

Reading and writing for development



The KwaZulu Grassroots Training Programme was initiated at the specific request of the Chief Minister in 1983.

It is now beginning to take root in several areas of KwaZulu and Clarion Call interviewed Mrs Jean Mayson, head of the Grassroots Training Division of the Bureau of Community Development, about progress so far.

The project was launched in the Ingwavuma area using literacy as a vehicle for local level community development.

In the process of teaching people to read and write, attention simultaneously focussed on local level issues such as health, agriculture, and nature conservation.

In this way not only are basic reading and writing skills learned but usually some activities aimed at meeting people's basic needs are also undertaken.

The project has, however, wrestled with numerous problems while getting

off the ground. Twenty-four trainers were recruited and trained by Mrs Mayson. All the teaching aids and materials were developed within the division itself. A pilot programme — which aimed at testing the materials and giving the trainers the opportunity of assessing their skills — was organised in the Mahlabathini district.

The pilot project struggled against difficult odds as transport is very limited. Cyclone Demoina then wreaked havoc with the roads as well as destroying some of the classrooms.

A donation of caravans from the Lonrho Group and the delivery of landrovers towards the end of 1984 enabled the project to move to the Ingwavuma area where it established a base camp at Manguzi Hospital.

In the initial planning of the project, it was assumed that groups could be mobilised, organised and taught the basics of reading and writing within three months.

Experience gained to date suggests

that many rural realities impede progress.

An important problem derives from the demands on particularly women's time in terms of the seasons.

During the planting season for example there is a great deal of work to be done in the fields.

Then the fields have to be protected from monkeys and sometimes even hippos.

There is some resistance on the part of husbands and more conservative mother-in-laws who sometimes feel threatened by the participation of women in projects such as this.

A further disturbing factor in the area, renowned for its palm wine, is the high incidents of chronic drinking — particularly amongst men but also amongst older women.

Mrs Mayson is also very disturbed about the number of illiterate youth in the area. As yet, she has not found a way of enticing them into the activities of the training programme.

Another "rural reality" is that very few people are prepared to work in remote rural areas. It is extremely difficult to find suitable staff at a supervisory level.

Notwithstanding all these difficulties, approximately 800 people in the Manguzi area participated in the training programme during 1985. Several gardening groups, savings clubs, sewing groups, a child care group and new Inkatha branches have been started as a result of the efforts of Mrs Mayson and her team.

A particularly exciting innovation in the project is a 56 page magazine produced by one of the teachers, Mr U.A.M. Mkhize, who underwent training with the Community Services Training Programme at Natal University.

The magazine entitled "Sekusile" includes short articles by some of the newly literate learners as well as reports on various activities.

The magazine, which is sponsored by local traders, will be published quarterly to boost the reading material available in the area.

Asked about the role of Inkatha in a project such as this, Mrs Mayson said: "Basically Inkatha philosophy underpins all our programme activities.

"We use the same approach as Inkatha with the same strong emphasis on self-help. We believe that every person should have a share in development and every lesson is followed by a discussion whereby the content of the lesson is examined in the light of the experiences of the people.

"In this way the reading and writing exercises are directly linked to a meeting of local needs through development activities".

Future projects will be directly linked to the meeting of local needs through development activities.

Inkatha branches will also be used to facilitate the best use of Inkatha organisational infrastructures and also to give tangible expression to Inkatha's commitment to community development.

At the request of local communities, the project will be expanded to other districts including Ubombo, Simandlangetsha, Inkanyezi and a squatter community in the Inanda area.

While strategies may be altered to ensure maximum cost effectiveness, the grassroots training programme has established a strong foundation for its continued full participation in the overall development effort of KwaZulu.



Progress



Government administration in KwaZulu has been greatly facilitated by the near completion of administration buildings in the capital, Ulundi. Pictured above, the main administration building and, below, a typical open plan office. Productivity has shown a marked improvement since officials were moved from their previous cramped quarters — in what was originally designed as a school. The new complex was erected by the Government of KwaZulu from funds saved for the purpose over a decade.