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# ICT access still a major challenge in rural areas

Rural areas in the country lags behind with regard to ICT access and in terms of economic development, such as literacy, computer skills and higher income. *Moses Sithole and colleagues\** report on a survey to measure ICT use in South Africa.

To understand the benefits ordinary South Africans could derive from having increased access to ICT, data from the annual South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) from 2003 to 2009 was analysed. The objective was to specifically measure whether there had been an increase in access to ICT in rural South Africa compared to urban areas. The SASAS survey is a national representative survey of adults aged 16 and older, regardless of their nationality or citizenship. Respondents were asked to indicate whether they had access to a range of ICT platforms such as a landline telephone, a computer, the internet, a television, radio and cellphone.

### Access to a computer and internet use

Analysing the overall access to a computer and the internet showed a steady increase from 2003 to 2006 in all provinces (Figure 1 and 2). As for computer access, there was a decline between 2006 and 2007, but that was followed by another steady increase up to 2009.

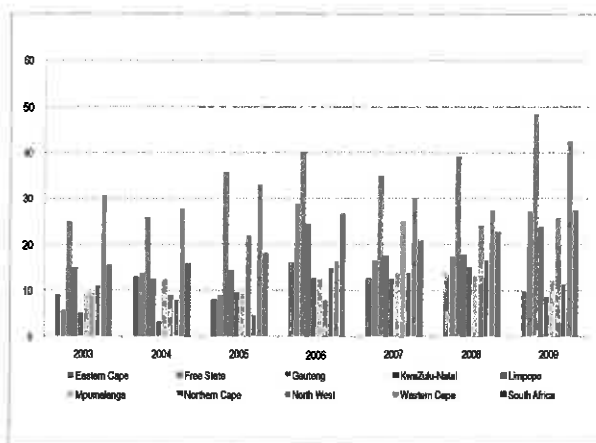
Gauteng had the highest computer access in 2009 (approximately 48%), followed by the Western Cape (almost 43%), the Free State (about 27%) and the Northern Cape (almost 26%). KwaZulu-Natal recorded considerable levels of access (almost 24%). All other provinces reported less than 13% access to computers.

Although the general pattern was obtained for both computer and internet access, the results showed that internet access in 2006 – the latest available year of data (WC, 37%; Gauteng, 28%; Free State, 24%; and KZN, 18%) – was generally lower than access to computers.

### The findings of this study indicate lower ICT access by the rural population

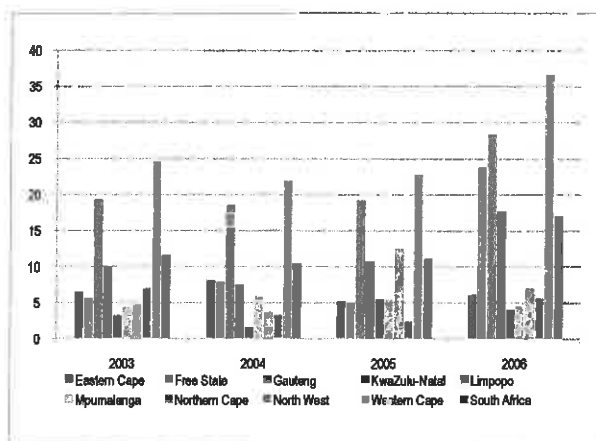
compared to the urban population of South Africa, and therefore, a possible shortfall in the implementation of the country's strategies for ICT spread to rural areas.

Figure 1: Trends in computer access by province (percentages of individuals aged 16+)



Source: SASAS

Figure 2: Trends in internet access by province (percentages of individuals aged 16+)



Source: SASAS

### Types of internet use

From the survey it was clear that the rural population made less use of the internet than city dwellers. While the internet was mainly used for information purposes in urban areas in 2003 and 2004, interestingly, in 2005 it was mainly used for entertainment.

