

'Simple' system behind Zimbabwe success

HOW TO assist the poverty-stricken peasant system of agriculture while maintaining the highly productive and sophisticated commercial sector was the task that confronted Senator Dennis Norman when he became Zimbabwe's first Minister of Agriculture in 1980.

Speaking to delegates at the Rural Land workshop about the Zimbabwean experience, Senator Norman said agriculture in his country had played "probably the largest single role in bringing political stability after 11 years of sanctions and 14 years of war".

In 1980/81 the value of commodities sold by commercial farmers totalled (Zimbabwe) \$18 million. Five years later the value had risen to \$192 million. Livestock sales had risen in value by 1 400 percent. Maize production in 1980/81 stood at 42 000 tons; by 1985 this had reached 481 000 tons. In 1980/81, 33 000 tons of cotton were produced; it was 132 000 in 1985.

The reason for these dramatic increases, said Norman, was the new agricultural policy which encouraged farmers to grow crops suitable to the area in which they lived.

In central Zimbabwe a population of

LAND WORKSHOP



Dennis Norman

about 25 000 to 30 000 people had been scratching a living trying to grow maize. A programme aimed at weaning them from maize to cotton was introduced and for the first time in the country's history a cotton ginnery was built in the area and cotton sales exceeded \$34 million. All this happened within four years.

Norman said a "simple system" consisting of three prongs was responsible for the dramatic increases. "The resource base was quite good, but it was not available to everyone, only to whites. We tried to extend services to everybody."

This included an education programme - crash courses through agricultural colleges for farmers and a general effort to stimulate interest. Secondly, the necessary fertilizers, seeds, chemicals and transport were made available to smallscale farmers - usually on a loan basis, with very few grants being handed out.

Thirdly, in an effort to redress the system whereby only white farmers were within easy access of transport or storage

depots, black farmers were assisted to reach the market. New depots for grain and cotton were built throughout the country so that, in areas where it was deemed those crops could be farmed productively, no farmer was more than 60km from the nearest depot.

"For the first three years after independence we were successful in preventing urban drift, in fact we reversed it. However, the position has now changed because of the success of the education programme and people are moving to the urban areas once again," said Norman.

The resettlement programme in which it was hoped to create villages with better agricultural prospects for about 162 000 people in the first four or five years of independence was less successful. It had envisaged four settlement schemes where land could be held as individual land, as a village with communal land, as individual land with communal grazing or as land for livestock farming. Through the willing-buyer-willing-seller scheme (before anyone in Zimbabwe may dispose of land, they must first offer it to the government) land was available for the project.

Senator Norman suggested several reasons why the programme had not worked. Firstly it had been introduced too quickly and not enough planning went into it.

Secondly, not enough value was given to the importance of title deeds, be they freehold or leasehold. Thirdly, co-operatives were not always successful and although Norman said he believed they did work, they needed to be carefully managed within clear guidelines and parameters. Lastly, many of those encouraged to farm knew little about it; training was needed if people were to become successful farmers.

Challenging the poor image most white South Africans seemed to have of prime minister Robert Mugabe, Norman spelt out some facts regarding the Zimbabwean government's record.

"In the 10 years Zanu-PF have been in government, they have not appropriated a single property," he said. "They have not nationalised a single industry, they have honoured every external debt. Every external pension has been paid since 1980 - they have not reneged on a single one - and they have honoured every single clause of the 1979 agreement. We have a government which stands by its word. It could have gone the other way, but it didn't."

Tricks and tales

From Page 5

After offering four possible economic options, Bundy concluded by saying the answer would not arrive as a policy preference but would take shape in the course of struggle.

"What people want, how they will be or-

ganised to express their desires, how the state and capital will respond, will determine the land question," he said.

Sue Valentine is Publications Assistant with Idasa.

Unity worthless?

From Page 1

because of political differences; the development of separate black consciousness-orientated organisations and Charterist bodies - with such rivalry that separate organisations in apparently apolitical fields such as literacy, domestic workers and even pre-schools have been formed; the conflicts over foreign funding and suspicions in some quarters about the DP's commitment to a post-apartheid South Africa.

Indeed, the pettiness and intensity of the tensions that has often existed between these groupings in the past makes the prospects of effective unity look very

remote.

But is it even desirable as a goal? The answer should be an emphatic no.

The essence of democracy is that political organisations go to the electorate to win votes for their policies and strategies. If they win sufficient support from the ordinary people, they gain representation.

There are clearly major differences of approach and personality among the different elements of the anti-apartheid movement. Now is not the time to patch them up in a semblance of unity on the spurious grounds that the system will exploit those differences and tensions.

Now is rather the time the different groupings try to get popular support by campaigning among the soon-to-be voters - and let the people decide.

Trying to create "unity" among these groups in preparation for a popularly elected government in a new and free South Africa will not only avoid the differences and conflicts between them, but it will also create a new United Party with all the attendant problems that Sir De Villiers Graaff and his party faced during the 1970s.

Barry Streek is on the political staff of the Cape Times