# Horizon Scan

**SOUTHERN AFRICA**

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Notion of rapid African urbanisation challenged by better data
A blogpost by Edward Paice, director of the Africa Research Institute, emphasis added

Everyone knows that Nairobi’s Kibera district is the largest “informal settlement”, or slum, in sub-Saharan Africa. At least, they used to know. Politicians, journalists, NGOs and urban planning professionals routinely declared that 700 000 – 1 000 000 people lived in Kibera. But when the district was geo-statistically mapped for the first time in 2009 its population was estimated at no more than 220 000 – 250 000. In similar vein, the city of Lagos is widely believed to have about 15 million inhabitants – an estimate supported by the city authorities in the wake of Nigeria’s contested (and manipulated) 2006 census. But the 2009 Africapolis survey of West Africa’s urban population, the most sophisticated to date and compiled with the aid of satellite imagery, found that the city was home to no more than 10 million people. Even more significantly, while Nigeria’s census claimed that the country’s population was 140 million, the Africapolis team concluded that “in reality, [Nigeria] probably does not contain 100 million”.

The shrinkage of Kibera, Lagos and Nigeria will prove to be unexceptional. Governments and city authorities competing for funds, and donors and investors competing for projects, have shared a penchant for exaggeration. Despite the lack of a census in DRC since 1984, McKinsey forecasts that Kinshasa will be the 13th largest city in the world by 2025. The UN has routinely – and demonstrably – over-estimated the size of Africa’s larger cities and urban populations. Over time, errors and misinterpretations of data have become magnified, and projections less realistic. Yet it is the UN’s statistics which are most commonly cited. “They have become ‘fact’ by being constantly re-stated”, says Dr Debby Potts at King’s College, London, “instead of being recognised as guesses”.

More reliable urban population estimates and projections are increasingly available to anyone minded to heed them. They present a far from uniform picture for the continent, but challenge the received wisdom that Africa is urbanising faster than any other continent in the world. According to Africapolis, the urbanisation level in West Africa will rise by less than 3%, to 34.6% of the total population, in the period 2000-2020. Analysis by Debby Potts and other leading specialists of the 18 censuses published by sub-Saharan countries in the past decade reveals a similar picture. While urban populations are growing fast in many countries, only in four countries is rapid urbanisation occurring. According to Potts, “the most common pattern is for slow urbanisation”.

Rapid urbanisation is being portrayed – by the UN, the World Bank and many others – as a potential developmental “silver bullet” for Africa. Cities, we are frequently told, will be the drivers of economic growth and poverty reduction on the continent in the years to come. At present, such claims are too simplistic, and counter-productively over-optimistic.

One of the explanations for the modest momentum of urbanisation in so many African countries is the dearth of opportunities for individuals to improve their lot in towns and cities. Job creation, or lack of it, is the key factor here. In the absence of formal or informal employment, or better services, many rural migrants chose to return whence they came, or to come and go – a phenomenon known as “circular migration”. This is becoming more and more common, and stays in each location are of shorter duration. Natural increase among the poorest urban-dwellers, not migration, is the biggest driver of urban growth in Africa. This means slum growth, and burgeoning ranks of unoccupied young men and women.

As Professor Edgar Pieterse, Director of the African Centre for Cities in Cape Town, points out “this is tough stuff”. In Africa, despite encouraging GDP growth figures over the past decade, larger concentrations of people are not automatically generating benefits – quite the opposite. Talk of widespread “bottom-up development” occurring in towns and cities is far-fetched. The notion that big ticket urban infrastructure projects will be a panacea is equally misguided.

The social, economic and political consequences of policymakers continuing to ignore the best available demographic research could be grim. For example, appropriate food supply networks and health services require sound knowledge of population distribution and migration patterns. But unsound “common knowledge” is contributing to bad policymaking and wasted resources – human and financial. “A set of very pernicious trends is unfolding and planned investments will exacerbate these trends”, says Pieterse.

What is ‘catalytic aid’?
Institute for Development Studies’ (IDS) Andy Sumner recently blogged about ‘catalytic aid’. An extract follows

So, what specifically might be ‘catalytic aid’?