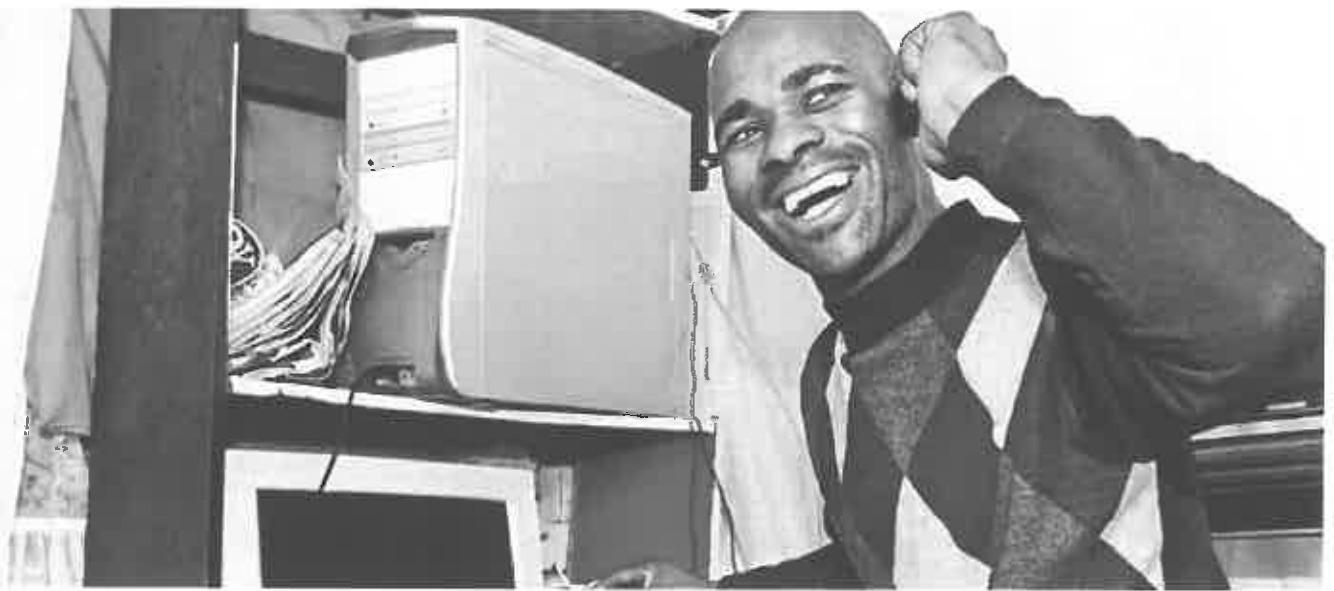
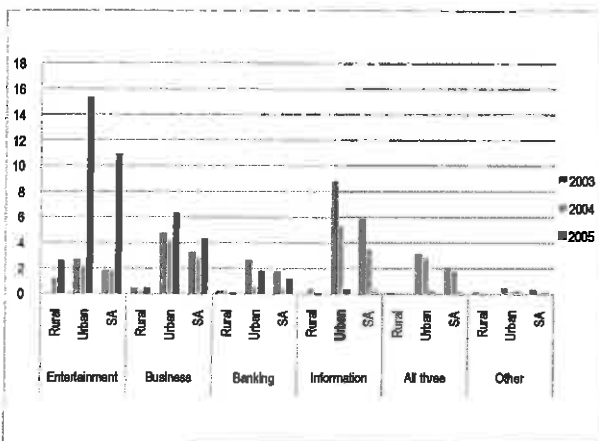


Figure 3: Trends in the internet usage types by urban or rural location (percentages of internet users aged 16+)

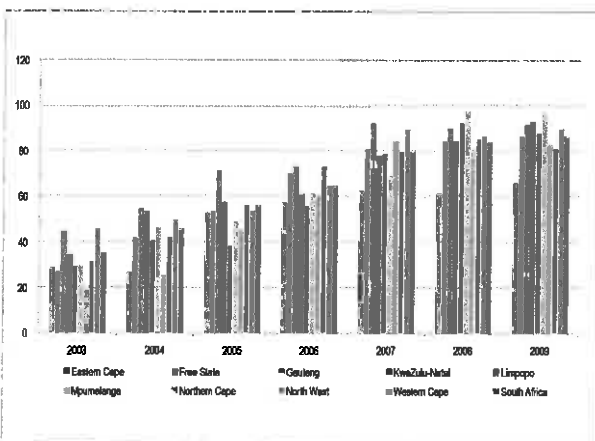


Source: SASAS

### Landline telephone and cellphone access

In general, cellphones were more accessible than landline phones, showing a steady decline from 2003 to 2008, followed by an increase in 2009. As with the internet, the respondents in the Western Cape were the highest users of telephones, followed by those in Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal and the Northern Cape, compared to the other provinces.

