



## **HELPING THOSE TO HELP THEMSELVES? SA's TRICKLE-UP ECONOMY AND THE FALLACY OF INDEPENDENCE**

“Don't feed a man fish every day – give him a fishing rod so he can fish for himself.”

So goes this homespun notion used ad infinitum over the years by well-meaning South Africans endeavouring to uplift South Africa's considerable third world component out of poverty and dependence. It hasn't worked of course – quite the contrary. Those on state welfare number now 28 million and their benefits keep increasing. Some “temporary” Covid 19 grants have now become permanent, and other dole payments are increasing.

Numerous charities, golf days, free food from retailers, blankets in winter and scores of donations, raffles, feeding schemes and numerous other transfers of goods and funds to South Africa's third world sector have hardly uplifted the poor. They have more to spend, but they don't create wealth. The dependency sector just keeps growing. In addition, largesse was distributed to thousands of others via the government's Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) policy which saw whole swathes of “previously disadvantaged” blacks (as defined in the BEE title) suddenly become financially advantaged as a result of jobs and directorships and partnerships handed to them without any means test, but simply because of their colour. Others became shareholders in private companies for which they paid nothing. Add to this “upliftment” policy the hundreds of thousands of civil servants who have been proven to be wholly incompetent in their jobs, yet receive salaries way out of sync with their

capabilities. As government-appointed cadres many could hardly qualify as tinned-food shelf stackers. Despite all of this free loading and the regular transfer of funds and benefits from the productive to the unproductive within the citizenry, the number of people, especially children, who go to bed hungry every night, is increasing.

Dependency and its corollaries, expectations and even entitlement, increase incrementally in South Africa year after year. A recent edition of the popular newssheet *Maverick* told of its readers' donation of R1.4 million towards feeding people in the Eastern Cape's Lusikisiki area. "This will feed hundreds of families over the next six weeks", said Alan Browde, founder and CEO of SA Harvest. "It is a significant amount of food aid".

It certainly is! But what will happen after six weeks? Will there be another round of passing the hat for donations to feed these very same people and perhaps many more, once the word gets around that there's something being given away for free? Where will it end? Browde says that "hopefully this will be the start of an ongoing programme". What sort of a programme? Will the 400 recipient families of this type of charity be taught to plant something while they wait for the next donation? And who will teach them? Or can they not learn themselves, even from a magazine article.

What makes certain parts of the world so hopeless, always waiting for handouts. This doesn't only happen in South Africa, of course, but it happens a lot in Africa! *Maverick* also reports that children "who have relied on school feeding schemes" will be without regular meals during the holiday period. Here is another whopping dependency situation where food is now expected as part of the school curriculum.

After hundreds of years living in a first world country, there are millions who still do not know how to grow even the most common vegetables. Carrots, tomatoes and green beans are not hard to grow. Seeds are available in shops all over the country. Yet in the Eastern Cape, one of the most fertile areas of South Africa, with an attractive farm-friendly climate, one in

three (32%) households is food insecure. According to the Eastern Cape health department, between September 2022 and August 2023, there were 456 new cases of severe malnutrition in children under five, and 91 deaths due to severe acute malnutrition, in one district alone! The magazine Harvest is quoted in the Maverick article (15.12.23) that SA Harvest “has distributed tons of food over the past five years and helped feed millions throughout the country”. Yet still the hunger persists, and still the feeding schemes are the only meals thousands get every day! The article articulates various ways that poor people try to create an income such as collecting plastic and sending school children into town to sell fruit and vegetables. But the core of the problem remains. Millions are either too obtuse, too indolent or too dependent to get out and grow something for themselves. Are we stuck with this mentality forever? It would seem so. So the conclusion must be drawn that feeding schemes and food donations must carry on ad infinitum, while the underlying problem of dependency is not solved.

## **WHAT USED TO BE!**

There are points to ponder vis a vis this situation. The Eastern Cape province voted 69% in favour of the ANC at the last general election in 2019 (and 70% in 2014.) What will be the percentage this coming June? Must kind South Africans taxpayers regularly feed people who continue to vote for the ANC, without demanding a quid pro quo?

The Eastern Cape is potentially the most productive and fertile of all SA's provinces. The climate is gentle, with mean summer temperatures varying around 22C. In the mountainous areas, rainfall averages 1 000mm and along the coast it is as high as 1 300mm, diminishing to 625mm in the area in between. The irrigation prospects of the area's perennial rivers are high, and the soil compares with the best in South Africa.

