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(NARRATOR)

This week two items that seem at first glance to be at opposite poles: on the one hand, apparent atomisation on the other, fusion. With regard to the latter, the subject of co-operatives in agriculture is one of basic importance to most African countries, and it's the theme of a thesis by a Nigerian post-graduate student - but first atomisation.

Last week we reported on the break-up of the University of East Africa and on the new University of Dar-es-Salaam. This week, the process of devolution at the University of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland, better known as U.B.L.S. Developing from the University College of Roma in the then Basutoland Protectorate, U.B.L.S. was set up in 1964 to serve the three erstwhile Crown Colonies in Southern Africa. The main campus of the then newly established University remained at Roma, but the agricultural college has always been at Mbabane in Swaziland.

The founding of the U.B.L.S. in 1964 took place before the independence of Botswana (1966) Lesotho (1966) and Swaziland (1968). Now, only six years later, devolution, and a national campus for each country.

Pro-Vice-Chancellor Elect of the Swaziland Campus of U.B.L.S. and Professor of African Language and Literature is Dr. S.M. Guma, a graduate of Fort Hare University College, and of the University of Cape Town; and he was asked what devolution means in the context of U.B.L.S.

- PROFESSOR GUMA: I think I'll start off by saying that devolution in this context means extending the activities of the university to both Botswana and Swaziland. According to the Alexander Report which has now been accepted by the University Council, there is going to be development in Botswana and Swaziland for the teaching of the Part One in the degree courses in 1971. This development is to be followed almost immediately by a polytechnic phase. The Part One centres will take on something of the character of what are called Community Colleges in America, or of the closely related two year colleges in Canada. These institutions are marked by activity on two levels, one looking to academic work, the other looking to employment after training in some vocational or technical area, but not leading to a degree. It is these two levels, both post O'level, that we shall be undertaking in the near future.
- COSMO PIETERSE: It's only six years, as I said, since the university was founded so why, our reporter at U.B.L.S. Allan Macartney asked Professor Guma, 'Why was the joint university embarked on initially if the breaking-up was to take place so soon after'.
- PROFESSOR GUMA: In effect, the three countries inherited the university. The university was set up by the British administration on the eve of Independence. It is only now that the countries, I think, are actively engaged in setting up a university.
- ALLAN MACARTNEY: So this is a post independence readjustment?
- PROFESSOR GUMA: Yes, this is a post independence readjustment.
- ALLAN MACARTNEY: I wonder in terms of development of the three countries, how can one justify the cost of setting up three campuses where you're teaching the same thing?

PROFESSOR GUMA: In so far as the university will now operate in the three countries, this is something which will meet the national aspirations of the communities involved. I think this is something which must not be overlooked.

ALLAN MACARTNEY: Now who's going to foot the bill for this? Is it entirely up to the three governments to find the funds from their own revenues, or is there going to be any outside assistance in this process?

PROFESSOR GUMA: Some of the money will have to be found by the governments, but we are also hoping for help from external donors. We are conscious of the economic needs, the economic position of the three countries that we serve, and we, as a university, are determined to effect savings whenever possible, in the way we organise our problems, in the way students share facilities, the two levels that I have referred to about, in this sort of way.

COSMO PIETERSE: Universities are expensive institutions and have been much criticised all over the world for it! But mightn't they also breed an academic elite, remote from the problems and concerns, the issues and worries of everyday life, and the matters of the nation, remote from the level of the people in the factory, on the land, in the street.

PROFESSOR GUMA: This is one thing that we can meet. Our plans anticipate just this sort of thing, hence our emphasis in future on the technical side of things, the production of the middle level man, not necessarily with a degree, but highly desirable for the development and needs of these countries.

ALLAN MACARTNEY: So U.B.L.S. may be leading the field to some extent in overcoming this yawning gap you find in many parts of Africa between the electrical engineer and the person who is not able to do more than fit a plug.

PROFESSOR GUMA: Quite. Exactly. After all highly skilled people without the support of the technicians, the middle level man, as I call him, will be unproductive, and you cannot get as much as you would otherwise. After all there is a job to be done here, and the sooner people realise this, the better.

COSMO PIETERSE: This basic and necessary, this healthy link between diploma and degree does not at all preclude post-graduate research, indeed, according to Professor Guma.

PROFESSOR GUMA: The university is a storehouse of knowledge. It should continue to be this but make its expertise available to the countries, to the governments, for the solution of various types of problems.

ALLAN MACARTNEY: And you think these new Part One Centres will facilitate this process.

PROFESSOR GUMA: I think this will definitely be so, in so far as each government will now have a university centre within its own boundaries to which they can go.

COSMO PIETERSE: Academically then a triple link: diploma/certificate, degree, post-graduate research. But physically the link is a difficult one. Southern Africa is vast, and unlike the East African case, the three countries served by U.B.L.S. are not next door to each other. There are about 500 miles of space to cover across the Republic of South Africa for the campuses to be in touch. But they have always had to travel for meetings, and with these specialised courses in their different countries, now the three governments will have more expertise more often at hand for tapping.

But might there not be a danger of a drop in standards owing to the diversification that devolution demands?

