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Progress with Agricultural Development in the Tribal Trust Areas of Rhodesia

by

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One of the most serious obstacles in acquiring knowledge of the Tribal Areas of Rhodesia is the scarcity of relevant and accurate statistics. Those surveys which have been carried out, although excellent in themselves, are not suitable for long-term comparisons. We are forced, therefore, to use derived figures. In the case of African agriculture the Central Statistical Office uses estimates for National Income purposes, based upon consumption per head figures in conjunction with average producer prices, the size of the rural population and the known values of sales.

The data in Table 1 show the values over the past ten years.

TABLE 1 - Agricultural output of Rhodesian African

	£ million
1959	17.5
1960	16.4
1961	18.5
1962	19.9
1963	20.0
1964	22.1
1965	20.8
1966	23.1
1967	27.4
1968	24.9

It is worth pointing out at this stage that these figures relate to both the true Tribal Areas and the much smaller Purchase Areas, where Africans are non-tribal and where they own or are in the process of buying comparatively large farms. It is impossible to show the Tribal Areas' contribution separately and this applies to most of the statistics that follow.

However, the figures in Table 1 indicate a growth rate of about 42 per cent in 10 years or slightly more than 4 per cent per annum.

They demonstrate a further important feature of African agriculture. When compared with output of other sectors of the Rhodesian economy they show that African agriculture is, and has been for some time, the fifth largest industry in the economy. In terms of Gross Domestic Product the comparison in 1968, derived from Central Statistical Office figures, is as follows:

	£ million
1. Manufacturing	79
2. Wholesale and Retail Trade ..	52.2
3. European Agriculture	34.7
4. Transport and Communications	32.4
5. African Agriculture	24.7

1968 was a very poor agricultural season.

Thus, African Agriculture is more important in the economy than many other industries which are usually regarded as being of major status, namely Mining and Quarrying (£22.2 million), Construction (£23 million), and Public Administration and Defence (£21 million). Its significance is only depreciated by the fact that such a small proportion of the output finds its way into the cash economy.

Sales of crops and livestock produce from the African areas to the cash economy are given in Table 2. They do not relate to sales made within the Areas amongst the Africans themselves, since these are not accurately known.

TABLE 2 - Gross Sales of Agricultural Produce from African Areas

	£ million
1959	4.9
1960	5.5
1961	4.8
1962	4.8
1963	4.2
1964	4.3
1965	4.5
1966	5.1
1967	5.4
1968	3.5

Source: Central Statistical Office

The most obvious feature of gross sales in Table 2 is its almost static level, within the range of roughly £4.5 to £5.5 million per annum, with the exception of 1968, due entirely to an unfavourable season. On the face of it this static level of sales indicates a lack of progress. Yet the figures should be viewed in their proper perspective.

Between 1959 and 1968 the African population of Rhodesia increased by 1 190 000 from 3.5 million to 4.69 million, a rate close on 3½ per cent per annum. By far the majority of these people were absorbed by the rural areas, as shown by reference to African employment. In 1959 Africans in employment, and therefore living outside the Tribal Areas, numbered 628 000. By 1968 the number was down to 621 000. So fewer Africans were employed in the money economy, and, even after allowing for the fact that many indigenous Africans must have replaced the 93 000 foreign African males who made their exodus from Rhodesia over the ten years, it is clear that by the end of the period very many more people were in the Tribal areas than at the beginning. In spite of this Africans have fed themselves and at the same time have maintained their level of sales out of the area. So, this static feature is, in fact, another sign of progress in the African agricultural industry.

The products represented by these sales provide further evidence of progress. Until a few years ago African agricultural sales consisted of surpluses remaining over and above their subsistence crop requirements, namely maize, groundnuts, millets and sorghums, plus some cattle. Latterly, however, a growing proportion of more intensive industrial crops has become evident, notably Oriental and Burley tobaccos and cotton; this latter crop in particular is now showing very rapid expansion. Pig production, too, has grown remarkably. Tribal Trust Land sheep numbers are increasing more rapidly than those owned by European farmers. And the fattening of cattle is being more widely practised. At the present time 7 500 cattle (thought to be split 50/50 between the Tribal and Purchase Areas) are being fattened, as distinct from being raised on the veld; this number having risen from a total of 13 in 1963.