At present it seems little defined although I’d suspect some papers are on their way given the buzz about it. Here’s my two cents worth: You’d want to reduce aid economic dependency meaning aid as a percentage of the economy or GDP or total government spending or total investment. So, over the course of however many years a countries development strategy would be to aim to progressively reduce ratios of aid/GDP and that would be done with intermediate targets for aid/total investment and/or aid/total government revenue.

Or alternatively one could go switching gradually from grant aid to concessional loans and then finally non-concessional loans. All of the above would require redirecting considerable amounts of foreign aid flows away from traditional programme aid (e.g. schools, bednets, vaccines) to stuff like:

1. Building domestic tax systems; (see here (pdf) why this matters)
2. Addressing capital flight
3. Hiring corporate lawyers with aid money – to get better deals for low income countries negotiating natural resource contracts with international companies (as supported by Norway’s aid programme in Latin America).
4. Anything else that led to an increase in domestically available resources – which is potentially a whole range of stuff (see here and ActionAid’s ideas here).

This would all imply over the long run a huge shift in the tax burden from the middle classes in the North towards the new middle classes in the South which may not be well received politically of course in the South (see post here on the revolutionary middle classes aka the catalytic classes). Or perhaps it might – if governments become more responsive to those funding the state – their own taxpayers.

So, the question is are we heading towards a zero foreign aid world of autonomous countries at some point in the next 25-30 years and if so should countries and donors have a strategy for it? And would such a direction also release the current resources of aid for global public goods too?

Read the whole post here http://www.globaldashboard.org/2011/10/13/what-is-catalytic-foreign-aid/  

Food banks can address urban food insecurity, but may not work where most needed

A recent paper, ‘Urban Food Insecurity and the Advent of Food Banking in Southern Africa’, published by the African Centre for Cities, examines the arrival of American-style food banking¹ in Southern Africa and its potential to “depoliticise” the problem of urban food insecurity. The author, Daniel Warshawsky, argues that in most African cities, there is sufficient food to feed everyone and considerable wastage of fresh and processed foodstuffs. Poor households are food insecure because they cannot afford to purchase enough quality food and are unable to access the surplus food that exists.

Food redistribution NGOs are well established in Southern Africa but more recently large centralized food banks have been advocated as a means to get surplus food to the hungry. In 2009, the first food banks opened in the South African cities of Cape Town, Johannesburg, Durban and Port Elizabeth. The South African model of food collection and distribution was developed in collaboration with American food bankers.

More food banks are planned for other South African cities. While food banking can offer temporary relief for the urban food insecure, they do not address the deeper, structural causes of food insecurity.

Warshawsky notes in his conclusion that Food Bank South Africa (FBSA) has ambitious plans to extend its operations outside the large metropolitan centres of South Africa. Even though food banks currently only exist in two African countries -- namely South Africa and Ghana -- it is likely that the food banking model will, over time, be advocated for other countries and cities in Southern Africa. Most of these countries also lack the state-funded social protection schemes that have grown rapidly in South Africa over the last decade. They do not have a well-developed private sector, especially among food manufacturers and retailers, which can sufficiently contribute to the food banking model which the Global FoodBanking

¹ A food bank or foodbank is a non-profit, charitable organization that distributes mostly donated food to a wide variety of agencies that in turn feed the hungry. The largest sources of food are for-profit growers, manufacturers, distributors and retailers who in the normal course of business have excess food that they cannot sell. After sorting and inventory, a food bank distributes the food to 100 to 1 000 non-profit community or government agencies, including but not limited to food pantries, soup kitchens, homeless shelters, orphanages, and schools.
Network and FoodBank South Africa espouse. As the North American model of food banking is dependent on ‘excess’ food and money from the corporate sector, it is unclear how the food banking schematic could operate at all in other Southern African countries. On the other hand, the rapid expansion of South African supermarkets and agri-food chains into the region could well provide some of the pre-conditions for an expansion of food banking regionally.

