



150-million

That's how many more people could be fed worldwide by improving small farmers' (mostly women's) access to fertilisers, says the World Bank

Better small-scale farming is key to growth

Empowering Africa's farmers, especially women, could be a game-changer for the continent



SEELAN GOBALSAMY

Visiting Singapore for the International Fertiliser Association (IFA) conference, I couldn't help but be inspired by this wealthy city state: in a matter of decades it progressed from being impoverished and underdeveloped to being one of the world's most prosperous nations. It's a journey that holds many lessons for Africa, a journey the continent has started but must accelerate if we are to reach our full potential.

In the 1950s, hunger, the threat of famine and rampant poverty characterised many Asian countries. GDP per capita was less than \$100 in virtually all countries in the region. Six decades later, while these countries are clearly at different stages of economic development, the spectre of famine has receded, with most Asian countries having achieved food security, improved development and made massive reductions in poverty. Some, like Singapore, have long since reached developed country status.

What was famous at the time, but is less apparent today, is how transforming their agriculture and food systems was an integral part of Asia's economic development. This was the so-called "green revolution" – when improvements to crop varieties planted, mechanisation, fertiliser, irrigation and other modern farming practices massively increased crop yields. What this demonstrates is that within a few generations you can conquer mass food insecurity and enable more farmers to generate commercial surpluses, which can ultimately lead to greater development. We



The World Bank estimates that improving women's access to fertilisers could potentially feed an additional 150-million people and help raise total agricultural output in developing countries by 2.5%-4%, says the writer. Picture: Alon Skuy

have learnt a lot since then about how to increase yields more sustainably.

It is why what we do in the fertiliser business matters: there is no empowerment, no development, when people are hungry. As the International Food Policy Research Institute put it some years back: "Food security brings economic growth – not the other way around." Let's also think of who is disproportionately affected by this dynamic. According to an Oxfam report, small-scale farmers, 70% of whom are women, are responsible for about 90% of the food produced in some African countries. This rings true for what I see in our own markets.

The point I discussed with industry colleagues in Singapore was that women are central to Africa's food security. In Sub-Saharan Africa they are at the centre of small farming and food production. If you make a difference to agriculture – and fertiliser is one input that does this – you make a difference to millions of women and everyone who relies on them.

Research bears this out. In 2023 the Food

and Agriculture Organisation report "The status of women in agrifood systems" showed that increasing women's empowerment and gender equality in these systems has the knock-on effect of

enhancing women's wellbeing and the wellbeing of their households, creating opportunities for economic growth, greater incomes, productivity and resilience. The World Bank estimates that by improving

women's access to fertilisers we can potentially feed an additional 150-million people and help raise total agricultural output in developing countries by 2.5%-4%.

So I believe we should talk more about how successful farming is a key to empowering all farmers, but especially women, on the continent: how better plant varieties, fertilisers, irrigation, farming practices, processing and logistics can bring a "green revolution" to Africa as it did to Asia. I see this at Omnia because that's what our products aim to do – provide farmers with a total crop management process that increases yield, reduces risk and increases the farmer's return on investment.

To develop agriculture properly you can't just drop off a bag of fertiliser and leave – you need a systemic approach.

Food security frees women – and indeed, everyone – to gain an education and ultimately the opportunity to pursue any career, whether in agriculture or not. I think it is fair to say that in many Asian countries it is the children and grandchildren of those successful women farmers who now have the opportunity to succeed in business and government. And here my industry has a different role to play. When I looked around at my colleagues in Singapore, I saw an industry of top leadership that was overwhelmingly male. Uncomfortably so. This needs to change.

So what can the industry do to become more diverse and inclusive? Right now, men in the industry – and this is a global phenomenon – dominate the top layer of companies. We need to create a pipeline of talented women. We need to deliberately seek out and sponsor this – it is the right

thing to do.

Alzbeta Klein, CEO of IFA, emphasises that agriculture is the largest employment sector for 80% of women in the world's least developed countries. However, she highlights a stark contrast: women have access to only a fraction of the land, labour, credit, inputs such as fertilisers, agricultural training, information and technology compared to men. This underscores the importance of ensuring equitable access to fertilisers, technology and innovation for women farmers – especially smallholders – in developing countries. Klein calls on policymakers and planners globally to prioritise gender-sensitive strategies to achieve this objective.

Corporate cultures must change too; consciously so. Some simple strategies include creating a pipeline of future leaders from talented existing female staff members.

Develop people, give them opportunities for advancement and, crucially, make sure they have mentors and allies. Ensure that women have a voice. Implement female-friendly policies that help women to stay on track with their career goals.

We are of the strong belief that the fertiliser industry's impact extends beyond its immediate products. It contributes to food security, education, career opportunities and significant economic growth. By bridging agricultural knowledge with tertiary education, we empower individuals to thrive both in the field and in corporate settings. That is why what we do in the fertiliser industry has meaning beyond chemicals and sales.

* Gobalsamy is group CEO of Omnia

True leadership is characterised by freedom



ROBIN WHEELER

Leadership is one of the most studied areas in business and, as such, reasonably straightforward to emulate, assuming flair, fortitude, a degree of intelligence, an edge of experience and an element of mentorship. You can get postgraduate qualifications in the subject, work your way up the corporate ladder, gather feedback from those around you, keep learning steadily and call yourself a leader with no doubt. But that falls in the middle of The Bell Curve and is characterised by constraint.