These encouraging changes have been induced, in part, by the gathering momentum of the irrigation expansion taking place within the Tribal areas. For instance, £100 000 is being provided annually by Government for small irrigation schemes ranging in size from 50 to 200 acres. In addition, four larger schemes have recently been constructed ranging from 450 acres to 2 500 acres, besides the 10 000 acres already under irrigation, and plans are in hand for expanding other major projects. But, in larger part they are signs of the beginnings of a new outlook spreading among the more progressive of the farmers.

So, there is progress within African agriculture. But whether the output and its rate of expansion are satisfactory in relation to the factors of production employed needs some examination. A convenient yardstick against which to compare these things is readily available in the form of the European agricultural industry.

Both sectors employ not dissimilar amounts of most factors of production. The area of land available to each is slightly in favour of the Africans, who occupy roughly 40 million acres as compared with the Europeans who occupy 36 million acres. The numbers of livestock owned are, again, slightly in favour of the Africans, the size of their cattle herds representing almost 53 per cent of the total national herd in 1968, their pigs 51 per cent, their sheep 50 per cent and their goats constitute virtually the whole national herd. The labour force in the Tribal areas is about six times as large, in terms of numbers, as that employed by European farmers. Yet, the value of agricultural output by Africans is only one-third of that produced by Europeans. This is illustrated for recent years in Table 3.

TABLE 3 - Agricultural output

Year	European			African		
	Gross sales	Farm retentions	Total production	Gross sales	Farm retentions	Total production
£ million						
1964	65.2	5.0	70.2	4.3	17.8	22.1
1965	66.7	5.3	72.0	4.5	16.3	20.8
1966	65.0	5.8	70.8	5.1	18.0	23.1
1967	66.1	5.9	72.0	5.4	22.0	27.4
1968	58.4	4.9	63.3	3.5	21.4	24.9
Total	321.4	26.9	348.3	22.8	95.5	118.3

Source: Central Statistical Office

A further yardstick against which to gauge the adequacy of African agricultural output is the income it provides to the rural families. Roughly half of these families still persist in following their traditional techniques and ignoring the advice available to them from the Extension Services. A typical agricultural income for this sort of family is of the order of £20-£30 per annum, including all production - home consumed and sold - valued at sale prices. It does not include, of course, cash receipts from relatives in the towns or earnings from non-agricultural pursuits, such as carpentry, brick-making, etc. Obviously, out of such a meagre output there generally remains little surplus for sale, and in fact, large numbers sell no produce at all.

This level of income compares with the annual average earnings of African employees in European agricultural and industry in 1968 of £144.

On the other hand, the position is better for those farmers who accept extension advice. A whole range of advice is accepted but the best farmers are those who have proved their ability and practices to the satisfaction of the Extension Officers and have attained their Master Farmer Certificate. They represent at present only 3 per cent of all Tribal area cultivators, yet they achieve incomes four times as large as those cited above. Their cash incomes too, are more than proportionately larger, averaging about £40 or £45 per annum, i.e. about half their income is earned as cash. At the very top of the scale are those who through superior energy or more favoured situations close to large urban markets, earn farm incomes well in excess of £150 or even £200.

This type of farmer demonstrates what is possible even under present conditions. Yet, obviously, the general situation within the Tribal Areas is of Generally poor techniques and very low standards of living.

Moreover, in normal times the rate of African agricultural expansion was about half that of both European farming and of African urban earnings.

In the past, European agricultural output has tended to expand fairly steadily, in contrast to a more erratic performance by African agriculture. Overall, between 1954 and 1964 European production rose by an annual average of about 9 per cent, while the African increase was about 4½ per cent.

