POVERTY, DEVELOPMENT AND DONOR ISSUES

Private sector involvement in humanitarianism

Poverty can sap people's ability to think clearly

ECONOMIC ISSUES

Malawi must reassess its agricultural policies to break cycle of poverty

Development indicators reveal improvements in lives of SA’s poor; and when living conditions improve, expectations rise

POLITICAL ISSUES

More patience, less protest: the new politics of the urban poor

On why people support Mugabe and ZANU-PF in Zimbabwe

SOCIAL ISSUES

The rise of low-fee private schools

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

Scaling-up the climate-smart agricultural sweet spot

SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION ISSUES

Fire detectors can help to prevent shack fires

Early success raises hopes for malaria vaccine
**Private sector involvement in humanitarianism**

A summary of a recent IRIN analysis looking at the future of private sector involvement in humanitarianism. This article is part of a series of reports exploring the likely changes in the aid world over the next decade.

The private sector’s involvement in humanitarian action has risen steadily in the last decade and is likely to play an even larger role in the post-2015 development agenda.

"In the face of diminishing resources and increasing disasters and crises... it is imperative to bring in innovative resources," said Mamissa Mboob of the newly created Private Sector Section at the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

"It's almost as if we have no choice... The humanitarian system is stretched to its capacity... It's becoming more clear that no single entity can solve a lot of these world problems."

But too often, researchers and practitioners say, aid agencies and corporations have entered into partnerships without a clear idea of goals, shared and diverging values, and each side's comparative advantage, leading to one-off ventures that have little lasting impact. If the hype around the private sector is to translate into a sustained and positive impact, experts say, both aid agencies and corporations must take a step back to assess the impact of such partnerships and establish best practices.

According to research (opens pdf) published by Development Initiatives in 2012, private funding as a share of the total humanitarian response grew from 17% in 2006 to 32% in 2010 (and totalled US$5.8 billion that year).

But overall, humanitarians have largely failed to leverage the private sector. In a 2011 report (opens pdf), the Humanitarian Futures Programme (HFP) at King’s College, London described commercial contributions as a “niche phenomenon” that is still largely ad-hoc and opportunistic.

"The idea in basic economics is that every group has a comparative advantage and the private sector's has not been maximized," said Lucy Pearson, programme officer at Humanitarian Futures Programme.

There remains a lack of understanding, a large degree of mistrust and what some experts have termed a “culture clash” between the humanitarian and private sector.

But interest is growing from both sides: humanitarians are eager for diverse sources of funding and innovative approaches, skills and technologies; while companies are looking to improve their corporate image, motivate and retain employees, and break into new markets. Increasingly, rather than just wanting to look good, private companies also see investment in disaster risk reduction as essential for business continuity; and in many cases, it is the private sector - not the humanitarians - taking the first step.


See also here http://www.irinnews.org/report/98642/where-aid-work-and-the-private-sector-meet for examples of public-private partnerships in humanitarianism, and although there are a number of platforms that have attempted to make private sector involvement easier (the partnership between OCHA and the World Economic Forum (WEF)), the Geneva-based Business Humanitarian Forum, the UN's business portal, Global Impact, and the Partnering Initiative) there is no overall framework that engages the private sector in a systematic way.

See also here http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Research/Files/Papers/2013/08/blum%20roundtable%20policy%20briefs/kharas%20policy%20brief.pdf (opens pdf) for a write-up of a recent Brookings Blum Roundtable session on 'Reimagining the role of the private sector in development' which argues that the private sector is willing to contribute more to sustainable development but companies lack models of what to do and how to engage in partnerships with the public sector. The private sector is needed to develop and take to scale new patterns of sustainable product ion, but, to do so new partnerships with aid agencies and other public financial institutions are needed. These partnerships should focus on:

- Mobilizing long term private finance for sustainable development;
- Generating more innovation in technologies and business models;
- Building mechanisms to hold the private sector accountable for development results.

Every high level development report and project now has private sector involvement. The time is ripe to systematize this approach and experiment with new forms of partnerships.
Poverty can sap people's ability to think clearly

It's the cruel cycle of poverty. The many challenges that come with being poor can sap people's ability to think clearly, according to a new study (journal article Science, DOI: 10.1126/science.1238041 behind a paywall). The findings suggest that governments should think twice before tying up social-assistance programmes in confusing red tape.