FoodBank South Africa was only able to form after national and local levels of governments committed money and political will to the broader aims of the food banking project. In comparison to South Africa, it seems unlikely that neighbouring countries have the institutional capacity to adequately support such a large-scale food banking model, especially with other urban crises, such as persistent poverty in informal settlements, high demand for social services, rapid in-migration, and the debilitating effects of HIV and AIDS. Overall, the North American food banking model has never been tested in a context outside upper and middle income countries. Thus, as low-income countries have the highest levels of food insecurity, it is exactly in these high-need locations where food banks may not work effectively.


ECONOMIC ISSUES

Governments urged to reduce the costs of formalisation for businesses and work

The latest Brenthurst Discussion Paper calls on Southern African governments to reduce the costs of formalisation for businesses and work. “Putting Young Africans to Work: Addressing Africa’s youth unemployment crisis” (pdf), draws on a series of Dialogues held earlier this year with the governments of Zambia, Mozambique and Swaziland. It argues that youth unemployment will only worsen unless an environment is fostered in which labour is more productive and opportunities for innovation and growth are created - largely by government setting the right conditions and then getting out of the way. “It is business, not government, that will put young Africans to work in sufficient numbers to turn the continent’s population time bomb into a demographic boon.”

The Dialogues were convened by The Brenthurst Foundation and comprised experts from the United States, Costa Rica, Argentina, the Ivory Coast and South Africa, all of whom contributed to the volume. Their contributions range from detailed entrepreneurial-led solutions, examples of best practice and initiatives from Latin America, technical proposals drawn from recent African experiences, and global trends in unemployment, economic growth and competitiveness.

Deal on 30% wage cut for new textile sector staff

Textile industry employers in Cape Town concluded a landmark deal on 5 October with a trade union. Employers will offer 30% lower wages to new employees, in an innovative bid to create more jobs and revive the fortunes of South Africa’s clothing sector. The agreement, billed as a ‘first of its kind’, was negotiated by employers and the Southern African Clothing and Textile Workers Union (Sactwu). It will be closely watched by supporters and critics of a similar youth-subsidy scheme being mooted across industries as a way to reduce youth unemployment. It could also boost the once-flourishing Cape garment industry, which has taken a beating from cheap Chinese imports.

Source: http://www.businessday.co.za/articles/Content.asp?id=155236

See also here for the National Employers Association of SA (Neasa) calling for a 50% cut in the minimum wage for entry-level jobs in the metal and engineering sector, in a bid to revive a key industry which has lost nearly 100 000 jobs since 2008.

Soweto’s small businesses struggle to survive

Only two out of five informal businesses started in Soweto were still in operation five years later, a survey released on 23 October has shown. “Business survival was particularly low among street vendors [hawkers] and home-based businesses,” said Professor André Ligthelm of the Bureau of Market Research of the University of South Africa.

A small business panel was selected in 2007 and was revisited each year until 2011 to study small business sustainability and mortality in Soweto, south of Johannesburg. The study found that over 60% of small businesses closed their doors during this period. At the same time, few new businesses opened in the study area leading to a net decline of almost 50% in small businesses. The study found that small informal businesses faced increasing competition as large shopping malls opened in response to the increased consumer expenditure by township residents in the past decade.

Large shopping malls had been developed, or were under construction or in
the planning phase in almost all township areas with sizeable population numbers. The small businesses most likely to survive operated from ‘old’ business centres where 55% were still going. They were followed by 33% of home-based businesses, such as spaza and tuck shops, and only 12% of street vendors.

Successful businesses appeared to be older and were established due to exploring a business opportunity, rather than as a response to unemployment. The owners were involved full-time and the businesses were more likely to be incorporated, a franchise or a multi-owned institution. They also employed more people and had a higher turnover. Above all, they implemented “typical entrepreneurial practices”, he said.

“This suggests that the impact of shopping mall development on small business survival cannot be explained unidimensionally, purely attributing a decline in small business activity to shopping mall development,” Ligthelm said.

Southern and East African countries have most economic complexity potential

Economists Ricardo Hausmann and César Hidalgo released their Atlas of Economic Complexity at the Harvard Center for International Development on 27 October. The 300-plus page atlas tells readers where their countries rank in terms of productivity - and, most astonishingly, where it will be in 10 years. The atlas starts with the idea that the wealth and potential of nations is derived from productive knowledge. To maximize collective knowledge, a nation needs to connect its individual citizens, each of whom can benefit the whole. The more complex and interconnected a nation, the greater its economic productivity and potential. The atlas visualizes the economic complexity of 128 countries and foresees the expected GDP growth for each between 2009 and 2020, using what Haussmann and Hidalgo call the Index of Economic Complexity.