The position has been temporarily reversed since U.D.I. however. The crop, such as Virginia flue-cured tobacco and sugar, which have borne the brunt of economic sanctions are principally European grown crops, with the result that European agricultural output remained virtually static from 1965 to 1967. African agriculture, on the other hand, showed considerable expansion, of nearly 32 per cent, between 1965 and 1967. The reasons for this are not yet apparent.

Yet, upon a return to more normal times, it can be anticipated that the European rate of progress will revert to a level nearer the pre-U.D.I. position. If, then, the recent African performance can be maintained, both sectors could advance at roughly comparable rates. This in itself would be a considerable achievement for African agriculture. Whether it can or cannot be maintained is still open to doubt, although it is significant that such a high rate has not occurred previously during the past fifteen years.

It is clear, however, from what has been said that the main African agricultural problem is that of low productivity. The reasons for this warrant some study.

In the first place, the explanation could be that the inherent quality of the land is inferior. This is certainly true to some extent, for of the total area in Rhodesia suitable for intensive and semi-intensive farming, i.e. the cropping land, Africans occupy 37 per cent and the Europeans 63 per cent. Similarly, Africans occupy 65 per cent of the land more suited to extensive and semi-extensive farming, i.e. grazing, and the Europeans 35 per cent. Therefore, other things being equal, one would expect a lower total return from the African as compared with the European areas.

This, however, is not at present the principal explanation. There are large areas of the country where comparable areas are farmed adjacently by Europeans and Africans. Yet it is rare for Africans under their tribal conditions to attain yields anywhere near comparable to those of their European neighbours. To illustrate this it is only necessary to quote the Sample Survey of African Agriculture (Central Statistical Office). This gave the average yield of maize in the 1959/60 season, for those African areas with an effective rainfall of over 20 inches, as between 6.5 and 7.5 bags per acre. The yield for comparable areas in the European Mashonaland Province for that year was 13.3 bags per acre.

Yet, it is by no means impossible for equivalent yields to be obtained. This is regularly illustrated on Government demonstration plots in the African areas and by African participants in the African Farming Development projects - an organisation in which groups of European farmers assist selected African neighbours with loans, advice, ploughing and supervision. By these means high yields are regularly achieved and in 1967/68, for example, the best farmer in the Chiweshe Tribal Trust Land, 100 miles north of Salisbury, reaped 125 bags of maize from 4 acres - equal to the yields of some of the best European farmers in the area.

It is worth nothing, incidentally, that when Africans grow crops of which they have little previous knowledge, e.g. cotton, they must follow closely the technical advice given to them and as a result they reap good yields. For example, in the drought year of 1967/68 the African national average for Albar cotton was 853 lb. per acre. The European yield in the same year was 939 lb. It is the traditional subsistence crops which give yields generally so far below those of the European. Could it be that traditional practices become so ingrained that they are difficult to eradicate?

It would appear, therefore, that differences in soil fertility are not the main cause of the low productivity. The reasons must be sought elsewhere. And, undoubtedly the system of communal ownership of land which prevails in the Tribal Areas is one of the gravest obstacles to progress in this respect. If a man does not own land he cannot mortgage it and is thereby denied access to some forms of credit. Pride of ownership is

absent, too, together with the incentive which it gives for long-term investment in the land. Improved techniques for crop and cattle management are inhibited. In sum total, the system of communal ownership reinforces the conservatism inherent in most peasant farmers and is a very real stumbling block to advancement.

There are certainly other land problems which stand in the way of development. Long distances from market, for instance, are a feature of the Tribal areas and this can be particularly inhibiting to the production of crops for sale especially if heavy transport costs make transportation of traditional crops to market a sub-economic proposition. The only solution to this is to substitute more high-value crops for the traditional ones, e.g. Burley tobacco, cotton, groundnuts, and cattle. Yet, again, this is not easy, especially when a tribesman's first concern is to assure to his family an adequate food supply.

I am moving away now from the land question and on to consideration of the second factor of production, labour. I have referred earlier to the fact that there is no labour shortage in the Tribal areas in terms of numbers of people who occupy the land permanently or return to it periodically. Where the shortage does occur is in the prevalent practice of African adult males, in particular, emigrating to the towns or to European farms to earn cash, so that, at any one time somewhere between 20 and 50 per cent of the able-bodied males will be absent from their homes.

