

Full house for first BASA 2014 Africa Breakfast

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Business and Arts South Africa's 2014 Africa Breakfast series got underway on Tuesday with a trio of fascinating, diverse presentations.



Sponsored by Standard Bank, the event took place at the Gordon Institute of Business (GIBS) in Johannesburg and was attended by business people, ready to hear different insights into working on the continent.

"Standard Bank group is a proud sponsor of the arts and is now pleased to be extending its support to the BASA Africa breakfast sessions. Africa is key to our business strategy and therefore a perfect fit."

After a welcome by new BASA board director, Herman Bosman, GIBS senior researcher, Lisa Brown, outlined the GIBS Dynamic Market Index (DMI) 2014.

"It's said that when the tide goes out, it remains to be seen who is left with their trousers on," Brown said of the picture presented by the recently-released DMI.

A tool that measures the performance and progressive change of the institutional structure and economic capabilities of countries, Brown revealed that the DMI is built around six enabling pillars of market dynamism - Open and Connectedness; Red Tape; Socio-Political stability; Macroeconomic Management and Human Capital.

Conducted across 133 countries between 2006 and 2012, the tool showed that Dynamic Markets are those characterised by increased innovation, progressive and stable political systems and sustainable economic development. Looking specifically at Africa, the DMI revealed that Kenya and Nigeria had fallen into the Adynamic category because of conflict and the threat of conflict during the period under study, while Botswana and Mauritius fell into the Dynamic category.

"The results do support the Africa Rising story," Brown said.

A more emotional account of working in Africa was given by multiple award-winning jazz musician, Kesivan Naidoo, who said that the arts enabled people to find out what they have in common.

To support this Naidoo spoke about a trip to Nigeria, Kenya and Ghana that came in the wake of being named the Standard Bank Young Jazz Artist of the Year for 2009. "I saw that people can identify with culture on many different levels. As musicians you meet people you don't know, people whose language you don't understand but you have to make it work. If

you don't, the music folds and no-one has a good time."

Naidoo said if there was any lesson business could learn from music it was how to bend the rules. "With jazz you can divert from the melody but you have to know the rules in order to break them. I think business can take something from that," the jazz drummer said.

The final speaker was Praekelt Group's Gustav Praekelt who built his presentation around illustrating how people in Africa use mobile devices to connect with each other and do new things.

"Every person in South Africa has a mobile phone", Praekelt noted. "We have 47 million people and 52 million active simcards so there is obviously something interesting going on. This is the fastest distribution or penetration of any kind of new technology ever."

For Praekelt, the important thing is what you can do with this amazing network. "There are obviously still huge problems in South Africa, around service delivery and governance and institutions, but somehow we have got one thing right - we can connect to every single person."

Praekelt used examples from both the for-profit Praekelt Consulting and not-for-profit Praekelt Foundation to illustrate the power of mobile connectivity.

One of these was the Guinness Football Manager, a fantasy football league that used simple SMS user interaction. With the game not dependent on a smart phone, over 700,000 people in Nigeria have signed up to the league. Another was a project that Praekelt Foundation is working on with Wikipedia to significantly increase the number of African users of the service without reliance on data connectivity. Wikipedia Text uses USSD technology to deliver the entire Wikipedia to any phone, even the most simple. "Having access to Wikipedia should be a universal right," Praekelt concluded.

Look out for the next BASA 2014 Africa Business breakfast, supported by Standard Bank.

About BASA (NPC):

Business and Arts South Africa is an internationally recognised development agency which incorporates the arts into, and contributes to, corporates' commercial success. With a suite of integrated programmes, Business and Arts South Africa encourages mutually beneficial partnerships between business and the arts in order to grow SHARED VALUE. Business and Arts South Africa was founded in 1997 as a joint initiative of the Department of Arts and Culture the business sector, as a public/private partnership. Business and Arts South Africa celebrates 20 years of Freedom.

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