

MD's Word or Two

By Patrick Kulati

The paraffin user's household energy safety policy proposals get submitted in energy public hearings.

1. Public Hearings on National Energy Bill

In June 2007, we held a series of paraffin users' summits throughout the country. The paraffin users agreed on a set of household energy proposals and handed these over to the Department of Minerals and Energy (DME). The intention was to ensure that their voices were included in any energy policy process that would impact on them. The Paraffin Safety Association of Southern Africa (PSA), as mandated by the summit participants, has been using all opportunities to raise awareness about the needs of poverty stricken paraffin users. So, when the Chairman of the Portfolio Committee on Minerals and Energy informed us about public hearings on the National Energy Bill, we jumped at the opportunity. And so on 30 July 2008, Phumzile Nteyi, Dehran Swart, Genevieve, Glenn Truran and I, made a submission on the National Energy Bill during public hearings. Our submission was heavily drawn from the declaration of policy proposals agreed to during the Summits.

2. Purpose of the National Energy Bill

The Bill states that its purpose is, *inter alia* "to ensure that diverse energy resources are available, in sustainable quantities and at affordable prices, to the South African economy in support of economic growth and poverty alleviation, taking into account environmental management requirements, international commitments and obligations and interactions amongst economic sectors". It is also "to establish institutions that will be responsible for the promotion of efficient generation and consumption of energy, energy modeling and planning, increased generation and consumption of renewable energies, energy research, contingency energy supply, holding of strategic energy minerals, adequate investment in, appropriate upkeep of and equitable access to energy infrastructure".

3. Key messages from our submission

- a. Household energy security and safety system must be implemented for low income sector.
- b. All energy carriers need equal attention for safety and efficiency.

4. Paraffin Safety Association's view of the Bill

Broadly speaking, we think that the hearts of its drafters were in the right place and had good intentions. We therefore support the bill because it addresses the following key issues:

- availability of diverse energy resources;
- sustainability and affordability of energy with regards to economic growth and poverty alleviation;
- Energy security in South Africa.

- An opportunity to address policy and implementation gaps in 1998 Energy White Paper
- Includes household energy safety

5. Gaps in the Bill

Though, we expressed our support for the bill, we identified some important gaps as well. For example, the bill needs to give substance in terms of how the country plans to improve household energy safety (across all energy sources). It needs to provide clarity on the role of government in promoting household energy safety. The principle of public participation and civil society involvement in the structures it purports to create needs to be implemented.

We believe that the State must lead public energy safety education and awareness campaigns. The roles for the other National Departments of such as Health and Education as well as for provincial and local government departments must be clarified. In other words, the bill must provide more clarity on the roles on provincial and local governments in South Africa's energy governance and linkages with their strategies.

The issue of standards enforcement needs to be attended to. It's one thing to put in place standards, however, we need to address the lack of capacity to monitor standards compliance and enforcement thereof.

Our experience is that energy related injury data is not collected and analysed in a centralised format. We believe that this must happen under the provisions of the Bill. In this regard, we proposed that PSA'S own household energy-related surveillance project be used as an established resource.

6. Appreciation of work done by DME

We appreciate the work done by the Department of Minerals and Energy in drafting and proposing this bill. We are particularly delighted with their inclusion of a section on household energy issues. Although the bill does not address all the aspects of household energy safety, we see it as a very first step. We also appreciate the public hearings because they presented the opportunity for civil society organisations to engage in the energy policy process.

7. Keeping track of National Energy Bill Process

The key issue now is whether the Portfolio Committee will factor these into the final document that will emerge from the process. As PSA we will monitor the process quite closely to its finality. The bill needs to be strengthened to carry and realize the people's dreams for a Household Energy Safety Policy in South Africa.