What this means in economic terms is that the rural community, because it has too many households headed by a female or an old man, visited only occasionally by the head of the family, is lacking in management ability. Hence there results a very serious absence of drive, energy and direction. In this sense there is a shortage of labour and not simply of muscle power.

Finally, in this brief survey of the factors of production there remains capital. Without it people are unable to put into practice those techniques which they are advised are essential for high yields. Yet the Tribal cultivator has no access to commercial credit nor to the Land Bank, because of his lack of acceptable security and because his needs are too small individually and too dispersed over a wide area. Nor can he save from his own resources, his income is too meagre. So, there exists a vicious circle of low yields, low incomes, no saving, inability to buy essential requisites and so back again to low yields.

This is why credit schemes have been created to cater specifically for the Africans' special needs. There is the Government's African Loan Fund, there is the private African Farming Development Company, there is the African Loan and Development Company, Ltd., and just commencing operations is the Tribal Trust Lands

Development Corporation. So, the structures exist but the funds at their disposal fall far short of what is needed. In total they command funds which, at present, probably do not exceed £1 million. To put this amount in perspective needs reference only to the fact that if merely half the Tribal areas were to be correctly fertilised about £12 million would be required annually. And fertiliser is only one of the requisites in short supply! Quite apart, too, from the question of physical shortage of supply there remains the more long-term essential need to educate the African in the correct approach to credit, its priorities, its proper usage and the responsibilities that go with it.

There may be other obstacles to rapid development in the African areas. For example, communications are poor in some instances and almost totally lacking in a few. Marketing facilities are not always ideal. Both of these however, are being improved and they are, anyway, minor as compared with those described above. Low productivity though, is due mostly to lack of capital, lack of management, the inhibiting factor of communal ownership of land and the attitude of mind which this generates. In fact, the most intransigent problem to be overcome in these areas may be more of a social than an economic nature.

What then are the possibilities? First of all, it is fortunate that generally speaking the necessary infra-structure for development is already there. A basic road system exists, there is a widespread pattern of water supplies, there is an adequate number of diptanks, an efficient Extension Service and a choice of marketing channels in most areas. There are also a few areas only sparsely populated and which could be settled more intensively. It is also obvious that the general level of production is so low that it offers vast scope for improvement.

But, if Tribal land production is to provide more than a subsistence existence, production must increase more rapidly than the growth rate of the population. Furthermore, if it is to maintain its attractiveness in relation to urban employment the rate of expansion must be considerably greater than that. Yet only if the potential income from the land can be shown to be at least equivalent to what a man can at present eke out from his holding plus what he earns in paid employment will the Tribal African find a life on the land attractive, in preference to the dual system of subsistence farming plus cash employment.

It is possible, as many demonstrations have shown. It will, however, require capital, training and a willingness on the part of the African to find satisfaction in hard work on the land and not merely regard his plot as a place to live on and eventually retire to, providing only sufficient food for his immediate needs.

But these are not the only problems looming. As African agricultural production increases where are the markets to be found? As far as Rhodesia is concerned she can only look to world markets. Her internal needs are already fully met for most agricultural commodities and are unlikely to expand dramatically. To compete successfully for export, quality must be high and prices very competitive. Can these essentials be met from small peasant holdings of 6 to 7 acres of arable land and cattle herds of 5 to 6 beasts per family? Particularly, when the world trend is towards larger farms that can take full advantage of modern capital intensive machinery and methods.

The answer may be that amalgamation of holdings will be essential. Can this process take

place quickly enough for survival, however? Or yet again, will the answer be farming upon an estate basis or co-operative production of the highest degree, making the maximum use of contract services and the like?

Whatever the answer or wherever the spark to development comes from, it is certainly necessary that the potential of the factors of production lying in the Tribal areas be more fully realised. For only thus can the national resources avoid waste, will the people be retained on the land at a decent standard of living and will the whole economy benefit from the release of purchasing power so engendered.