Figure 4: Trends in cellphone access at home by province (percentages of individuals aged 16+)



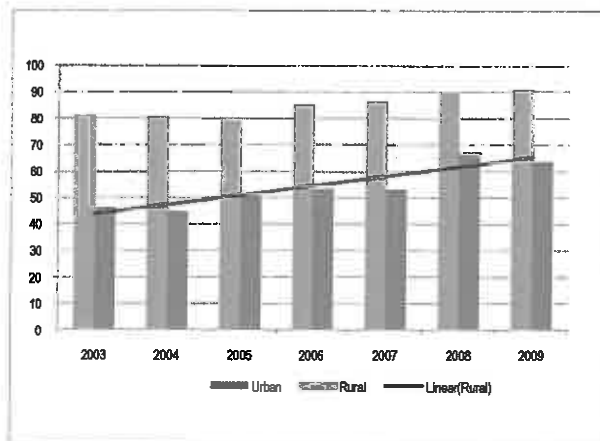
Source: SASAS

Figure 4 shows the high increase in access to cellphones and an apparent saturation point by 2009 in all the provinces, except in the Eastern Cape. Although Gauteng and the Western Cape once again dominated cellphone access initially, the other provinces had almost caught up by 2008. It was also found that cellphone access was generally higher than computer and internet access.

### Radio and television access

Unsurprisingly, there were very minor disparities between rural and urban access to radio (approximately 66% rural and 76% urban access in 2009), whereas there were much larger differences in television access (almost 64% rural and 91% urban access in 2009), as demonstrated in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Trends in television access by rural or urban location (percentages of individuals aged 16+)



Source: SASAS



**There is already good cellphone and fair radio and television access in rural areas. These cornerstone mediums can be employed immediately in rural areas for information sharing, and further developed as tools of poverty alleviation.**

**Conclusion**

Most developed economies have very good ICT infrastructure, suggesting that ICT platforms provide a foundation for, and contribute to, development. In some urban areas, South Africa's ICT infrastructure is good, but the opposite is true for most rural areas.

The findings of this study and others indicate lower ICT access by the rural population compared to the urban population of South Africa and therefore, a possible shortfall in the implementation of the country's strategies for ICT spread to rural areas. A useful concept of the Knowledge Economy Model, adopted by the Department of Science and Technology, is to involve the private sector in the provision of necessary knowledge infrastructure and services. ICT distribution to rural areas could be enabled by such a strategy and this could in turn lead to poverty alleviation in rural areas.

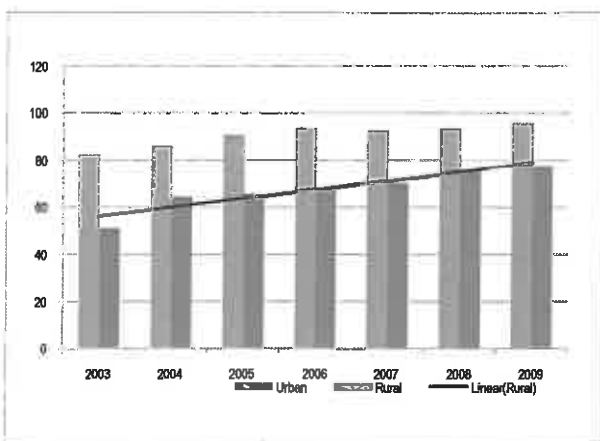
There is already good cellphone and fair radio and television access in rural areas. These cornerstone mediums can be employed immediately in rural areas for information sharing, and further developed as tools of poverty alleviation, for example, through sharing health information, e-learning at schools or enabling economic activity through cellphone banking.