Sociologists have long known that poor people are less likely to take medications, keep appointments, or be attentive parents. “Poor people make poorer decisions. They do. The question is why,” says Timothy Smeeding, director of the Institute for Research on Poverty at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

But does bad decision-making help cause poverty, or does poverty interfere with decision-making?

To explore this question, psychologist Eldar Shafir at Princeton University and his colleagues took advantage of a natural experiment. Small-scale sugar-cane farmers in Tamil Nadu in southern India receive most of their year's income all at once, shortly after the annual harvest. As a result, the same farmer can be poor before harvest and relatively rich after. And indeed, Shafir’s team found that farmers had more loans, pawned more belongings, and reported more difficulty paying bills before the harvest than after.

The researchers visited 464 farmers in 54 villages both before and after harvest. At each visit, they gave the farmers two tests of their cognitive ability: a multiple-choice pattern-matching test, and one in which they had to declare the number of digits shown rather than their value: seeing “5 5 5” but saying “three”, for example.

The farmers scored significantly lower on the tests before the harvest, when money was tight, suggesting that their worries made it harder to think clearly. In fact, worrying about money impaired the farmers' thinking almost as much as going without sleep for a full night, and was the equivalent of a 13-point drop in IQ.

Looking at the same individuals before and after they received their pay packet meant that the team controlled for other factors that likely contribute to cognitive abilities, such as family background, childhood nutrition, limited education and exposure to lead or other toxins.

The most likely explanation for the results is that people have a limited amount of "mental bandwidth", and financial worries leave less available for other cognitive tasks, says Shafir. If so, then poor people's bad decision-making may be at least partly a result of their circumstances, not due to any intrinsic lack of intelligence, says Smeeding, who was not involved in the study.

Shafir’s study is an important advance, says Ann Stevens, an economist who directs the Center for Poverty Research at the University of California, Davis. If poverty makes people think less clearly, then even small social programmes to improve their lot may let them devote more attention to staying healthy, being better parents and the like. That could bring social benefits that are not usually counted in cost-benefit analyses of welfare programmes, she says.

Limited mental bandwidth also means governments should be careful not to add too much paperwork to poor people's burden. “A typical poor citizen comes to you poor in money and poor in bandwidth,” says Shafir. “When you give them a 30-page application form [for social assistance], you're putting a pretty massive charge on their bandwidth.”


Malawi must reassess its agricultural policies to break cycle of poverty

A United Nations (UN) independent expert has stressed that Malawi must reassess its national food security strategy to ensure that policies designed to combat poverty and malnutrition truly reach the most vulnerable in the population. “Recent high-profiled food security policies have failed to rid Malawi of chronic food insecurity and malnutrition,” said Olivier De Schutter, the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food. “The country urgently needs a national food security strategy, underpinned by a Right to Food Framework Law, to hold policies to account when they do not yield benefits for the most food insecure and to ensure a coherent approach across sectors,” he said at the end of an 11-day visit to the country.

More than 50% of the country remains mired in poverty, with one quarter of ‘ultra-poor’ Malawians earning less than the estimated costs of a diet providing minimum recommended calorie intake, and about half of all children suffering from acute or severe malnutrition.

ECONOMIC ISSUES
While Malawi is often viewed as an example of how hunger can be tackled by subsidizing inputs for farmers, long-term progress can be missed when too little is done to empower the poor, Mr De Schutter said.

Through its Farm Input Subsidy Programme (FISP), (see here for background) more than one million beneficiaries have gained access to discounted fertilizers and seeds. However, this year the country will need to import maize for humanitarian food aid to Malawian farmers who are unable to feed themselves.

Mr De Schutter argued that the country must reassess whether FISP – which takes up more than half of Malawi’s agricultural budget – is the most effective use of available resources to protect the right to adequate food for all Malawians.

"It is time for Malawi to move beyond the fertilizer-led ‘green revolution’ and invest in the brown and blue revolutions needed to rebuild soil fertility and water retention," Mr De Schutter urged. “Malawians need a durable agricultural resource base and living wages – and currently they are getting neither.”

The Malawian minimum wage, currently fixed at around $1.12 per day, is one of the lowest in the world, and 300,000 tenant families on tobacco plantations – where 78,000 child labourers are employed – are only paid depending on the quantity and quality of tobacco sold to landlords.

