

The fund was up 5.9% in the second quarter. It has returned 8.0% over the last 10 years, ahead of competitors, up 7.6% on average. Since its inception in 2011, the fund has delivered 7.9% pa, well ahead of inflation.

Economic backdrop

Global economic activity is slowing due to increased US tariffs and uncertainty surrounding generally chaotic and aggressive US foreign policy. Financial conditions, which tightened meaningfully in the immediate aftermath of the April US tariff announcements, have moderated due to a sharp rise in asset prices. Erratic US government policy has negatively impacted consumer sentiment, consumption, business confidence and investment (though the decline in business investment has been less severe than expected due to resilient AI-driven spending). Consequently, US economic growth is beginning to weaken from a previously robust rate.

China's nominal economic growth has been weak due to ongoing deflation and the consequences of a weak property market. The economy is now being further undermined by the escalating trade war with the US, which is expected to negatively impact Chinese exports and manufacturing. Positively, however, Chinese consumer confidence and spending may be improving from historically low levels, buoyed by more aggressive monetary and fiscal stimulus and targeted structural state interventions that have had some success in improving local consumption.

The Japanese and European economies are being negatively affected by elevated uncertainty regarding US tariff threats. Europe's economy, which has been stagnating due in part to its export link to a weak manufacturing sector in China, will start to benefit from higher fiscal stimulus. Business confidence in Germany has started to improve following the decision to lift the debt ceiling and meaningfully increase fiscal spending on infrastructure and defence.

South African economic activity has been supported by higher export receipts (due to higher precious metal prices) and a mild cyclical recovery in real consumption as consumers benefit from falling inflation and interest rates. A more enduring lift to the growth of economic activity is, however, structurally constrained by the acute underperformance of transport infrastructure, poor service delivery from weak and revenue-hungry municipalities, inadequate (albeit improved) electricity supply and low business confidence. Disappointingly, the recent moderate increase in investment off very low levels has not yet been accompanied by any notable job creation. In recent years, there has been material progress made in moving to reform the economy through Operation Vulindlela (acting within the Ministry of the President) and the partnership between government and business leaders (targeting key priority areas needing reform). Additionally, the Government of National Unity has brought about positive leadership changes in key ministries and a renewed commitment by government to accelerate initiatives that address the country's structural problems.

Consequently, following the dramatic economic decline of the last 15 years, there is room for optimism that the economy may stabilise and that the country may now follow a more constructive path. Yet, given the deep structural issues in the economy – most notably the sizable government debt burden and large, unskilled population with high unemployment levels – we believe that a modestly higher growth trajectory will take an extended period of time to engineer and that this path is beset with risks.

Markets review

Global markets were strongly positive in the second quarter (up 11.6% in US dollars), mainly due to the outperformance of Japan (up 18.3%), the US (up 17.9%) and Germany (up 17.4%). Emerging markets were also strongly positive, up 12.2% for the quarter, with outperformance from South Korea (up 36.1%), South Africa (up 13.9%) and Brazil (up 12.2%).

In rand terms, the local equity market was up 10.2% in the quarter. Industrials outperformed (up 12.1%), with most notable performances from Naspers (up 22.1%), Prosus (up 17.8%) and MTN (up 17.1%). Aspen (down 27%), Sappi (down 17.8%) and Spar (down 8.8%) all underperformed.

Resources were up 9.7%, boosted by robust performances by Sibanye (up 54.9%) and Northam (up 46.4%). Other standout positive performers included Implats (up 26.2%), African Rainbow Minerals (up 21%) and Valterra (up 17.5%). Weak performances were delivered by Kumba (down 8.7%), South32 (down 7.9%) and Harmony (down 7.3%).

Financials underperformed slightly (up 7.9%), with non-life insurance up 14%, life insurance up 10.4%, listed property up 9.1% and banks up 6.8%. Shaftesbury (up 32.7%), Hammerson (up 30.3%) and Reinet (up 29.4%) all outperformed, while Standard Bank (down 1.8%), Nedbank (down 1.2%) and Nepi Rockcastle (up 1.8%) underperformed.

Fund performance and positioning

Positive performances were delivered by all asset classes, particularly local and foreign equity.

Locally, key positive contributors included Northam Platinum, Omnia, MTN, Datatec, PPC and Valterra Platinum. Aspen, Rhodes Food Group and KAP contributed negatively.

Positive global equity contributors included JD Sports, Micron and Johnson Matthey. Negative contributors included JD.Com, Medtronic and Pfizer. We are substantially underweight in the US relative to our benchmark within global equities, and overweight in European and Japanese equities that are very attractively priced.

Currently, our portfolios have high exposure to platinum group metal (PGM) miners, telecommunications shares, together with a diverse range of other mispriced stocks, including mid-cap stocks. We also have a high exposure to longer duration government sukuk at present, which is offering very attractive inflation adjusted returns.

Stock snapshot

Valterra Platinum is the world's lowest-cost producer of PGMs, supported by an extensive, high-grade reserve base. This positions the company as one of the largest PGM producers globally, while also providing significant optionality for production growth when market conditions (particularly PGM prices) are favourable.

Valterra's operations are predominantly mechanised, resulting in consistently low-cost, low-risk mining. Its flagship asset, the world-class Mogalakwena mine, is a large open-pit operation that benefits from structurally low costs. Notably, Mogalakwena's revenue basket is uniquely weighted towards nickel and copper - both of which have strong long-term demand outlooks, driven by their critical roles in decarbonisation technologies. The mine's extensive reserve base supports current production levels for over 80 years, with potential for material output expansion as market conditions improve.

In addition to its mining assets, Valterra owns strategically important PGM processing facilities. These allow the company to beneficiate its own ore while monetising surplus capacity by processing material from third-party miners for a fee. This provides a unique, capital-efficient opportunity to benefit from industry-wide production growth. Given the high capital costs associated with building new processing infrastructure, Valterra's existing capacity represents a significant competitive advantage and a barrier to entry for new market participants.

Valterra's portfolio of low-cost, high-quality mining operations and value-accretive processing infrastructure remains significantly undervalued. This is especially notable in a market where PGM demand continues to be robust, while supply is constrained due to a decade of underinvestment in mining and limited processing capacity.

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