

Bill Turner's Speech Notes for "Bread from Stones" Breakfast  
Co-hosted by  
The Crawford Fund and Australia-Africa Mining Industry Group ("AAMIG")  
at Origins Restaurant, Pan Pacific Hotel  
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Good morning everyone. I have been asked to talk about:

**"Why Australian mining companies in Africa, should care about agriculture".**

Perhaps a little scenario setting is appropriate to start with.

When senior executives of exploration and mining companies in Africa think about delivering on their social responsibilities, they naturally gravitate towards **health, education and infrastructure** issues.

They build roads and bridges for access, put in water wells for potable water, establish clinics at mine sites to support their workers, and build schools for the children of their workers.

They may also begin a small vegetable garden to supply the mine kitchen. However, when it comes to the issue of **bulk food supply**, mining companies more often than not, look to **external procurement**.

Furthermore, the broader issue of **"food security"** usually does not rank at all, because there are so many other more urgent competing social issues demanding attention.

Another reason food security does not rank, is that **farming** is **not a core skill** of engineers and construction people involved in mine development work.

They also tend, not to enquire about local agricultural expertise, which more often than not, is substantial.

The African Development Bank's Quarterly Bulletin in July last year, reported on the **food security** situation in Africa. It found that 28 out of the 35 countries around the world, requiring external assistance in 2012, were located on the African continent.

They also reported that **rural productivity** in Sub-Saharan Africa ranks among the lowest in the world.

Looked at slightly differently, the gap between what SSA is currently producing, and what it could be producing in agriculture, is perhaps the biggest gap (but **also** the biggest opportunity) of any region in the world.

The lack of **agricultural productivity** is caused by a broad spectrum of factors, which include:

- Extreme and erratic climatic conditions,
- The persistence of traditional methods of subsistence farming rather than using high-tech inputs, and modern methods, **and**
- Low investment in rural infrastructure.

amongst of course, other factors.

The broader issue of **food security** is further complicated by:

- effects of conflict, which often result in massive migrations of displaced people,
- pattern of trade where cash crops are exported and more costly manufactured food products are imported, and
- disconnected state of much of the continent's infrastructure network – the lack of much needed “food corridors” (to transfer food from more productive areas to less productive areas).

These and other factors constrain large-scale agricultural productivity and prevent small-holders (many of whom are women) from transitioning from **self-sufficiency** to **commercial farming**, as a means of exiting poverty.

However, although the continent may be described as having a chronic food deficit, more than 85% of the **rural poor**, live on land that has medium to high potential, for increased productivity. If harnessed properly, this untapped potential could make a significant contribution to alleviating the chronic food security problem.

It is interesting to note, the significant changes that have taken place with approaches to AID programs and social development work in general, in impoverished parts of the world, in recent years.

There has been a move away from a “hand out” approach to a “helping hand up” approach, as well as a move away from inadvertently creating a “sense of dependency”, and more towards a strong “sense of ownership, empowerment and self-reliance”.

### **Now why should the mining industry get more involved in agriculture?**

The mining industry is often located in remote areas, and is therefore very well positioned geographically to contribute to improving agricultural capacity. It is also better understood that it is “capacity building” and “trade”, rather than AID, which will lift the poorer African nations out of poverty.

Although the mining industry is often actively involved in social development programs and capacity building efforts, considerably more could be done in the area of **agricultural production** and **food security**.

With this in mind, the Australia-Africa Mining Industry Group (AAMIG), which I am speaking on behalf of here this morning, recently signed a MOU with **AGWEST Food Security** (part of the West Australian Department of Agriculture and Food).

The purpose of signing this agreement is:

- To **improve the cooperation**, and **access the synergies**, between the WA **mining** and **agricultural** sectors, (both of which are world class),
- To make available, a ready **pool of experience** and **expertise** to assist in designing and implementing agricultural initiatives, in the context of the social development programs, of our mining companies, and
- To achieve improved outcomes in Africa, with respect to achieving **food security**, even if it is initially, only in the vicinity of specific mining operations.

We thank **Mar Hube** Manager International Projects at AGWEST for promoting this initiative together with Trish O'Reilly AAMIG's CEO; and Director-General, **Rob Delane** for his support of the initiative.

It is the nature of mining that resources are finite and at some time a mine will ultimately close.

One of the most impressive legacies, a mining company can leave behind following a mine closure, is a local community with a **productive agricultural capacity**; one that is run on **commercial basis**, rather than **subsistence farming**, and one that is **sustainable**.

This is the kind of result that contributes to making a mining company a **Partner of Choice** and an **Employer of Choice** and helps build a truly **competitive advantage**. It is expected that mining companies will see the "value creating" aspects of this engagement with AGWEST.

As mentioned earlier, more than 85% of the **rural poor**, live on land, that has medium to high potential, for increased agricultural productivity.

This represents a significant and attractive opportunity for the mining industry **to do good**, in addition **to doing well**, and we look forward to the involvement of AGWEST Food Security in assisting the mining industry to deliver improved agricultural outcomes, in their **future social development endeavours** on the African continent.

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