Simple solutions that are durable, adaptable and easily maintained are most likely to succeed initially. Education, skills, capital equipment and infrastructure are needed for this ICT diffusion to succeed optimally. For example, schools need computers, as well as the means to keep this equipment safe, properly maintained and connected. ■

**Comparison between digital and selected other media**

An analysis of selected other media showed that access to the various types of media were lower in rural areas compared to urban areas. An important factor in this respect was rural access to the electricity grid, which grew notably from approximately 51% in 2003 to 78% in 2009 (Figure 6). Access to DVD players or video cassette recorders (VCRs) increased rapidly in the rural areas from approximately 6% in 2004 to about 44% in 2009, at which point urban access stood at almost 79%. Although access to satellite/pay TV grew in rural areas during this period, the growth was marginal and the access levels remained low.

Figure 6: Trends in electricity access by rural or urban location (percentages of individuals aged 16+)



Source: SASAS

*\*Authors: Dr Moses Mefika Sithole, chief research specialist; Cheryl Moses, senior researcher; Dr Derek Davids, senior research specialist; Saahier Parker and Julian Rumbelow, senior researchers; Dr Neo Molotja, senior research specialist; Professor Demetre Labadarios, executive director of the Population Health, Health Systems and Innovation programme and acting head of the Centre for Science, Technology and Innovation Indicators (CeSTII), HSRC. Dr Davids is in the Democracy, Governance and Service Delivery programme, HSRC. All the other authors are in CeSTII, HSRC.*

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# REVIEW

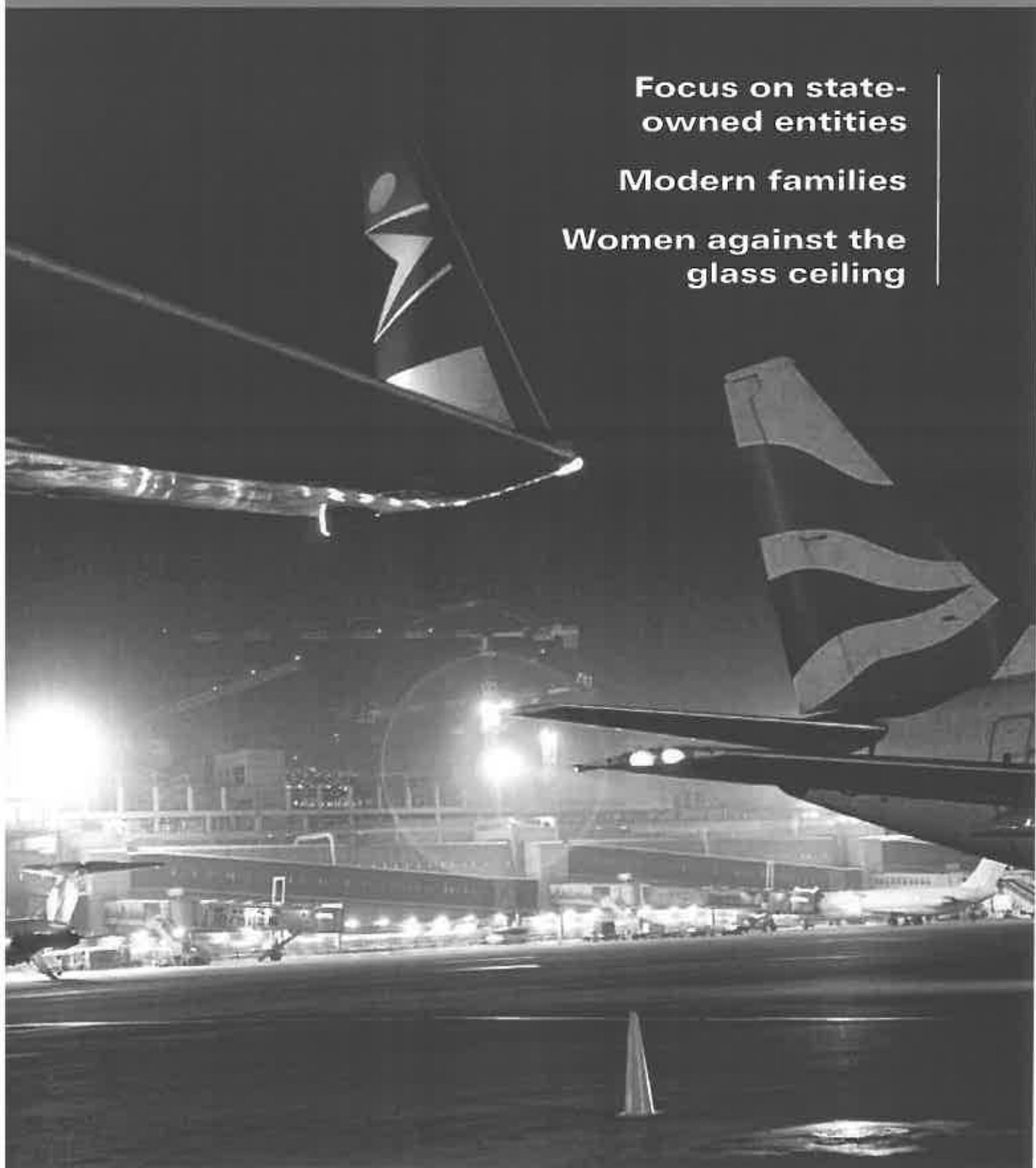
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**Focus on state-  
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**Women against the  
glass ceiling**