Meanwhile, Malawi has lost over 10% of its gross domestic product (GDP) to illicit outflows over the past three decades, with mining companies exempted from customs duty, excise duty, value added tax (VAT) on mining machinery, plant and equipment.

"The policy of providing abundant, cheap and non-unionized labour to plantation owners must be consigned to the past," Mr De Schutter stated, adding that "Malawi’s poor pay twice for the red carpet treatment given to multinational investors – in the suppression of their wages, and in the services deprived them by corporate tax exemptions."

Among the steps to be taken by the Government to redress the balance are enforcing a living wage, allowing workers to bargain collectively in all sectors, and negotiating fair taxation arrangements for investors.

"By improving participation and accountability in the design and implementation of food security policies, Malawi can ensure that public investment will truly reach the poorest within the population,” Mr De Schutter said.

“...It is essential that the country does not pursue investment for investment’s sake, but uses its as an opportunity to engage corporations in a genuine commitment to help improve the situation of Malawi’s poor and food insecure,” he concluded.


The Special Rapporteur on the right to food, Mr Olivier De Schutter, conducted a mission to Malawi from 12 to 22 July 2013, at the invitation of the Government. Independent experts, or special rapporteurs, are appointed by the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council to examine and report back on a country situation or a specific human rights theme. The positions are honorary and the experts are not UN staff, nor are they paid for their work.

The Special Rapporteur convened five roundtable discussions with representatives of non-governmental organizations, trade unions, farmers associations and academics, held in Lilongwe and Zomba. Moreover, the mission included visits to the central and southern regions, during which the Special Rapporteur met with local officials and communities in the Districts of Dedza, Salima, Mulanje, Thyolo and Zomba, including meetings with tea estate workers in the village of Bwaila in Traditional Authority Mchilamwela, villagers facing displacement to give way to a sugar cane plantation in Mtakataka, tenant workers on a tobacco farm in Changoma, a Nutrition Rehabilitation Unit developing a community garden project at the Mulanje Mission Hospital; farmers involved in agroecological projects in Ekwendeni and Dedza (Lodi).

For more on the work of the Special Rapporteur on the right to food, visit http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Food/Pages/FoodIndex.aspx or www.srfood.org.

Development indicators reveal improvements in lives of SA’s poor; and when living conditions improve, expectations rise

A deluge of data on the demonstrable progress made by the government in improving the living conditions of the poor [in South Africa] has become available in recent weeks.

The Development Indicators — an initiative by the government’s Department of Performance Monitoring and Evaluation, which tracks progress made in various areas of development — were published two weeks ago. There are 85 indicators in all, from the
health of the economy to households’ assets and social cohesion.

On the development side, the news is almost all good: 95% of households now have access to potable water, up from 60% in 1994; 83.4% of households have toilets up to a basic standard, up from 51% in 1994; and the number of households with access to electricity jumped to 76.5% from 52% in 1994. A greater proportion of people live in formal housing than ever before and there are 5.6-million more formal houses than in 1994.

Within a week or so of the publication of the government’s Development Indicators, Statistics South Africa released its Annual Household Survey, which for the past 10 years has tracked the success of government policies through face-to-face surveys with about 25,000 households.

The numbers here are a little less rosy than the indicators. For instance, the household survey puts access to piped water at 90% of households, not 95%, and estimates that a slightly larger proportion of households are still in informal settlements. But essentially they tell the same story: that people are far better off than they used to be, especially if wealth and poverty are measured in terms of access to the basic necessities of life.

But why then are people more dissatisfied? Rising conflict — through service delivery protests and strikes — indicates that this is certainly the case. One reason is the standard of services. The Annual Household Survey has begun to track this with interesting results.

In Limpopo and Mpumalanga, for instance, more than 55% of households complained of regular water interruptions that lasted more than two days at a time.

A growing proportion of people also complained about the quality of water they received, and a good proportion of people living in low-cost houses, 16%, complained that these had weak walls or roofs.

In light of the findings it is obvious that to count houses or water connections, as the African National Congress (ANC) is fond of doing in its election material, can lead to a misguided sense of hubris.

A second reason is psychological and political. Once people have “the basic goodies”, they begin to focus on the satisfaction of other needs, in particular, relative to what other people in society have. University of Johannesburg professor Steven Friedman says this theory of relative deprivation helps explain the simultaneous rise in both wealth and dissatisfaction.

