



PRESS RELEASE

Geeks rally for science, development and openness in Cape Town

Cape Town, 24th January 2012

Two events this week show the growing interest in making science more fun, enjoyable and accessible for everyone. The Cape Town Science Hack Day - first of its kind in Africa - and an Open Knowledge meet-up bring together scientists, technologists, designers and educators who wish for science and its benefits to be within the reach of the general population.

In many parts of the developed world, computer geeks and scientists get together and innovate science using technology. This can lead to so-called 'citizen science' projects for example, where members of the public can help real research and learn about science at the same time. This thinking is now catching on in Cape Town, where academics and technologists concerned by this issue are coming together.

Science is very much alive in the Cape Town area with great universities and research institutions, but does it reach everyone on the street? Not yet, according to Carolina Ödman-Govender, one of the organisers of the Cape Town Science Hack Day. "The idea behind 'hacking' science is not to break into computers and steal passwords, but to generate creative science tools using freely available technologies and to release them to the public."

The Cape Town Science Hack Day is themed around science for development. "How can science and cutting-edge technology empower communities? Developing answers to that question is one of the motivations for the Hack Day", says Kevin Govender, Director of the IAU Office of Astronomy for Development, partner organisation of the event. The Science Hack Day is taking place at the African Institute for Mathematical Sciences (AIMS), a centre of postgraduate training and research based in Muizenberg. AIMS hosts scientific workshops on a regular basis and is a local hub of scientific activity with strong connections to scientific institutions nationally and internationally.

Not only scientists and computer geeks are going to attend; the Cape Town Design Network (CTDN) is also involved. "Science and technology are crucial to inform effective design. In return, designers convert science into everyday products and tools, some of which are then used by scientists for their research. This collaboration is natural for us", says Michael Wolf of the Cape Town Design Network whose organisation was instrumental in winning Cape Town's bid to become ICSID World Design Capital of 2014. "Good design helps scientists visualize and understand results emerging from very large sets of data such as those expected from the MeerKAT telescope or the Square Kilometre Array, which we hope to host in Africa" adds Carolina Ödman-Govender.

The Science Hack Day is preceded by an Open Knowledge meet-up hosted by Siyavula, an organization creating open education resources for technology-powered learning in South African schools. "Openness is critical as it makes knowledge available and engages people in the creation of empowering resources" says Mark Horner, Shuttleworth fellow and head of the Siyavula project.

As science, programming, education and design come together this week, the community of good hackers for development hopes to grow its ranks.

The Science Hack Day is supported by Popular Mechanics and takes place at the African Institute for Mathematical Sciences (AIMS) in Muizenberg on January 28-29. The event is free but tickets must be booked in advance at <http://scihackct.eventbrite.com/> .

The Open Knowledge meet-up takes place at the Open Innovation Studio, 27 Buitenkant Street, Cape Town on January 25. Tickets are R30 to be paid at upon arrival. Tickets must be booked at <http://www.meetup.com/OpenKnowledgeFoundation/Cape-Town/573122/> .

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NOTES FOR EDITORS

About Science Hack Day <http://capetown.sciencehackday.com/>

The mission of Science Hack Day is to get excited and make things with science! A Hack Day is a 48-hour-all-night event that brings together designers, developers, scientists, citizen scientists, web geeks and anyone with good ideas in the same physical space for a brief but intense period of collaboration, hacking, and building 'cool stuff'. Science Hack Day is not an organisation but a grassroots global network of volunteers.

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About AIMS <http://www.aims.ac.za/>

The African Institute for Mathematical Sciences (AIMS) is a centre for education and research in Cape Town, South Africa. AIMS was established in 2003 as a partnership project of the following 6 universities: Cambridge, Cape Town, Oxford, Paris Sud XI, Stellenbosch, and Western Cape. The goals of AIMS are to promote mathematics and science in Africa, to recruit and train talented students and teachers and to build capacity for African initiatives in education, research, and technology. The main AIMS building is a self-contained residential centre with excellent computer, library and lecturing facilities. Lecturers and students live and dine in the main building, allowing for maximum contact time in an informal and collegiate setting. The AIMS Research Centre is housed in 2 buildings across the road from the main building.

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About the IAU Office of Astronomy for Development <http://www.astro4dev.org/>

The Global Office of Astronomy for Development (OAD) is a partnership between the IAU and the South African National Research Foundation to coordinate a wide range of worldwide activities designed to use astronomy as a tool for education and development. This is part of the realisation of a visionary

decadal plan by the IAU entitled “Astronomy for the Developing World”. This plan aims to use astronomy to stimulate development at all levels including primary, secondary and tertiary education, science research and the public understanding of science, building on the success of the International Year of Astronomy 2009. In a strong partnership between the IAU and the South African government, the OAD began its work on 1st March 2011.

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About the Cape Town Design Network <http://www.ctdn.co.za/>

The Cape Town Design Network grew out of the Creative Cape Town Clusters initiative, started in 2008, which provided a platform for networking between dynamic people in Cape Town’s creative industries, and stimulating innovative partnerships for economic and social development. The aim of the Network is to draw professional designers and innovators into a loose association, which could form the basis of a future structure to drive specific programmes to benefit design, the design professions, the community and the city, and to provide a unified voice for design and designers.

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About Siyavula <http://www.siyavula.com/>

Siyavula, a Shuttleworth Foundation seeded project, believes in sharing, community, collaboration and openness, and through the use of technology we strive to produce the best quality free educational resources out there. Our openly licensed Grade 10 – 12 maths and physical science textbooks are currently being printed by the Department of Basic Education, for free distribution across South Africa! This means that every single learner in a government school that is taking maths and / or physical science in Grades 10 – 12 will receive a copy of our textbooks, paid for by the Department of Basic Education. This is hugely exciting for us as an organisation, but also for the world of open educational resources – as far as we know, this is a world first. The books have their own website and can be viewed at <http://www.everythingmaths.co.za/> and <http://www.everythingscience.co.za/>.

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