

**LOOKING AHEAD: At the Futures Summit are, from left, Professor Andre Roux, Professor Luke van der Laan, Tanja Hichert, Professor Hendrick Lloyd, Professor Sohail Inayatullah and Professor Chris Adendorff**  
Picture: FREDLIN ADRIAN



# Futures speakers predict Africa high by 2050

## Herald Reporter

THE inaugural two-day Nelson Mandela Bay Futures Summit, hosted by the NMMU Business School, wrapped up on a high note yesterday, with guest speakers outlining an Africa rising to become a key global player by 2050.

“In 2000, *The Economist* magazine described Africa as the hopeless continent – doom and gloom and darkness.

That changed, and 13 years later it described Africa as aspirational,” Stellenbosch University Institute for Futures Research former director Professor Andre Roux told academics and business people attending the summit.

Looking to the future of the continent, Roux said: “On the positive side, Africa’s demographic dividend will occur in 2050.

“America’s demographic window shut down last year, while China has another 10 years or so to go. India will be next in line.”

Roux, who currently lectures economics and futures classes at Stellenbosch University, said a demographic dividend occurred when less than 30% of the population consisted of children and less than 15% consisted of seniors, with 55% or more of the population being of working age.

This was an economically beneficial time, he said.

“Using our institute’s own demo-

graphic projections, we calculated that Africa’s demographic window will open up in 2050. If we can emulate what so many other countries have done, we could be next in line [for strong economic growth].”

Despite this, there remained a number of tipping points in South Africa which could either push the country to further mediocrity, or, if dealt with correctly, raise South Africa into success.

The summit, with *The Herald* as official media partner, was initiated by the NMMU Business School’s futurist, Professor Chris Adendorff.

The summit also featured respected South African futurist Tanja Hichert and globally recognised futures academics Professor Sohail

Inayatullah and Professor Luke van der Laan. Hichert, who is based in Cape Town, runs Hichert & Associates and is an associate at Vision Foresight Strategy LCC, said a stumbling block for businesses in properly planning for complex and uncertain futures included “willful blindness”.

“Attitudes [towards futures planning] are by far the most important – to be open-minded and very self-reflective of the things you are not speaking about; the issues which are present, but which you choose to ignore – either because they are too unpleasant to speak about, or they are too sensitive. That’s the willful blindness,” she said.

“I see it surprisingly often in busi-

nesses. That willful blindness will trip you up if you don’t go into that difficult area.

“Make some effort in surfacing those unspoken issues which are critically important.”

Another stumbling block is that the future is often perceived as further than it really is.

This meant that the goalposts could be shifted further down the road, with many under the impression that major advances in business and technology were far off, when in fact they were here and now, Hichert said.

NMMU faculty of business and economic sciences deputy dean Professor Hendrik Lloyd described the summit as a success for the university as well as for the region.