“Society has made progress on providing the goodies for people but it hasn’t made progress on income inequality. Once the need (for basic services) is satisfied, people measure their circumstances against those they see around them. It doesn’t help to point out to people that they are better off than they used to be,” he says.

BNP Paribas Cadiz Securities political analyst Nic Borain says that when people’s living conditions begin to improve, one consequence is that expectations rise. “As material conditions improve it is much more likely that people will act to express their dissatisfaction than if they were people who had no hope,” he says.


The article states that the measurement of poverty [in South Africa] should include dimensions of well-being that cannot be measured in monetary terms. Data on health, education and standards of living can be used to calculate a so-called Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI). Results suggest that both the prevalence and the intensity of multidimensional poverty fell significantly from 1993 to 2010. The decline in multidimensional poverty is much greater than the decline in poverty as measured in terms of income and/or expenditure. Better social services and infrastructure have played a large role.

POLITICAL ISSUES

More patience, less protest: the new politics of the urban poor

A new book shows how poor urban communities across Africa and Asia have developed powerful new approaches that have enabled millions of people to get better housing and services, and — beyond this — social justice and inclusion in political processes.

Their efforts and experiences stand in stark contrast to the images of popular protest that have erupted in large cities —as in Egypt and Brazil— in recent months. And as the book’s authors note, these quieter,
more patient approaches to the problems of poverty and injustice appear more likely to bring benefits in the long-term.

Reducing Urban Poverty in the Global South by David Satterthwaite and Diana Mitlin shows that unlike the street protests that capture media attention, the people living in the “slums” of Africa and Asia realised that their realities required a different way of doing politics.

“Social movement leaders observed the lack of progress in the post-independence period and decided that they had re-design their strategies to increase the likelihood that equitable and inclusive cities were to be part of the political agenda,” says Dr Mitlin.

“They rejected demonstrations and public protest because they knew that such a critical mass could not be held on the streets for long, but had to return to livelihood struggles,” she adds. “They rejected revolutionary change – and contesting the seat of government – because they recognised that history shows that those who secure such seats rapidly join the political elites. And they recognised that there was little point in making claims and defining entitlements to a set of urban development policies which have delivered little in terms of pro-poor development.”

Instead, an alternative approach has emerged simultaneously in diverse countries over the past 20 years as groups of low-income urban citizens from informal settlements have joined forces to develop their own solutions to previously intractable urban development problems.

Through less confrontational tactics than mass protests, these groups have ensured that governments recognise the urban poor for what they are — legitimate citizens able to sit around the table with mayors and ministers alike to determine new development options and help implement them.

As a result millions of urban residents are now organized in neighbourhood associations that come together in city federations to negotiate with local government for financial redistribution and investment capital, alongside pledging their own time and effort in improving their localities.

The book begins by discussing the most widely-used conventional approaches to urban development, and explores the ways in which these have been used by a range of development agencies including national and local government, and civil society.

The authors then describe the alternative approach that has emerged, illustrating this with five case studies of programme interventions that have adopted similar strategies to address urban poverty and advance the cause of the urban poor. These include international funds that support their priorities and are accountable to them.

“These show the capacities of urban poor organizations and federations not only to develop far more effective solutions in dozens of countries but also to work with local governments to do so at scale,” says Dr Satterthwaite.

The final two chapters analyse the approach and its underlying politics — and look forward to what this means for action to address urban poverty in towns and cities of the global south in the 21st century.

Source: http://www.iied.org/more-patience-less-protest-new-politics-urban-poor

On why people support Mugabe and ZANU-PF in Zimbabwe

Jonathan Bhalla, the Research Manager at Africa Research Institute wrote a recent blog post, which is shortened here, on why the Zimbabwean people voted for Robert Mugabe and ZANU-PF. It is based on Blessing Miles Tendi’s book “How intellectuals made history in Zimbabwe” and the snippets he picked out follow below.

This post is featured in the Southern African Scan newsletter because since the July 29th Zimbabwe elections, debate has raged about the conduct and outcomes of the vote. The notion that ordinary Zimbabweans — perhaps even the majority — actually voted for Robert Mugabe and his Zimbabwe National African Union-Patriot Front (ZANU-PF) party is perplexing for many; for some inconceivable. Asking why many Zimbabweans decided to vote for ZANU-PF might be uncomfortable for some, but it is certainly necessary if we are to understand the country’s future political trajectory.