True leadership is to the right of the graph, in the 95th or even the 99th percentile, perhaps defying the data altogether, and, it is characterised by freedom. If you are not free, you may be rallying troops or raking in revenue, but you are not serving the highest value. The truth is essential – otherwise, to where are you taking people?

A true leader does things on their own terms using their best intelligence. They have to, both subjectively and socially. They are driven by inner knowing aligned with outer vision, and conformity may not fit that. They trust the whole and they trust themselves, sometimes at the expense of short-term acceptance, until new ground is broken and respect catches up.

It's a calling and a unique insight, combined with unusual commitment. It occupies an increasingly singular space, and sometimes persists against all odds. Thus, it becomes softer, stronger. Leaders personify a rare dignity, which is often

misunderstood, but then the world gets them and they become heroes.

General leadership means conformity, albeit at a high level of complexity. A practitioner is contained by context, which can, in turn, be part of their strength and impact. A free leader does things as they see fit, which is how they bring something new into being, ultimately elevating others into awareness and innovation.

This also comes in its own time. You can't rush a poet or the process. A true leader is more of an artist than someone modelled on the military, an outlier or even outlaw rather than a model citizen. They go at their own pace, which is endogenously determined and then refined by insight and hard-won clarity. This may make all the difference when it counts the most.

I've often said the wise man doesn't go to the king, the king goes to the wise man. He may wait until three in the morning and do so in disguise on someone else's horse, but he rides out of town to where the answers lie, with the free agent who has paid the price for autonomy. The true leader is more of a mischievous master, whose spiritual wealth and artistic way are priceless.

Leading happens out on the edge of life where there is no precedent or preceptor, and there is sometimes no immediate sense of leading. It might be a plight handled in solitude and, in that, the creation of pure awareness, possibility and vision. This might be a matter of leveraging presence out of pressure, harmony out of discord, and sight beyond the collective consciousness.

Leaders bring stability or change, and true leaders bring transformation. One is a variation on the known and the other comes from the unknown. Where you place yourself is your business and where you fit best is where you are meant to be, but every organisation needs a true leader in town, or innovatively on the edge of it.

* Wheeler develops leaders through talks, projects and books

ADVERTORIAL

Community schemes in South Africa reflect a growing demographic diversity which calls for far more reflection in broader nation building imperatives

Community Schemes Ombudsman Services (CSOS) is an agency of the Department of Human Settlements, with a mandate to provide the following:

- Provide an alternative dispute resolution service within the community schemes;
- Regulate, monitor and quality assure all community schemes governance documentation;
- Provide training for conciliators, adjudicators and other employees of the CSOS; and
- Therefore the custodians of schemes governance documentation.
- Promote good governance of community schemes;
- Provide education, information, documentation and other such services as may be required to raise awareness to owners, occupiers, executive committees and other persons or entities who have rights and obligations in community schemes, as regards those rights and obligations;
- Deal with any matters as may be necessary to give effect to the objectives of this CSOS Act.

South Africa has a history of human settlements that were built on segregated communities, with lesser affluent citizens living in community schemes, in other words majority of South African citizens have not lived and participated in affairs of such shared living arrangements in their numbers before.

Today, community schemes have diverse ownership demographics. Majority of owners are between 35 and 55 years old. Younger owners (25-34) are increasing, driven by first-time buyers. Older owners (56+) often downsize or invest in sectional titles.

In terms of Gender, Female owners constitute between 45% and 50%, and the number of female sole owners and co-owners is increasing rapidly.

The demographics vary where race is concerned, depending on location and scheme type. Historically, sectional titles were more popular among white owners. Lately, there is an increasing diversity, with growing numbers of black, Indian, and coloured owners entering the market.

Middle to upper-middle-class owners dominate community schemes. Average household income is between R500,000 and R1,500,000 per annum.

In terms of Occupation, Professionals (managers, lawyers, doctors, etc.) constitute between 25% and 30%, Entrepreneurs and business owners are between 20% and 25%, while Retirees and pensioners constitute 15-20%.

Around 15% to 20% of the South African population (approximately nine to twelve million people) are estimated to be living in community and/or sectional title schemes.

The racial breakdown of community schemes residents in South Africa is difficult to determine with precision, as there is no centralized database. However, based on industry reports and statistics, between 70% and 80% of sectional title residents

Lesiba Seshoka
Corporate Affairs Executive at CSOS

are white, with the remainder black. When it comes to community schemes, the percentage of white residents is slightly lower, between 50% and 60%. Worth keeping in mind when processing these patterns, is the fact that 81% of the South African population is black.

The main reason why community schemes developments do not perfectly reflect the national demographics is that they are often influenced by factors like affordability, location, and historical development patterns.

However, with a growing economy and equalised forms of competition for personal growth there is more individuals of African communities who are entering the schemes market for residential living and property ownership. There is far more dialogues required for South Africans from different demographics to engage in cultural inclusion and have these cultural values engraved in the new governing rules of schemes.

Further to that, issues of transformation in the value chain of the suppliers of communities schemes, such as managing agents, facility managers, gardening and maintenance, security, internet provision etc, needs to take into cognisance the need for South Africa to build an inclusive and diverse economy, therefore needing to embark on economic transformation initiatives.

Article Written by Lesiba Seshoka
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CSOS is hosting the second Indaba this year in Polokwane on the following details:

Venue: Bolivia Lodge, Polokwane, Limpopo
Date: 12-13 September 2024
Time: 09:00-17:00
For registration and more information please visit:
<https://csosindaba.com/>

Community Schemes Ombud Service