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 homogenous 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.’