



# Demonstrating the Benefits of Green, Inclusive Housing at the UN Climate Talks

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COP-17 has made me proud to be South African for several reasons. First, hosting of the 17th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP) here in Durban, South Africa, has helped to remind the world that the impacts of climate change are already disproportionately impacting the poorest and most vulnerable populations of the world. Perhaps nowhere is this trend best illustrated than here on the continent of Africa.

Second, I'm proud because we're not sitting back and watching. While negotiators work on a global solution, the [Green Building Council of South Africa](#) (GBCSA) is improving lives and reducing emissions at the micro level, one street at a time. Our flagship project at the COP was the retrofitting of South Africa's first "green street" in a desperately poor area of Durban called Cato Manor. Here, residents suffered from oppressive heat in the summers, severe cold in the winters, and a lack of basic services such as clean and reliable water and fuel. The sheer amount of electricity needed to boil water for cooking and bathing resulted in utility bills that many residents could not afford. Leaky roofs and the use of expensive paraffin heaters in the winter often left residents facing the risk of serious health threats from asthma to tuberculosis.

Through the generous support of many sponsors, partners, and both the United Kingdom and Australian governments, GBCSA facilitated a green retrofit of 30 homes on this street that entailed solar water heaters, insulated ceilings, rainwater harvesting, food gardens, energy-efficient lighting and even LED street lights, which has helped improve safety. Additionally, we have provided residents with a little-known cooking technology called [Wonderbags](#), which are, simply, "off-the-grid" slow cookers that allow women to begin the cooking process on the stove but finish it in an insulated bag that requires no further labor, cooking fuel or electricity. The use of this simple yet transformational strategy has changed the lives of the women who use them while on average reducing cooking fuel consumption by 30-50%.

Last night at our celebration here in Cato Manor with local members of the community and international delegates, the hope and optimism in the air were nearly tangible. This demonstration project has underscored the message from South African President Jacob Zuma on climate change and to COP-17 delegates: that climate change mitigation strategies cannot be pursued in the absence of socioeconomic inclusiveness and equality. The Cato Manor COP-17 legacy project has demonstrated this goal can in fact be a reality.

Not only can the pursuit of simple green building strategies for low-income housing help to "leapfrog" the traditional high-carbon development path that developing groups traditionally follow - they also have undeniable, life-changing impacts on the people who live there, often at an operating cost that is by and large free.

Our dream is that this small project will become the standard for all new low-cost housing developments in our country. If these initiatives are followed we will be able to save the equivalent of one-third of the carbon emissions of a city the size of Durban every year. Here at COP-17, we have shown the world that green building councils really are changing the way the world is built - and in turn, changing the world.

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