Producing a wide variety of goods boosts a nation’s rank on the Economic Complexity Index (ECI) because it gives the country the potential to make even more (and more advanced) products. For example, a country that manufactures lithium batteries can soon expand into making computers, cell phones, or electric cars. By this measure, Uganda has the most potential of any country in the world, followed by Kenya, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, and Madagascar. The United States ranks at 88, comfortably mid-pack, but well-behind rival China at 20. This makes sense—the countries with the most potential are often ones that are starting from near the bottom in current GDP.

By using vibrant visualizations, Haussman hopes that the atlas will draw in investors, economists, governments, corporations, and the average reader. Each nation’s connectivity can be visualized on a complex and colourful web that links areas of production. The potential of the atlas lies in these connections: In just one glance, a reader can see the current areas of production and those within reach, thus understanding where potential investments or development efforts should focus.

Malawian agriculture calamity waiting to unfold

Malawian President Bingu wa Mutharika’s most ardent critics tend to agree that his first term — from 2004 to 2009 — was successful and that at the heart of this success was his expansion of the fertiliser subsidy programme (Fisp) in 2005, credited for transforming famine-prone Malawi into an exporter of maize. An average of 1.6-million smallholder farmers have received seed and fertiliser each year since then at nearly no cost to them. But this year was an annus horribilis compounded by chronic fuel and forex shortages and riots, in which 19 Malawian protesters died at the hands of state security forces, not to mention the expulsion of the United Kingdom’s ambassador, which triggered a Western aid freeze. Malawi’s President Bingu wa Mutharika’s government is struggling to keep its prize programme from turning into an albatross.

The executive director of the Malawi Economic Justice Network, Dalitso Kubalasa, explained the government’s woes in précis. “Fuel and fertiliser are scarce because the suppliers can’t get the forex needed to pay for the stuff. There’s no forex in Malawi’s banks because Malawi has allowed itself to become dependent on a single forex earner, tobacco, and the tobacco price slumped last year. The freeze in Western aid tied Malawi’s other hand, as it were,” he said.

Besides 100kg of fertiliser, every beneficiary of Fisp is also entitled to a 5kg bag of open-pollinated variety maize seed, a 7.5kg bag of hybrid maize seed and 2kg of legume seed (either bean, ground nut, soya bean or pigeon pea seed). But seed companies have not been immune to Malawi’s crises. “Last year, there was coupon fraud to the extent of MK900million [US$5.5million] and this mainly affected
Most governments are not investing sufficiently in the public goods required to catalyse broad-based agricultural growth

Massive shortage of long-distance transport north of South Africa

Result: national food production may be rising in some cases, but it is not resulting in broad-based income growth or poverty reduction.

See also ‘Conservation agriculture a possible way out for Malawi agriculture quandary’ in the Environmental Issues section

POLITICAL ISSUES

The role, and success, of International Organisations in Africa

The latest edition of the South African Journal of International Affairs (SAJJA) examines the role of international organisations in Africa and their success in providing a coherent and coordinated political, economic and social agenda to address the continent’s needs. As it stands, Africa has a vast number of regional economic communities (RECs) with overlapping membership and policy aims, as well as a continental body, the African Union. The interaction of these organisations with other global organisations such as the United Nations, the World Trade Organisation and the European Union (to mention a few), has wide-ranging implications for Africa and its people.

In this special issue on "International Organisations in Africa", SAJJA Volume 18 No.2, August 2011 brings together noted contributors who draw on empirical analysis in various policy areas including security, human rights, economics, food security and climate change. The journal articles are as follows:

- Overlap and interplay between international organisations: theories and approaches
- The regional roots of the African peace and security architecture: exploring centre-periphery relations
- Human rights in Africa: normative, institutional and functional complementarity and distinctiveness
- Regional economic integration in Africa: impediments to progress?

