

Grassroots in Africa's infrastructure drive?

To what extent will the South African Infrastructure Investment Plan contribute significantly to improvements in the lives of the poor and those currently excluded from economic participation? Does the plan recognize youth, who make up more than 60 percent of the population in South Africa, as a key demographic that must benefit from current efforts to improve infrastructure in South Africa?

These were the key questions addressed and discussed at the recent roundtable held between African Monitor and the HSRC.

On the 3 October 2012, the African Monitor (AM) and the Human Science Research Council (HSRC) staff, held a joint roundtable discussion in Cape Town with live video conferencing to Pretoria and Durban, around the African Monitor's 2012 Development Support Monitor (DSM) publication which focuses on *Rural infrastructure in Africa*. The publication explores continental plans and funding by African governments and development partners in this sector, and notes that despite infrastructure gaining more prominence by policy-makers and continental bodies in recent times, most often, rural infrastructure provision where the majority of the rural poor operate is often neglected. Equally, infrastructure which supports the urban poor is also neglected.

Within the South African and African context, the roundtable participants sought to discuss and reflect amongst others on:

1. What are the commitments towards rural infrastructure in Africa from governments and development partners?
2. What are the constraints and challenges in developing rural infrastructure services in South Africa and Africa? Why do African countries and their development partners fail to deliver on their commitments?
3. Is there consensus on the need to invest in grassroots focused infrastructure as a lever for integrated economic development and poverty reduction? What needs to be done and what are the practical actions needed to achieve tangible results?
4. How can the agenda for adequate provision of rural infrastructure be advanced in Africa? Is there a constituency advocating for rural infrastructure provision in Africa? How can a constituency be built to strengthen infrastructure delivery for the grassroots?

Summary of the Opening Presentation: In her presentation, African Monitor's Director, Ms. *Namhla Mniki-Mangaliso*, stated that results from AM's monitoring work show that inadequate and unreliable infrastructure services are still common in the majority of rural communities in South Africa and Africa. Rural households do not have adequate access to various forms of hard and soft infrastructure which would enable them to generate sustainable livelihoods. She stated that only 34 percent of rural Africans live within two kilometres of an all-season road, compared to 65 percent in other developing regions. In South Africa, data shows that only 21 percent of rural South