ON PATRIOTIC HISTORY

“It is a narrative which depicts ZANU-PF as sole champion, past and present, of the independence and sovereignty of a country under constant attack from ‘imperialist forces’. Mugabe was the chief definers of the contours of this history, but professional academics gave it substance and credibility.”
"Patriotic history is a potent narrative that draws on real, not imagined, grievances. It taps into strong sentiments about colonialism and perceived western hypocrisy on human rights. Its proponents provide persuasive evidence for their assertions, which adds to the plausibility and strength of the narrative. The primary theme – inequality in land ownership – has an authentic history. The incorporation of powerful moral discourses makes patriotic history compelling, and difficult to challenge. Nationalist public intellectuals cite the land grievance as the main reason for their alignment with ZANU-PF.”

**ON PATRIOTS AND SELL-OUTS**

"ZANU-PF history categorised Zimbabweans as ‘patriots’ or ‘sell-outs’. From the late 1950s this distinction was a continuous theme of liberation movement politics. But after 2000, a ‘sell-out’ was a ‘saboteur’ of liberation principles – someone who opposed land seizures and sought the extension of human rights in Zimbabwe. ZANU-PF supporters are by definition ‘patriots’ while the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) and civil society institutions were ‘sell-outs’ – and therefore ‘legitimate’ targets for political violence.”

**ON SANCTIONS AND THE WEST**

"After 2003, western sanctions replaced whites as the leading cause of Zimbabwe’s problems in patriotic history. ZANU-PF intellectuals declared that the West was punishing the country for having forcibly taken farms from their ‘kith and kin’, and redistributed them to landless blacks. In reality, sanctions were directed at leading members of ZANU-PF through the imposition of travel bans and freezing of their overseas financial assets. International events – the NATO-led Kosovo intervention in 1999, the Iraq invasion in 2003, the abuse of prisoners at Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay in 2004 – were routinely cited as further evidence of western malefiance and hypocrisy.”

**ON THE MEDIA**

"The state-sponsored media was instrumental in disseminating patriotic history. From 2000 onwards, the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC) repeatedly broadcast liberation war documentaries that presented ZANU-PF as being solely responsible for securing independence, justified land seizures, highlighted colonial atrocities, and erased personalities and events from the historical record. State-run radio aired catchy jingles – many composed by Jonathan Moyo – which reworked liberation war songs and celebrated ZANU-PF’s achievements.”

**ON LAND REFORM**

"For the MDC, land reform is a technocratic process. For ZANU-PF it was a populist event. The MDC considered production to be more important than hectares. It wanted methodical land reform, administered by an independent land commission. Joseph Made, twice ZANU-PF’s agriculture minister, argued that “the land issue is more serious than institutions, what is needed now is land, not a [land] commission.”

**ON VALUES**

"The primary fault line in Zimbabwean politics remains an irreconcilable gulf in political values. As the coherence of patriotic history has begun to unravel, so its utility as a means to identify political loyalties has been undermined. In coming years, proponents of patriotic history will require greater ingenuity to sustain their narrative. Yet the coalition government in Harare, even if it can succeed in mending the economy, is building on a fragile foundation. Should the economy recover without any attempt to revisit the crisis of values, then the recovery will have been built on quicksand. Technocratic intercession which fails to tackle this crisis of values may result in history repeating itself.”


---

**SOCIAL ISSUES**

**The rise of low-fee private schools**

An op-ed by Ann Bernstein who is executive director of the Centre for Development and Enterprise (CDE). This article is based on a new CDE publication: Affordable private schools in SA (opens pdf). See also here http://www.bdlive.co.za/opinion/2013/08/20/schools-with-enforceable-contracts-offer-hope-to-poor for a related piece, which may feature in the next edition of the Southern Africa Scan newsletter, on schools with enforceable contracts offer hope to poor. This is currently a South African trend, but expect to see it spread to the region soon – driven by the education ‘crisis’, weak educational institutions, massive demand for skills and parents wanting to do the best for their children.

Private schools for the poor are a global phenomenon. In Nigeria, Kenya, Ghana, Colombia, Chile and elsewhere, parents are deserting failing public schools and “edupreneurs” are emerging to meet local needs. About 40% of India’s urban pupils are in private schools for the poor. If unregistered schools are included, this jumps closer to 70%.
What is the secret of success in these mushrooming private schools for the poor? The Indian report was clear: “In a private school, the teachers are accountable to the manager (who can fire them) and through him or her to the parents (who can withdraw their children). In a government school, the chain of accountability is much weaker, as teachers have a permanent job with salaries and promotions unrelated to performance. This contrast is perceived with crystal clarity by the vast majority of parents.”