This article demonstrates how RECs in Africa...
are effectively hindering further economic integration at the continental level.

- **The International Food Safety Complex in Southern Africa: cooperation or competition?** This article presents a more cooperative narration of international organisations’ interplay and analyses the emergence and impact of the food safety complex in Southern Africa. It sketches out the different IO’s involved in the establishment of the food security complex and demonstrates how densely these institutions are interlinked.

- **Sustaining the African common position on climate change: international organisations, Africa and COP 17** This article analyses how regional overlap and nestedness is affecting the ability of Africans to formulate a common position in climate change negotiations. Abstracts of the articles can be found by clicking on the link above. Subscription is required to access complete articles in the journal, these can be requested by e-mailing Tanja@hichert.co.za

### SOCIAL ISSUES

**Majority of South Africa’s top earners believe in giving back to society**

New research into the ‘Top End’ of the South African market has revealed a vastly more diverse and complex group of consumers than previously assumed. The University of Cape Town’s (UCT) Unilever Institute of Strategic Marketing explored this seldom-surveyed sector of the local market, focussing on adults living in top end households earning over R30 000 a month (US$3 800) "With a statistically significant sample and numerous focus groups, our results have revealed a great deal about both attitudes and consumer behaviour of the country's highest earners,” says Emeritus Professor John Simpson, director of the institute.

Simpson refers to this segment as the backbone of the local economy. “We are not talking about the ‘super rich’ here, as they are only a tiny fraction of this 900 000-strong, mainly middle-class, group. We are talking about hard-working, productive citizens who comprise only 10% of the country's taxpayers, but account for half of the entire country’s taxable income.” Aside from their personal contribution to the tax base, they make a significant contribution through company and other taxes, as well as through social responsibility initiatives,” he adds.

The majority of these well-heeled South Africans believe in giving back to society. Two-thirds of respondents reported an obligation to “pay it forward” and cited 10% of one’s income as an appropriate amount to donate to worthy causes.

Source: [http://www.bizcommunity.com/Article/196/19/65374.html](http://www.bizcommunity.com/Article/196/19/65374.html)

Perhaps more creative and innovative ways can be found to channel the good intentions and beliefs of these ‘top earners’ - volunteering endeavours being one of them. According to research in the UK [http://blog.thefuturescompany.com/2011/10/27/getting-to-the-big-society/](http://blog.thefuturescompany.com/2011/10/27/getting-to-the-big-society/) typical barriers preventing societal involvement include: lack of time and energy, low levels of confidence, a fear of being excluded or not fitting in and perceptions of red tape. And, more than ever, there is a growing suspicion – even hostility – regarding the motives of ‘Government’.
Hormonal birth-control injections may double a woman's risk of contracting HIV

Hormonal birth-control injections, the most popular contraceptive used by women in Southern and Eastern Africa, may double a woman's risk of contracting HIV and passing it on to her partner, according to a new study recently published in *The Lancet*. The study followed about 3,800 heterosexual couples in seven African countries (Botswana, Kenya, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda and Zimbabwe) over about two years. The research comes at a time when many governments are looking to scale up their family-planning programmes in a bid to reduce maternal mortality. ‘Active promotion of DMPA [the injectable birth control] in areas with high HIV incidence could be contributing to the HIV epidemic in sub-Saharan Africa, which would be tragic’, said Charles Morrison, senior director for clinical sciences at Family Health International. ‘Conversely, limiting one of the most highly used effective methods of contraception in sub-Saharan Africa would probably contribute to increased maternal mortality and morbidity and more low birth-weight babies and orphans – an equally tragic result’. Source: [http://www.safaids.net/content/hormonal-contraception-and-hiv-weighing-evidence-and-balancing-risks](http://www.safaids.net/content/hormonal-contraception-and-hiv-weighing-evidence-and-balancing-risks)

### ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

The business case for mining whilst managing the environment

According to commentators and participants at a recent AngloGold Ashanti / Motjoli Resources Mining for Change workshop in Johannesburg, the development of green mining initiatives and more environment-friendly projects will become an increasingly economically viable option for the mining industry. While, initially, it may be costly to initiate or implement environmental programmes to comply with environmental legislation, the long-term benefits a mining company could reap by going ‘green’ could be a more viable option for the industry, they suggest. Pan-African Capital CE Dr Iraj Abedian advocated the concept of mining and managing the environment as a joint production activity that could dovetail with other pursuits like the agriculture and light industry.