PROFESSOR GUMA:

I don't think that the academic standards will be lowered in any way whatsoever. There will be this peripatetic teaching - members of staff having to move from country to country at certain times. There will be this intergrated type of teaching that I refered to earlier on, and what's more, there will be the usual check by external examiners to ensure that the standards are right.

COSMO PIETERSE:

That was Professor S.M. Guma , Pro-Vice-Chancellor Elect of the Swaziland campus of the U.B.L.S. talking to Allan Macartney.

Should we bewail another international split - I don't myself, for as with the case of the break-up of the University of East Africa, it is not only inevitable for expansion, but desirable for national identity. And now, from Nigeria, Mr. Adeniyi Osuntogun whose first degree, a B.Sc. in Economics, was gained at Ibadan University. Mr. Osuntogun is currently at Leeds University doing a Ph.D., his thesis is on 'Agricultural Marketing and Credit' with special reference to the Co-operative Marketing and Agricultural Produce in the Western States of Nigeria.

Well I have no need to say a thing about how controversial co-operatives in agriculture or anything else can be. But one thing I often notice is that people's definitions of what co-operatives are, or should be, vary considerably, so when Clyde Alleyne talked to Mr. Osuntogun for us in Leeds he asked him first for his view of the role of co-operatives in agricultural development and market reform.

MR. OSUNTOGUN:

The co-operative is supposed to be a meeting ground for the farmers, to join hands together in order to increase their bargaining power. Secondly co-operatives do offer farmers some short-term loans, and medium term loans, thereby, relieving them of indebtedness to private money lenders and its associated disadvantages.

MR. OSUNTOGUN:
CONT'D:

In terms of economic development the co-operatives have a big role to play. Firstly they enable the farmers to live their lives on an economic scale. Small farmers could join hands together to do a number of things co-operatively, which an individual could not afford to do. Then given the traditional land tenure system in Nigeria where there is co-operation between small-holders, it is possible to engage in a large-scale operation which an individual farmer could not afford.

CLYDE AILEYNE:

Theoretically this sounds fine, but I'm just wondering because I know there's been some criticism of the uncompetitiveness of certain co-operatives particularly those in Western Nigeria.

MR. OSUNTOGUN:

Yes. There are a number of problems associated with these co-operatives where they unfortunately could not compete effectively with the private system. In fact, this is one of the major areas I'm looking into in this research, to see how, in fact, these co-operatives could be made more viable, and to look into some of their problems, and suggest some concrete suggestions. One of the problems is that the co-operative idea, as it was introduced about four decades ago, seems to be dying down among the farmers. Most of them don't seem to realise that the co-operative is for them. As a result not only is the attendance at meetings, and the sort of interest in the society dying down, the tonnage handled is also dying down, it seems to be on the downward trend. One of the things I'm looking into is how to make farmers to be more interested, and how to buy over their interests to these societies. One has either to make sure that the co-operatives run in the most efficient way so as to ensure that the farmer gets the best for his produce, that is, a form of price incentive, this is the point I'm making.

CLYDE ALLEYNE: Well, do you think it is because of the lack of price incentive that there has been a decrease in the interest shown in the co-operative.

MR. OSUNTOGUN: Yes. Because in my field study, when I went back to Nigeria in Summer 1969 I discovered that an average farmer has little or nothing to gain by selling his crop to the co-operative, in fact, I discovered in certain parts of Ondo Province that middle men were even paying higher prices than co-operatives. Given this situation when there is another way, where there could be higher prices, the farmer is bound to sell to the greatest bidder.

CLYDE ALLEYNE: But I was under the impression Mr. Osuntogun that the role of the co-operative society was to undermine, in fact, eradicate the sort of rather unfair practice in the past where the middle men under-paid the farmer.

MR. OSUNTOGUN: Yes, we got this situation in Western Region, whereby the middle men are now at the stage where they have to pay the real competitive price or quit the market. In fact, another situation is going on now, it is a competitive market and all forms of competitive devices are used. The middle men realise that the co-operative is very strong in that region and are not only paying gazetted prices, they are in fact, trying to pay more than the gazetted prices. I think you know that besides the gazetted price the Marketing Board does give these middle men some form of block buying allowance. A number of these middle men are now ploughing back part of the block buying allowance, which is now theirs, and they are putting it on top of the price to be given to the farmers. Here is a device to weaken the co-operative, and afterwards when the co-operative has collapsed to occupy the market and be in a monopolistic condition.

CLYDE ALLEYNE: So then to what extent do you think there should be governmental control in making sure that these malpractices within the framework of the co-operative society do not happen?

MR. OSUNTOGUN: In the first instance I would suggest that the government, should as much as possible, as it used to do, give more encouragement to these co-operatives. Not that the government should subsidize an uneconomic project. But in times of educational promotion, the farmer should be educated more on the advantages of co-operation. The advantages not only in terms of marketing, but in terms of social and rural development. Make the farmers realise that it isn't the governments' concern, that he is the co-operative, and it is not another government agency. This, I think, from my limited experience on the field, is what an average farmer thinks of the co-operative.

COSMO PIETERSE: Is Mr. Osuntogun a prejudiced researcher? Or is this a necessarily spirited defence of an invaluable institution?

On this questioning note, from me Cosmo Pieterse, until the next edition of University Report it's goodbye for now.

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