.

The Forum is a loose coalition of the chief executive officers of 40 companies, some of them amongst the top listed companies on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (e.g. Impala Platinum, Eskom and Sasol).

The main objectives of the Forum are:

- To improve knowledge about climate change.
- To become active in policy discussions and partner more closely with the government in tackling climate change. In doing so, the Forum aims to ensure that as South Africa transitions to a low-carbon economy, the country increases its competitiveness and creates new industries and jobs.
- To ensure that COP17 is a successful event.

The Forum has deliberately been conceived as a short-term initiative in the build-up to COP17, and will be disbanded after the conference is concluded in December 2011. Given this limited window of opportunity, the Forum has set boundaries to its activities. Its main undertaking is to engage with government structures (e.g. the Department of

Environmental Affairs, National Treasury) on policies such as the National Climate Change Response White Paper and the carbon tax proposals.

To further assist it in achieving its objectives, the Forum has adopted a partnership-based model, evidenced through the establishment of working relationships with bodies such as Business Unity South Africa, the National Business Initiative, and the World Business Council for Sustainable Development. In the spirit of inclusivity the Forum invites a substantial number of companies that are not members of the Forum to its monthly meetings.

The Forum's role at the COP17 conference will be to contribute financially towards the running of the conference. At the actual conference, local companies will have stalls to showcase their climate change initiatives. The Forum will also facilitate discussion forums and networking between local and international businesses with climate change as the central theme.

Whilst the creation of the Forum reflects the growing seriousness with

which business leaders in South Africa are viewing climate change, what appears to be lacking is representation of and engagement with SMMEs, which account for 52%–57% of national gross domestic product according to the South African government.¹ Although there is limited research available on how South African SMMEs are impacted by and contribute to climate change (now and in the future), consideration of SMME-specific issues is an essential component of a co-ordinated business response to climate change.

The Forum's practice of inviting non-members to its monthly meetings is a step in the right direction as it exposes the Forum to the climate change views and experiences of peers from diverse backgrounds (the companies invited by the Forum vary in terms of size and the sectors they represent). Nevertheless, it is debatable if this by itself is sufficient and whether a more pronounced emphasis on SMMEs is not required. Given the Forum will not exist post-COP17, this is perhaps an issue better dealt with by entities such as the National Business Initiative and Business Unity South Africa. ☉

¹ South African Government Information, 2011. Available online: <http://www.info.gov.za/aboutsa/economy.htm>