According to Duane Newman, head of sustainability and climate change at Deloitte & Touche, high energy costs and pressures for sustainability are triggering environment-friendly mining, and companies are realising that their operations could be more viable if they were more environment friendly. This has resulted in some mining companies studying capital-intensive co-generation plant projects, which can be more cost effective in the long term, particularly if planned government policies come into play, such as increased tax breaks, incentives and carbon credit benefits. Renewable-energy generation can also be seen as another source of revenue for a mining company and becomes a commercial division for the company, harnessing wind, solar or biomass-produced energy.

Further, it is becoming difficult for mining companies to ignore or disregard regulations, as one is now seeing an integrated reporting journey in which the public and environmentalists demand one simpler, integrated report from organisations – combining the company’s financial results and historical information with reporting on its compliance with sustainability and environmental legislation. The more progressive companies are currently developing more transparent ways of reporting this information.

Meanwhile, Nedbank Capital joint head of resource finance Peter van Kerckhoven says mining companies are realising the positive impact environment-friendly mining has in terms of creating good relations in the community as well as stability. Van Kerckhoven says socio-economic, environmental and sustainability elements are interrelated; however, environmental challenges and solutions continue to become more important in the lives of mining companies. As mining companies are labour intensive and many are operating in rural communities, sound environmental practices and social upliftment initiatives are key to the sustainability of their own operations. However, Ernst and Young’s report, *Business risks facing mining and metals from 2011 to 2012*, points out that maintaining a social licence to operate has become a more significant risk to companies, listing at number four in the 2011 to 2012 top ten business risks list. Source: [http://www.miningweekly.com/article/green-mining-a-consequence-of-cost-effectiveness-and-sustainability-2011-10-21](http://www.miningweekly.com/article/green-mining-a-consequence-of-cost-effectiveness-and-sustainability-2011-10-21)
Alf Wills, South Africa’s lead negotiator, carries the strain of almost a decade of attending the annual climate talks, including the disastrous Copenhagen talks two years ago. However, he remains optimistic about progress. Wills said earlier this month that a likely outcome of the Durban negotiations would be a transitional regime to bridge the period until a new legally binding treaty takes effect. The first Kyoto commitment period expires at the end of next year.

Another option could be to move to the second period, with the European Union taking the brunt of the carbon caps. The Europeans are insisting that the United States would have to make comparable commitments. But Wills’s colleague, Environment Minister Edna Molewa’s adviser, Xolisa Ngwadla, said that there is a third option -- that no deal will be reached at all.

Source: http://mg.co.za/article/2011-10-14-cop17-deal-or-no/

South Africa needs to ensure a balanced approach to its roles as a negotiating party and as the president of COP 17. At a national government level, International Relations and Cooperation Minister Maite Nkoana-Mashabane is the COP 17 president, and her department would be handling the logistics arrangements of the conference, as well as facilitating a successful outcome at COP 17. The Department of Environmental Affairs would ensure that South Africa’s interests were properly represented at the negotiations. South Africa is also facing divergent expectations and needs from various groupings and was under significant pressure, according to Imbewu Sustainability Legal Specialist’s Dr Marie Parramon.

The country was part of official negotiating groups such as the African Union and the Group of 77, nonofficial negotiating groups such as the Basic (Brazil, South Africa, India and China) group of developing countries, as well as having strong economic relations through its Brics (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) grouping, and bilateral relations with China, the European Union and the US.

