

WORK PROJECTS IN MOCHUDI

The idea of working for food has been in the air for a long time now. The original starting date was March 1st. This became June 1st, then latterly July 1st. It is generally agreed that direct free food distribution over such a lengthy period is bound to weaken self reliance and encourage future expectation of government bounty. Some weeks ago Dr. J.C. Ramchandani came here to stress the need for a self help programme and the Prime Minister, similarly, in his recent visit emphasised the necessity of working for food. Last week the Chief in a tribal meeting encouraged the Bakgatla to do so.

About six weeks ago the Community Centre, in association with the Tribal Authorities, started a classroom building project at Linchwe School. Despite government's acceptance of this as a pilot work for food scheme progress was slow and labour came solely from individual schoolboys. As a work for food project it was a complete failure despite the Chief's strong recommendation in the Kgotla that Mochudi should cease being so dependant on outside help and start working for itself. By the 25th April the project was a sensational success - a change that can be attributed to the following factors:-

- 1) a series of ward meetings by myself and Richard Richardson on the general need to organize self help projects, and in particular on that at Linchwe School
- 2) the enthusiastic support of one particular Headman.
- 3) the widespread hunger at the end of a 3 week period without famine relief supplies.

By the end of April a totally new situation has arisen almost overnight. One ward after another stated that it had chosen its project, had X number of people who wished to work and wanted to start immediately. Despite the request to give details and estimates for prior consultation with the authorities Makgophana Ward sent a message saying that 200 people had already started work on their road construction project. Although this the wards have been asked to be patient Manamakgote have also started work this morning.

A situation has now come about which could have been expected by none. The Famine Relief Officer, Mr Peter Heady has explained that there is insufficient food in the country at the moment to continue direct famine relief and to support self help projects organized on a work for food basis on the scale that Mochudi now requires. Whatever may have been the reasons for Mochudi's sudden eruption of enthusiasm - and it is most unlikely that any one of the already mentioned factors could alone have brought it about - it would be wise to consider very carefully before settling on one of the three seemingly possible solutions.

- 1) stop direct famine relief distribution in Mochudi
- 2) Stop the Makgophana and Manamakgote projects. This has just been effectively done by withholding food issues
- 3) obtain more food

1) The first of these could only be done by the Chief. Such a move would free a certain quantity of foodstuffs which would probably not be sufficient to meet the requirements that at present seem likely, bearing in mind the need to continue feeding those people who are aged or suffer from some disability..If however there are surpluses elsewhere in the territory they could presumably be diverted to Mochudi.

2) The second, may in the circumstances, appear the most obvious. But the interest, enthusiasm and wish to cooperate of large numbers of people cannot always be predicted in advance. It is obviously necessary for famine relief administrators to set a date for the switch over to work for food and as obviously overoptimistic to expect several thousand people throughout the country to time their interest accordingly. Mass interest cannot be turned on and off at will. To discourage the present interest may be to lose it forever, especially as the current switch over date comes at a time when people are leaving for the lands.

The lack of resources in the country only serves to stress the urgent need for cooperative development and widespread and continuous village projects. Both depend on rousing popular interest. The crux of the matter is that this

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is particularly strong in Mochudi at the moment. Can the country afford to reject what it so desperately needs? The present circumstances may not have been planned and anticipated but plans sometimes have to be adjusted to changed circumstances. A tremendous chance now exists. Every effort ought to be made to take advantage of this fact. Mochudi could give an invaluable lead to the rest of the country and help to facilitate the general change over to self help work projects. It is only necessary to compare the current enthusiasm with the reticence that has so handicapped community development efforts in the past and to remember that in the last 40 odd years not a single classroom has been built in Mochudi by voluntary community effort. Now two wards have been so keen to start that they have organized themselves and simply started without waiting for an official approval. Has this happened any where else on a non regiment basis in the last 10 or 20 years?

It must be recognized all the same that this can change. People who have said they want to work may change their minds later. If they are discouraged their interest will in any case evaporate. But can it be recreated a second time? How many chances does one get? And whose word is going to be believed? It may seem that the greatest difficulty lies in preparing the ground for a large scale change of plan. In the long run it may well turn out to be the people themselves. Sudden enthusiasms can easily be followed by sudden depression and frustration. It would be foolish to ignore this possibility.

The third possibility will presumably be difficult but not impossible although supplies could not be obtained overnight. One of the Directors of the Africa Program of Church World Service which I represent in this country has said that they would consider sending additional supplies from the Christian Rural Overseas Program to support work for food schemes. This could be done, however, only if there is no customs charge either in South Africa or in Bechuanaland. Other possibilities could be explored.

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4.5.66

*Britain has just given an additional £1 million
for famine relief - this may be the answer to our
project.*