

CAN WE TRY THIS? #11 Solar farms in the Kalahari

In 2010, I lived in South Africa, teaching at a science centre in Mpumalanga province. My mentor/boss there was from the Northern Cape Province. I got the chance to learn about his family's struggles in that region.

I want the De Beers Group to invest in the development of solar farms* in the Kalahari Desert, where it mines diamonds.

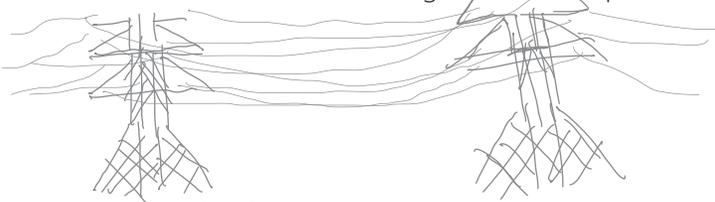
Why the Northern Cape and the Kalahari?



It is a semi-desert, which means the land is poor for agriculture, yet many of the residents are subsistence farmers.



But being a semi-desert also means that the skies are clear much of the time, which is good for solar power.



At least in South Africa, the government has committed to getting rural areas onto the power grid. With commitment but not yet infrastructure, now is the time to design it to be optimized for alternative energy.

De Beers has reaped a lot of profit from this region. It is time to give back—by training locals to be technicians, technologists and researchers in this new industry.

There is precedent for this—e.g. the science centre where I was working[†] is a community development project funded by Sasol, a large petroleum company.

*A solar farm is a system of photovoltaic cells—a power plant of solar panels.

[†]I used these reference maps: <http://bit.ly/1yovP4i>, <http://bit.ly/1zpm2z6>, <http://bit.ly/1D1ed3G>

Why De Beers?



De Beers right now has a huge amount of capital.



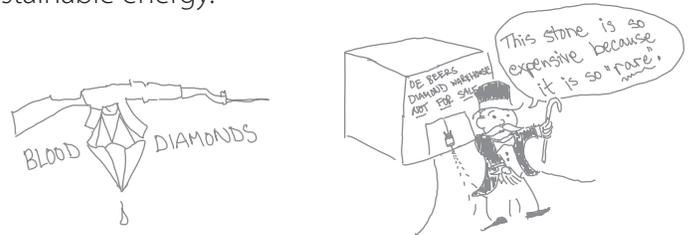
BUT, their business is at risk from laboratory-created diamonds.



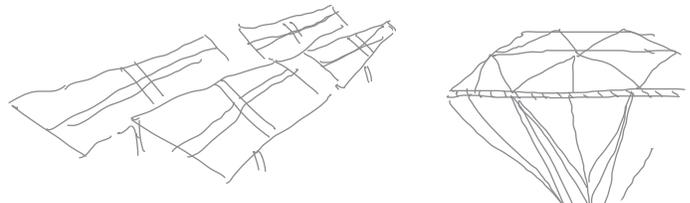
SO, it is a sensible time to diversify through investment



De Beers should recognize the risk of relying on limited natural resources, and therefore should support sustainable energy.



De Beers could use the good PR, given their history with conflict, monopolization, and environmental issues. (And they do have some history of public good projects for PR.)



And there is something about the arranging of surfaces at particular angles to catch the light which seems fitting.