While government has stated that it would represent the ‘African position’ at the climate talks, Parramon said many argued that South Africa was not ‘faithful’ to this position. "South Africa must be careful of what it promises and what it delivers at the climate talks. This has to be the most politically loaded climate change conference and remains a strong challenge for the country," she said. The country must have the ability to adequately and efficiently manage its national and international agenda. "Even if the outcomes of COP 17 are

COP17: Deal or no deal? South Africa, as Chair, in a tenuous position

One month before the United Nations’ s big climate indaba, COP17, the hard-line stances of different economic blocs and countries are posing a threat to chances of a deal in Durban. Most analysts agree that a legally binding agreement is highly unlikely, but negotiators are pushing for clarity on a second commitment period for Kyoto and for global agreement on the need to push ahead with the process.

larger budget to develop socioeconomic and environmental projects and have an on-the-ground capacity to manage and implement the project. This is practically possible as illustrated by the following examples:

- Anglo American Thermal Coal’s R28.1 million (US$3.5 million) gypsum housing project, which was a joint winner in Nedbank Capital’s Green Mining Awards entails the use of gypsum waste products as building materials while the by-products from the gypsum baking process are potentially used in other applications, creating future business opportunities which are being explored.
- BHP Billiton Aluminium South Africa’s Ongoye Forest project involves restoring a 500 ha degraded and threatened forest and providing a sink for between 60 000 t and 125 000 t of carbon dioxide (CO2) over a 20-year period. The project has the potential, through the use of indigenous tree species, to promote ecological restoration, as well as conservation of medicinal plants.
- First Quantum Minerals’ Kansanshi Mining’s conservation farming project is aimed at conserving and rejuvenating soil, while simultaneously improving food security. It involves minimal soil disturbance, crop rotation and using crop residues to increase the humus layer of the soil. This project, started in 2010, has the potential to provide new sources of income for communities affected by mining activities, as well as to slow and possibly reverse deforestation.

To better understand the underlying importance of the mining industry for Southern Africa’s political economy, read this brilliant recent editorial by Peter Bruce, editor of the highly regarded Business Day. It starts of stating: President Jacob Zuma should, in one important way, try to emulate former US president Bill Clinton, who famously had a plaque on his desk. It read, "It’s the economy, stupid," so he never forgot what was important. Mr Zuma’s should read, "It’s the mines, stupid."
Conservation agriculture a possible way out for Malawi’s agriculture quandary

Foundations for Farming, a smallholder farmer outreach organisation started by Zimbabwean super-farmer Brian Oldreive, is one of several organisations in Malawi advocating a change in methodology from ridge planting to what is widely known as conservation agriculture. It is a startlingly simple system — one does not plough or hoe the land in advance of planting, instead covering the ground in a mulch of grass and twigs so that the soil retains moisture. The mulch also stifles the growth of weeds. When the time comes for planting, one simply scoops away the mulch at regular intervals, digs a series of shallow holes and drops in a few seeds. If a farmer is also taught composting techniques, or how to plant nitrogen-fixing plants such as Tephrosia vogelii, the system requires little in the way of chemical inputs.

The results can be spectacular. Joseph Chikopa, said he used to reap an average of three 50kg bags of maize a season when he planted on ridges. In contrast, during his first year of using a conservation agriculture methodology, he reaped 70 bags and was able to build himself a house with the profits. After some initial resistance — “the older farmers called what I was doing ‘lazy farming’ and said there was nothing a young man could teach them” — Chikopa’s continued success has fired a mini agri-revolution in his village, with 12 farmers now mulching their fields instead of hoeing them.

Malawi’s government is well aware of conservation agriculture’s virtues and has established a task force to promote the system. Earlier this year, 25 districts’ agriculture development officers were sent to the foundation for training. But as Malawian academic Henry Moza-Banda pointed out, conservation agriculture had been punt for more than a decade by the national extension programme and many other projects, without many smallholder farmers adopting the new practices.

Source: 

Some case study / research work like that advocated by Abhijit Banerjee and Esther Duflo could come in handy here in answering the question of ‘Why do more smallholder farmers in Malawi not adapt the conservation agriculture practices?’

TECHNOLOGY ISSUES

MXIT leads the social media charge in SA

Nearly a quarter of South Africa’s population actively uses the locally developed social network MXIT, while Facebook appears to be losing some of its early appeal as the youth turn to BlackBerry’s instant messaging service BBM instead. A study released recently by technology research organisation World Wide Worx and online reputation management group Fuseware, titled South African Social Media Landscape 2011, revealed that South Africans have embraced social media, with MXIT and Facebook well ahead in terms of users. However, Twitter showed a 20-fold increase to 1,1-million users in just over a year. LinkedIn, which targets professional users, also has 1,1-million users — 10% of whom are business owners.