South Africa has a small, but growing, low-fee private schooling sector. No one knows the exact size of the sector, but evidence suggests it is much larger than the 4% of total school-goers indicated in the latest census figures.

Low-fee private schooling in South Africa is growing rapidly. The Independent School Association of Southern Africa says there are more than 2,500 independent schools. Umalusi, the statutory quality assurance body says there are about 3,500 registered independent schools. No one knows the number of unregistered schools.

Meanwhile, the public school sector is shrinking. Between 2000 and 2010, the number of public schools declined by 9%, while the number of known independent schools (from a much smaller base) grew 44%. Of course, the size of schools differs.

Significant developments are taking place in the low-fee sector. Curro Holdings, a private schooling company that aims to grow to 100 schools in the next decade, listed on the JSE in 2011 and now has a market capitalisation of more than R5bn [± US$5m]. It has recently bought a privately run teacher-training college producing 1,000 teachers a year to serve the needs of its schools.

The Public Investment Corporation (PIC) and Old Mutual have established a special education fund, which has invested in two private schooling chains — Curro and Basa. Basa Educational Institute Trust operates primary and secondary schools in working class areas. This black-owned and managed school chain has 160 teachers and runs four schools in Soweto, inner-city Johannesburg and Diepsloot catering to 5,000 pupils a year. The PIC and Old Mutual’s R60m [±US$6m] investment will fund renovation and expansion of Basa’s Soweto-based primary school and development of a new high school. Together, these two schools aim to educate 2,400 pupils a year.

Spark schools — launched by young entrepreneurs this year — intends to become a network of low-fee, non-profit private schools. Adapting successful experience in the US, Spark aims to grow to 64 schools in a decade. The Commonwealth Education Trust, which invests in primary and secondary education in developing countries, has approved the launch of Nova Schools in the Western Cape. These schools, which will open next year, will be supported by a central hub providing services to each school. They hope to reach 3,600 pupils in two years.

These four recent developments illustrate the innovative, experimental nature of the sector. From the use of technology in classrooms as a way to individualise teaching and reduce costs; to a cluster of schools all served by a central hub providing administration and quality controls; to much larger numbers in classes where teachers and teaching assistants will deal with up to 100 children, this sector is providing research and development for schooling poorer communities.

With the growth of the sector, one of the primary questions concerns affordability. There is much innovation and work to be done in further reducing the cost of schooling and making the low-fee sector even more affordable to the poor.

By international standards, South Africa’s low-fee schools are expensive. Fees range from R750 [±US$75] a month to R1,200 [±US$120] and even R2,000 [±US$200] a month. In India, “budget” private schools charge annual fees of R2,000 [±US$200] and less. In Kenya, a chain of low-fee schools charges R360 [±US$36] a year. The affordability issue raises the question of government subsidies. Registered, non-profit independent schools in South Africa are the only ones that can receive state subsidy, but not all qualify — and their level of state subsidy is determined by their fees (the more school fees charged, the less the subsidy). This subsidy is never more than 60% of the equivalent cost of government schooling, even when the parents of children are poor.

There is resistance to independent schools among some officials in some provinces. And in many provinces there is also a lack of capacity to implement the subsidy regulations correctly. However, the Department of Basic Education is supportive of independent schools, as are some of the provinces. They recognise the value added and cost savings to the government, as well as the need for partnerships and collaboration to improve the quality of the education system as a whole. However, efforts to make these schools accessible should be supported by public policy, including a review of subsidies.

What is social justice in this area?
In poor communities, where public schooling is described by the government as dysfunctional (and worse by others), why should parents who decide to attend a local private school receive so much less per pupil than is spent on pupils in government schools? Why not have a system in which an agreed amount is allocated to each pupil irrespective of the school they attend (public or private) and then leave it to the parents to decide where to spend that money.

If provincial education departments are struggling to implement government policy and the constitutional obligation of support to private schools, why not look to another form of regulation?

In Pakistan and the Philippines, for example, a transparent and fair process of private school regulation takes place that is also responsible for the allocation of the public subsidy. The regulatory demands on private schools need to be equivalent to the oversight and demands on public schools.

