

The Batlokwa —

Why move a viable Community?

By Seamus Cleary

SITUATED about 50 km north of Pietersburg on the road to Rhodesia is Dwarsrivier, ancestral home of the Batlokwa who are now threatened with removal. They are a settled, thriving community although such economic success as there is based on the earnings of migrants in the Pretoria-Witwatersrand complex.

Resettlement within the area has taken place in the past mainly for the purpose of introducing agricultural betterment schemes.

Community facilities like schools, clinics, shops and a bus service between Dwarsrivier and Pietersburg are sufficient to meet the immediate needs of the Batlokwa and the people's confidence in the viability of their community is reflected in the increasing switch from traditional styles of building to the more permanent (and more expensive) erection of houses using concrete blocks and zinc roofing. This building is continuing despite the threatened removal which hangs over the Batlokwa.

Opposition to the planned resettlement is prevalent in all sec-

tions of Batlokwa society. The representatives of the traditional, Chiefs Machaka and Ramagopa, oppose the move as strongly as do the school children in the area.

The settlement was disrupted in October 1979 when Government officials attempted forcibly to remove the followers of Chief Makgato, whose tribe is related to the Batlokwa, who had refused to accompany their chief to the new area which had been set aside for them.

The Makgato fled to the neighbouring Batlokwa villages and were given refuge there. Chiefs Machaka and Ramagopa announced that they could not do otherwise since the Makgato were refugees from a war which the South African Government had declared on unarmed and defenceless people.

The Government believes the resettlement of the Batlokwa to be necessary and an urgent requirement of its policy of homeland consolidation. Dwarsrivier, which was part of Lebowa, was excised from the reserve in terms of the Government's 1975 'final'

consolidation proposals and declared a 'white' area.

The 'black' spot, therefore, in terms of Government policy must be cleared and the human cost, while attempts may be made to lessen it, will not be allowed to interfere with the execution of the overall strategy of grand apartheid.

Unfortunately for the Batlokwa, military and strategic interests are also apparently operative although there has been no official confirmation or denial of this.

The geographic location of Dwarsrivier, athwart the major road communication link to the north, is indicative of the site's potential information-gathering role in any future real guerilla threat to South Africa.

The Batlokwa are unaware of the outcome of appeals they have made to Minister of Co-operation and Development, Piet Koornhof. Koornhof's office has as yet to reply to a memorandum submitted to him in June and the Batlokwa leaders have adopted the attitude that the issue is being considered and are encouraging residents to continue building.