# Understanding the scourge of corruption

In 1983 I was with my family in Buea, Cameroon – waiting in a long line for my turn to buy stamps at a post office. Someone shouted that if he were in Lagos, Nigeria, he could have waved his 10 nairas at the man behind the counter and would have been allowed to jump the queue and get his stamps immediately. We all laughed, and I said South Africans were lucky because corruption had not reached the level where it hampered people's daily living...

That was the memory I had before I left for exile in 1975. Perhaps I was naïve and idealistic in my youthful days, thinking we were a different breed and had strong ethics as a people. The 2013 Transparency International Global Corruption Barometer reminded us that we were in fact no different to the 36 other countries that believed that the police were corrupt. While almost half (47%) of South Africans paid a bribe in the past year, 36% of urban-based South Africans admitted to bribing a police officer!

The public can only try to bribe the police if it believes they will take the bait. Yes, the public definitely believes the police are corrupt. It has become common for some members of the public to bribe their way out of acts of lawlessness such as drinking and driving, driving without a licence and other serious criminal acts involving the loss of dockets and important evidence in order for the perpetrator to walk free. The media is certainly full of anecdotal stories of police demanding bribes from drug dealers and illegal shebeen owners to turn a blind eye.

In the 2012 June edition of the HSRC Review, Steven Gordon, Ben Roberts, Jarè Struwig and Siphesihle Dumisa published findings from the South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS), showing that 66% of the population perceived people working for the South African Police Service to be corrupt. Without enablers, police could not perpetuate corrupt practices. In this case, the environment seemed to promote corrupt activities. With regard to the reasons offered as to why corruption existed, these scientists found, inter alia, that the public believed that:

- The executive and parliament did not do enough to fight corruption (63%);
- Corrupt people got away easily because the judiciary did not impose appropriate sentences or prosecute the perpetrators (33%); and
- They, as the public, had come to accept corruption as a reality (28%).

Of all issues related to rampant corruption in South Africa, the one that is most concerning is the public acceptance that corruption is a way of life. This is a sign that it will be very difficult to root it out if allowed to permeate all facets of life. Socially aberrant behaviours thrive in environments where there are enough people who share the same perspective. Corrupt people do not operate alone. They exist within our communities; they are all around us: in the families, workplaces, places of worship etc. all around us.

While there are increasing concerns about corruption, there is also a glimmer of hope. The 2013 SASAS survey showed that 94% of the South African population perceived corruption as a major problem, which means that the majority of South Africans do not support this behaviour. However, the challenge remains that the 36% of urban residents who bribed the police officers are also inclined to perceive corruption as a problem, while their behaviour serves to exacerbate levels of corruption. These findings suggest a need for social scientists to investigate the reason for this cognitive dissonance. It is time that social scientists go back to social experimental studies to understand this phenomenon of corruption; to understand the ethical, social and economic determinants in order to devise strategies to end it before it is too late.

Dr Olive Shisana  
CEO HSRC

## Contents

News roundup	1
Assessing cognitive functions in children	4
African scholars finding their voices	6
Landscape of the true extent of state-owned entities	8
Family matters	11
ICT access still a major challenge in rural areas	14
Family ties	17
Releasing the transformative power of urbanisation	20
The impact of social policies on the welfare of women and children	22
Women leaders in the workplace	24
Tackling plagiarism at university level	26

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