Much effort and funding was put into this area of South Africa under the old National Party's homeland consolidation scheme. In particular, large amounts of taxpayers' money went into the development of a seriously researched and productive

agricultural sector-to-be. Many and diverse projects were introduced into the area – irrigation schemes, dairy, beef and sheep farming enterprises, the construction of dams, various crop farms including maize, wheat, lucerne and vegetable plantings, as well as sorghum and legumes grown under dry-land farming conditions.

Up to 1975, 61% of the old Transkei was agriculturally planned. There were 14 agricultural cooperatives, with 16 000 members. By June 1975, more than 1 300 dams had been built and 1100 successful boreholes had been drilled. More than 600 soil conservation schemes covering an area of 2 300 000 ha had been approved, and 922 dipping tanks had been provided for dipping livestock. At that time, the region was one of the biggest cattle-producing areas in South Africa. Maize had to be imported at the time – only around 200 000 tons were produced, yet there was a potential of approximately five million tons.

Potential was always the name of the game in this part of South Africa. Said the Africa Institute in 1976: “It has been estimated that the Transkei can produce enough tea to supply half of South Africa’s demand.” The Institute believed in 1976 already that the available land could produce fibre and industrial crops, coffee, cotton and sugar in large quantities.

In the old Ciskei, only 837 ha of land owned by blacks was under irrigation by 1975. Declared the Africa Institute: “The story of the Ciskei was even worse than that of the Transkei” (in terms of development in the mid seventies.) “The total number of fruit trees planted by black farmers up to 1975 amounted to 48,100. But on one Letsitele commercial farm alone, there were more than 100 000 trees”.

At the time not only was the soil underutilised and degraded and the growth potential for crops hopelessly untapped, the land itself was under strain with over-grazing, soil erosion and population growth.

## **WHATS THE USE OF POTENTIAL IF IT'S NOT REALISED?**

If there's one word seriously overused in politics, business and in virtually every element of life, it's potential. It means "what could be if".... and therein lies the rub! So many countries have potential, but those in charge don't know how to turn potential into achievement. A country like the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is awash with nature's munificence. The country has vast mineral wealth, is one of the world's largest exporter of copper, cobalt, zinc, gold, manganese, uranium and platinum, yet its people are among the poorest in the world. It is corrupt to the nth degree. Around 80% of gold produced in the country is smuggled out every year, with only 20% being sold in legitimate transactions. It is constantly at war with volatile semi-military factions from various parts of the country and from neighbouring lands.

Compare this to Japan which has hardly any agricultural land, is earthquake prone, endures extremes of temperature, and supports a relatively large population living on the few islands that make up the country. Yet it is a world economic power. It has a law abiding populace, and has a 99% conviction rate for serious crimes. The difference between these two countries is of course the people who live there.

## **CONCLUSION**

The agricultural potential of the homelands is estimated at more than 23% of the total in South Africa. At the time of the creation of the Eastern Cape homeland as a project to be developed, the people only produced 5,8% of South Africa's agriculture contribution to the country's GDP, this in the country's best land and climate.

A reading of the 1976 publication "Black Development in South Africa" outlines, inter alia, the role of agriculture in the economic development of the South African homelands. Pages and pages outline the work performed to change people from the stone-age into those who could at least feed themselves. It was a daunting task. Today however it is virtually impossible to find

information on the success of homeland development under the tuition and auspices of thousands of white civil servants who were sent to these areas to bring them into the 20th century. What these civil servants did was miraculous. They proved empirically that these territories could survive and prosper, some outstandingly, with modern management. It was not to be, however, and the regions deteriorated like so much of the rest of South Africa. Under the new “democratic” dispensation, these homeland areas were deemed inimical to the grander plan for a one man one vote dispensation, and well before 1994, these enclaves were left to their own devices. Today the people are queuing for food handouts, children are either malnourished or starving, the soils are eroded, the water supplies polluted. There are no jobs, most local politicians are eminently corrupt and the only development of note is the rise of crime, syndicates and penury.

We have not touched upon the success of the erstwhile Bophuthatswana. A Sunday Times article by the head of the ActionSA political party Herman Mashaba (21.1.24) reveals what many already knew – that the Bop homeland under President Lucas Mangope was a success in the true sense of the word. It became the fourth best economy in sub-Saharan Africa. Mashaba talks of value systems inherent in Mangope’s reign. What an historical tragedy it was to watch SA’s erstwhile Foreign Minister Pik Botha tell Mangope that his homeland was no longer. Botha’s party had capitulated and with it, years of positive endeavour were ended in a part of South Africa that showed what could be achieved with will, skill and hard work. Tragedy has indeed found its own level in South Africa.