MXIT remains the most popular site by far, with 10-million active users, according to the report, and most users are not teenagers, as is commonly believed. About 76% of male and 73% of female users are older than 18. According to Michal Wronski, MD of Fuseware, MXIT, Facebook and BBM illustrate that as social media networks become more mainstream, penetration within all age ranges deepens. “This, in turn, will result in the continual flattening of the age curve as social networks mature,” he said. South Africans’ growing ease with social media and the internet was also evident in a study released in May by World Wide Worx which showed SA’s online retail spending surpassed the R2-billion (US$260 million) mark last year — an increase of 30% over the previous year. Mr Goldstuck said last year that there were 3,6-million people who had been online for five years or more, and by 2015 the figure was expected to be 6,8-million.

Southern African social media, internet and mobile usage patterns and penetration DO NOT resemble those of the developed world, or for that matter other developing world regions. Something to keep in mind when considering it as a growth and development tool.

Internet Protocol (IP) traffic in South Africa is estimated to grow sevenfold from 2010 to 2015, representing a 46% compound annual growth rate. The statistics form part of the yearly Visual Networking Index Forecast for 2010 to 2015.


Mobile phone deployment creates SME business opportunities in Zimbabwe

A United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) report reveals that the rapid increase in mobile phone deployment in Zimbabwe has created business opportunities for small and medium-scale entrepreneurs in the country. 59% of Zimbabweans now have access to mobile phones compared with only about 5% in 2005.

Economic commentator Rejoice Ngwenya said that while many small-scale entrepreneurs are doing business over mobile phones, mobile service quality remain an issue. The report said that as mobile phones are the main ICT tool used by micro-enterprises and SMEs in low-income countries, these trends reinforce the likelihood that mobile networks will be their main way of accessing the Internet in the near future.


Solar-powered internet schools

Samsung Africa, part of the global electronics company, recently launched its “unique and world-first” Internet School – a mobile, solar-powered, independent classroom in a container -- at its Electronics and Engineering Academy in Gauteng, South Africa. Deon Liebenberg, Samsung managing director of Electronics in Africa, said the education initiative is part of their objective to increase access and connectivity across Africa, targeting specifically remote rural areas.

“Electricity remains Africa’s largest economic challenge with the level of penetration lower than 25% in most rural areas,” he said. "This lack of power isolates communities and limits their access to education and information, both of which are key to fast-tracking a nation’s development.”

The 12m-long shipping container can accommodate 21 learners and a teacher. Its ventilation system is designed to maintain a ‘temperate environment’. The server is loaded with school-based content for grades 0 to 12. Thierry Boulanger, who deals with IT solutions at Samsung, said the classroom is easy to transport to remote areas via truck. It has been customised for “energy-scarce environments” where weather conditions are often harsh. He added that it can also be transported over long distances.

Boulanger said fold-away solar panels provide sufficient energy to sustain the classroom equipment for up to nine hours a day and for one and half days without any sunlight. Care has also been taken in selecting the materials used to make the panels. For instance, rubber has been used instead of glass to make sure the panels are hardy and durable enough to withstand wear and tear as well as lengthy travel across the continent.

The classroom boasts a number of other technological gadgets that should make learning a stimulating and pleasurable experience. The classroom is fitted with a 50-inch electronic E-board and a variety of Samsung Notebooks and Netbooks, including solar-powered netbooks and Galaxy Tablets to facilitate interface between teachers and learners. The classroom is also equipped with an energy-efficient refrigerator, a file server, router, uninterruptted power supply, video camera and wi-fi camera, all of which communicate via 3G.

Samsung’s Ntutule Tshenyel explained that they are working with Teach SA to provide technical and pedagogical training to teachers on how best to tap into the power of technology. Other strategic partners include Microsoft, Learn Things and the Nelson Mandela Foundation, he added. Katlehong Technical High School will be used to pilot the project, after which it will be taken to Qunu in the Eastern Cape and then to other areas.