Centre for Social and Sustainable Innovation
Communiqué
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Everybody’s business:
Not only off the charts...off the continent
Brock Smith got a PhD so he wouldn’t have to dig ditches for a living. And yet he spent his sons’ spring break digging a foundation in Swaziland.
In March, the Smith family combined a trip to Kruger National Park in South Africa with a visit to a rural village in Swaziland, where they hefted pickaxes and shovels. The trench they helped carve into the red earth formed the base for a community centre, where local women will get together to weave bowls, placemats, and other items and agree on pricing, production volumes, and make other business and community decisions. The for-profit social enterprise Gone Rural then markets the finished goods to retailers like the Smithsonian in Washington and Home Autour du Monde in Paris, returning the lion’s share of the profits to the producers, which they use to support their families and to micro finance other local businesses.
The volunteer building crew, including the Smith family, was organized by BC-based NGO Swazi Kids, which supports education and health programs in Africa’s poorest country.
“It was a good thing for our kids,” Brock says. “We wanted to give them a sense that they are very privileged to live in Victoria and Canada and that they can make a meaningful difference in the lives of others, even with small contributions of money, time, and effort.”
And Brock says it worked. His sons definitely see their lives and the world differently now.
Clearly there’s more to creating a foundation than digging a hole in the ground.

Public companies: what are they doing?
The Conference Board Sustainability Practices Dashboard analyzes the most recent disclosure of environmental and social practices by public companies around the world. The project is a collaboration between The Conference Board, Bloomberg Data Solutions, and the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI).

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As the price drops
Crude oil prices have fallen almost 50 per cent since summer 2014, creating winners and losers. Those to suffer include producers and governments, but the global economy is set to benefit from the equivalent of a huge programme of quantitative easing... The Financial Times offers this buffet of articles.

Do your students care about clothes?
From compostable fabrics to evolving algae dyes, small companies are nimble enough to innovate the industry, according to Can Big Brands Catch Up on Sustainable Fashion? in The Guardian, March 24, 2015.

How to measure innovation
Innovation Measurement Metrics and Practices: The Life Sciences and Clean Tech Sectors, a report from the Conference Board of Canada, is one of a series of studies providing sector-specific analysis of measurement activities in representative companies of all ages and sizes within priority sectors of the Canadian economy. The report looks at the innovation measurement practices of LSCT companies and how satisfied they are with their measurement efforts. The report also profiles best practices by small, medium-sized, and large companies in the LSCT sectors.

Climate and you
The award-winning and engaging Dr. Gavin Schmidt, Director of the NASA Goddard Institute for Space Studies, is talking about What are climate models good for? In Vancouver, BC, and your computer tonight (April 9).