



## JILL FARRANT

### FAMINE FIGHTER



In 2012 Jill Farrant received a L'Oréal-Unesco Women in Science award, by some estimations just one tier below a Nobel, for her work with so-called resurrection plants. They survive long periods in a desiccated state, having lost 95 percent of their water content, but 'green up' after being watered. The goal of her research is to develop drought-tolerant crops using targeted biotechnology, attempting to 'switch on' genes already in the plant. Mindful of the need to make the

products of such research safe, Farrant is also chairing a study by the SA Academy of Sciences to assess biosafety and biosecurity in this country (the findings will be published in 2014). By the time Farrant came to study these Lazarus-like plants, their existence had been noted but little understood. Nobody realised their potential for preventing famine. Her personal story has a miraculous dimension too: four years ago she suffered a traumatic brain injury. She made a full recovery – except for losing her sense of taste and smell. Farrant may be two senses down, but she's still the first woman in life sciences at UCT to receive the A-rating – academics who are 'recognised by their peers as leading international scholars in their field'. Back to those plants... Farrant estimates we could be about 15 years off drought-tolerant crops. When it happens, expect the Nobel committee to come knocking on her door.



## NOLO LETELE

### BRINGING THE WORLD TO AFRICA



After studying in the UK, Nolo Letele returned to SA to find there were not many jobs for a black electronics graduate in 1974. He found work at a radio station in Lesotho and ended up helping to launch that country's first TV station. In 1990 he joined M-Net; he knew very little about pay TV but Letele has never been afraid of a challenge, or new ideas and pushing boundaries. One such innovation was interactive television, offering e-commerce and email on TV – who would have thought it wouldn't work out? More importantly, because he believes every mistake is a vital lesson, there's been plenty that has worked: dual-view decoders, mobile phone TV, BoxOffice and cheaper DSTV Compact, which opened up a whole new market to satellite television. In the early 90s, Letele pioneered MultiChoice's expansion into the rest of Africa; today DSTV is available in 50 countries in six million homes, including channels in Swahili, Yoruba and Hausa. The Americans tend to see Africa as one country, so it took an African to avoid treating the continent as one homogeneous market. Now executive chairman of MultiChoice SA, Letele received the 2012 Lifetime African Achievement Prize from the Millennium Excellence Foundation for media development in Africa.



## JOHNNY CLEGG

### AGENT OF HARMONY



His music is known and loved throughout the world and, at almost 60, Johnny Clegg is still notching up firsts: he recently became the only South African solo act to perform at the Royal Albert Hall in London. With his first band Juluka, formed in 1976 with Sipho Mchunu, he introduced a unique fusion of Western and Zulu sounds. But their partnership was tricky due to apartheid, and touring the world became the most viable way to spread the music and the message. Since then, Clegg has had global success with his second band, Savuka, and as a solo artist. All along, he's spread the message of racial harmony – he has three honorary doctorates and several humanitarian awards in recognition of this. The French love him so much they've made him a knight of arts and letters. Clegg says he's most proud of creating dialogue and letting people know about where he is from. 'I recognised early on that the South African experience is unique, and I wanted to write and sing about it. In the process I became someone who helped shape the telling of it. This is impossible from London or New York. Also, this is such a happening country'



## RAVI NAIDOO

### DESIGNING ACHIEVEMENT



Over the past four years, the Design Indaba has contributed a billion rand to the SA economy. This is based primarily on sales figures from the expo floor, which in 2012 was almost R200 million and this year featured 486 exhibitors. Hard to believe Ravi Naidoo launched what is now the biggest design platform in the southern hemisphere with just 200 attendees in 1995. He'd been approached by creatives who felt design was not getting recognition as a catalyst for change in the new SA. So began the idea of bringing the world's top thought-leaders together to stimulate and grow our ideas (these have included Paul Smith, David Adjaye, Alberto Alessi and Ferran Adrià). Initiatives affiliated to Design Indaba have included the First African in Space mission and the marketing bid to host the 2010 Fifa Soccer World Cup, both managed by Naidoo's brainchild, Interactive Africa. And it was in no small part the Indaba's contribution to the SA design community that clinched Cape Town's 2014 World Design Capital Award. Naidoo, who's on the jury of the INDEX: Award, the world's top design prize, and sits on the advisory board of THINK in Amsterdam, wants to build a critical mass of great designers in SA, not just a few. He believes we can be a creative hub for the world, like India is for IT.