A situation in which private schools are subjected to multiple regulatory bodies while far too many public schools fail to perform with impunity is not a recipe for success or social justice.

If South Africa is to join the ranks of developing countries with higher standards of schooling performance, and with good schooling available to the poor, it will need to review the ethics and the practicalities of national and provincial education funding.

Schooling systems need diversity and experimentation. Affordable private schools are vital parts of the schooling system in many other developing countries in Asia, Southeast Asia, Africa and South America. In the context of a struggling and patently unaccountable public schooling system in South Africa, the development and expansion of private schools serving poorer communities is a trend to be welcomed and encouraged.

Source: http://www.bdlive.co.za/opinion/2013/08/01/the-rise-of-low-fee-private-schools-can-only-benefit-south-africa

### ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

**Scaling-up the climate-smart agricultural sweet spot**

Can we implement climate-smart agriculture at scale both globally and in Africa? This was the opening question for the CGIAR Program on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security (CCAFS) Head of Research Sonja Vermeulen when presenting at the “Climate-Smart Agriculture” side event held in parallel to the Africa Agriculture Science Week (AASW).

Based on her outline, and the recently published Working Paper on successfully scaled-up climate-smart agriculture, CCAFS argues that not only can climate-smart practices be implemented and scaled-up – in many countries this is already happening.

The paper ‘Large-scale implementation of adaptation and mitigation actions in agriculture practices’ (opens pdf) meticulously analyses fascinating large-scale case studies from around the globe that have fulfilled all or nearly all of the sought-after climate-smart goals.

In this case, large-scale means covering tens of thousands of farmers or tens of thousands of hectares.

The ‘sweet spot’ means an agricultural activity or practice achieving the ‘triple-win’ – climate adaptation and resilience building, climate mitigation, while securing national food security development goals.

Scaling-up climate-smart practices would mean expanding this ‘sweet-spot’ – more food for today while minimising our environmental footprint for tomorrow.

Depending on the country and its level of development, there are different goals that a country would want to maximise. The ‘Drought Tolerant Maize for Africa Project’, implemented in 13 African countries, focuses primarily on food security and climate adaptation instead of mitigation.

On the flip side, Denmark has been very successful in reducing greenhouse gases from their agricultural sector, through its Agreement on Green Growth. However, the country hasn’t necessarily aimed for adaptation in this project.

Niger on the other hand succeeded to fulfil all three climate-smart areas: increase in agricultural productivity, vegetative cover and carbon sequestration while reduced sedimentation of watercourses. In fact, water and soil erosion were reduced in 88% of the sites.

The Morocco Green Plan initiative has really boosted the country’s agricultural production. Compared to the period 2005-2007, production has increase by 190% in the olive sector and 52% for cereals. In Tanzania communities are helping the government take the lead on forest management, involving 7,000 farming households as a way to protect natural forests against degradation, with climate-resilience and adaptation co-benefits.

Reading these case stories makes me inclined to think that not only can climate-smart agriculture practices be implemented...
and scaled-up in Africa, the continent is already taking the lead on agricultural activities to help reduce number of hungry, while including mitigation aspects and building climate resilience.

Dr Vermeulen pinpointed factors needed in order to ensure successful up-scaling, which starts with strong governmental support: Almost every single of these case studies have had serious governmental backing.

In addition, as upfront cost are substantial, we are talking multimillion dollars per year just to get things going, without financial support these projects will probably not reach more than a few farmers.

Source: http://africagreenmedia.co.za/scaling-up-the-climate-smart-agricultural-sweet-spot/

Download Dr Vermeulen’s slides from the talk here http://www.slideshare.net/cgiarclimate/climatesmart-agriculture-presentation-16-july-2013-vermeulen and see here http://www.ilri.org/ilrinews/index.php/archives/11830 for an article on the need to start collecting better data on how much greenhouse gases African countries are emitting if Climate Smart Agriculture is to be adopted in Africa.

SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION

ISSUES

Fire detectors can help to prevent shack fires
Shack fires are an unremitting scourge facing urban townships. In South Africa, between 2000 and 2010, over 230 000 people were made homeless by fires. Growing urban populations together with inadequate services, in particular electricity and water, means urban shack fires will continue to take their toll. There is an urgent need for effective solutions to address the major causes.

Last year, the City [of Cape Town] responded to 1,177 fire incidents in informal settlements around Cape Town. According to the City 3,480 shack were damaged or destroyed and 105 lives lost in 2012 alone.

