

On a continent plagued by droughts and floods, an unremarked revolution is under way in the arid Southern Province of Zambia where 58-year-old Munalula Mate has harnessed the internet to help forecast and prevent natural disasters. Once the bread-basket province of the nation, the region around the city of Livingstone has in recent years experienced a slump in its agricultural fortunes because of the floods and droughts that ravage the area at regular intervals. But thanks to Mr Mate's work, that trend is being swiftly reversed. Mr Mate is a weather forecaster with a classical training from the UK's Met Office. For years he has compiled short- and long-term forecasts in the Livingstone area. But their usefulness has been constrained by two factors. First, the local data he has been able to gather has been severely limited. Second, even when he compiled the best predictions he could, they were out of date by the time they could be effectively distributed throughout the remote rural province.

But those obstacles were all put behind him once he had landed his first computer and internet connection. Disasters are now being avoided and farming output has risen in his area by an average of 10 per cent every year for the past five years.

"Any farmer who does not know when to plant is in business to fail," says Mr Mate. "Nowadays people no longer plant at a set time like they did in the past." Forecasts help farmers capitalise on good rains and to avoid dry spells.

#### **Conclusions**

It's an Information Century and the most Valuable Capital in the c21st is Information. The exciting thing for Africa is the low base effect and the spike Potential of bringing the c21st to Areas which were previously cut off.

Aly-Khan Satchu  
[www.rich.co.ke](http://www.rich.co.ke)