On New Year’s Day (2013), a fire broke out in the BM section of Khayelitsha. More than 4,000 people were left homeless; at least four residents lost their lives.

This incident brought light to a project run by Samuel Ginsberg, an electrical engineering lecturer at the University of Cape Town, to develop a fire detector. Final year engineering student, Francois Petousis, took it on as a thesis project.

Petousis wanted to develop a cheap fire detector that could be mass produced.

“Many fires are started by candles, paraffin lighting, and cooking devices. These devices are sometimes left on at night while people are sleeping, and can often be knocked over,” said Petousis. Shack fires get out of hand because there is no early warning.

“People are often not aware of the fire when it begins, and that is when the fire can be fought more easily. What makes this detector a distinctively effective solution is that, when detecting a fire, it emits a low frequency sound that is at a pitch that was recently shown in studies to be most effective at waking people.”

“The sound is distressing and makes the body react. It is an extremely effective alarm.” If a detector goes off in one shack, the pitch is powerful enough to alert neighbouring shack dwellers.

The device is smaller than the palm of the hand and is being called Khusela (meaning “protect” or “defend” in Xhosa). It can be mass produced at a cost of just under R10 [$1, one US dollar] per device. The detector, which is durable, can be hung or attached easily from any surface inside a shack and the prototype has a battery life of four years.

“Other fire detection technologies were not suited to a township environment,” said Petousis. Available smoke detecting technologies are designed to be highly sensitive to the slightest presence of smoke.

This would be useless in a township environment, which is normally smoky. Other technologies are also more expensive and use removable batteries, which isn't ideal in a low resourced community. What the Khusela does is sense rapid changes in temperature and then it activates.

A report, prepared by the City of Cape Town, for a Fire Safety Symposium in February corroborates Petousis’ assertion that many fires occur at night when people may be sleeping or unaware. The document reports that most fires are reported between 9pm and 3am.

Other solutions have been put forward. Working on Fire, a Johannesburg organization, is calling for the use of foam bombs -- non-harmful chemical foam that suffocates the oxygen supply to fires and is dropped from the air.

Fire detection by camera has been suggested by the City as another possible strategy. The City Disaster and Management department are focusing on the provision of ‘first strike’ firefighting skills and safety awareness programs.
The department says that fires are mostly accidental, often caused by negligent use of dangerous cooking or heating devices, and as a result of alcohol and substance abuse. Other major causes are illegal electrical connections.

Whereas many solutions emphasize effective fire fighting, the Khusela aims at prevention. The value of this approach was shown in the US, where the introduction of fire detectors for households led to a 50% decrease in home fires after several years.

Petousis hopes to provide fire detectors for most informal settlements in and around Cape Town, and later countrywide.

"We are in the process of finding the best means to distribute them, but the biggest challenge is to find funding for the mass production of these detectors," he said.

"This project is non-profit, but we need funding to pay for the production and distribution. If we get funding we may operate as an NPO, otherwise a contract from a government department could allow us to take this project out to settlements. Getting the Khusela out to people is our chief priority at this stage."

Source: [http://www.groundup.org.za/content/fire-detectors-can-help-prevent-shack-fires](http://www.groundup.org.za/content/fire-detectors-can-help-prevent-shack-fires)

---

**Shack fires present a very real threat to residents of informal settlements all over Southern Africa and any measures to prevent them should be taken seriously. To contact The Khusela project for further information or support: fire.khusela@gmail.com**

---

**Early success raises hopes for malaria vaccine**

A malaria vaccine has become the first to provide 100% protection against the disease, confounding critics and surpassing any other experimental malaria vaccine tested, Nature News reported [earlier this month].

The vaccine, developed and tested in the United States, will now be tested further in clinical trials in Africa, starting at the Ifakara Health Institute in Tanzania. If those are successful, the vaccine may be licensed as early as four years from now.

The results, published [on 8 August] in Science, demonstrate for the first time the concept that a malaria vaccine can provide a high level of protection, raising cautious optimism amongst researchers.

So far the new vaccine has only been tested in the phase I safety trial, in a small study on 40 volunteers. Also, the vaccine was given intravenously, making it difficult to administer in mass vaccination campaigns or to give to children. There is currently no effective vaccine for malaria, a disease that kills around 660,000 people a year, mostly children.