

Compensation is a resettlement site situated on Trust land 73 km from Pietermaritzburg in the Impendhle district. Its Zulu name is KwaVulamehlo which means 'the place that opens eyes' - a blunt comment on how people already living there view the place. It is a 'Closer Settlement', that is a series of small plots, laid out like a township but without any urban infrastructure and miles from any centre of employment. There are no ploughing or grazing lands available.

Only a small section of Compensation has been settled. Rows of tin toilets and a grid of recently bulldozed roads cover the rest of the site, tangible signs that the government plans to move more people in soon.

Population At present there are 87 households, about 540 people in all. They come originally from a 'black spot' in the Underberg district near Pevensey, called 'The Swamp'. After the government had expropriated this land, the land-owner and his tenants were moved to Compensation in December 1978.

Facilities When people were first settled at Compensation each family was provided with a tent for six months. During this time they were expected to build their own homes. Each plot had a pit latrine and there were two 4 500 litre water tanks on one edge of the site. There was also a temporary lower primary school in the form of three tin 'fletcraft' huts.

Despite government assurances that nobody is moved before schools, shops and clinics are available, this basic infrastructure has still not been provided. By now most people have built wattle and daub houses. A new brick school, with 10 classrooms, is in the process of being completed but is not yet in use. A windmill has been installed and work is proceeding on a reservoir, apparently in preparation for the next intake of people. That is the extent of improvements.

There are no shops, clinics, churches, community centres or telephones on the site. The nearest shop is a white-owned store about 3 to 4 km away. Prices are high - an 80kg bag of mealie meal costs R20,90; a 750ml bottle of paraffin, 65c. The shop is also the nearest clinic depot. No doctors visit the community itself.

Buses do not come into Compensation because the road is too bad. The nearest bus stop is on the road to Impendhle 3km away. There is a daily bus to Pietermaritzburg, costing R1,85 one way.

Fuel At present free firewood is available nearby but the supply is dwindling fast. It will not last long if more people are moved in.

Land The lack of land is the single most devastating change in lifestyle the people have had to adjust to. At 'The Swamp' everybody had access to a field to plough and commonage for grazing stock. In terms of the regulations, only landowners with more than 17ha of land are compensated with an equivalent amount of land when resettled.

Only one person, the original landowner, qualified to be compensated with land when the community was moved. However, much of the land he received in return is on a steep hillside, unsuitable for cultivation.

Employment AFRA interviewed 82 households and discovered that they have a total of 95 people in employment. A further 23 people see themselves as unemployed and actively looking for work. Of these 16 have lost jobs they used to hold and 7 are newcomers to the job market.

The enforced move from the Underberg area has clearly dislocated previous patterns of employment. Twenty-three people still work in that area but, where before they lived at home, they have now become migrants returning home only weekly or monthly. Of the 16 unemployed people who have lost their jobs, 10 used to work in the Himeville/Underberg area before they were moved.

The degree of unemployment is being cushioned for the time being because many men are employed on a temporary basis at Compensation by the government. They are installing toilets, digging ditches, clearing roads etc., in readiness for the next intake of people. Fully one third of those employed - 32 people - are working in this way. They make up the largest single category of employed. The remainder work in the Durban/Pietermaritzburg areas (19 people), Johannesburg (3 people) and other parts of Natal (18 people). Only one person reported working in the Impendhle district itself. Not all households have a breadwinner. 7 of the 82 households interviewed depend entirely on pension remittances for their income. In one instance 6 people are living off a single old age pension. Another 10 households have no regular source of income at all. Five of these report informal sector activities such as making and selling mats, beer, clothing or plastering other people's houses. The other 5 households have no obvious source of income.

It is clear from these bald figures that significant numbers of people must depend on charity and at least some degree of illegal activity for their survival.

Organisation Compensation is a depressed and divided community. Although the people have been living there for over 18 months, there is no sign of community organisation or cohesion. There are no church groups - a Catholic Women's League did not survive the move from 'The Swamp' - no social clubs and no sports associations. Inkatha does not have a local branch.

The ex-landowner is recognised as the official leader by government officials and is in charge of recruiting workers to prepare the new sites: a powerful position in a community as depressed as Compensation. He does not enjoy the support of his ex-tenants, however. He complains that they no longer listen to him; they complain that he does not represent their interests. Nothing else has emerged to fill the vacuum left by the destruction of the old landowner/tenant relationship.

People willingly offer a formidable list of complaints and problems but do not see themselves as capable of solving them. A universal complaint is the lack of land. Other common complaints are the overcrowding - people are not used to living so close together - the absence of a local shop and clinic, the unemployment and the distance to the bus stop. People interspersed their replies with such bleak comments as "We are starving here" or "We are too ill". They all believe that they are far worse off at Compensation than they were at 'The Swamp'.

When asked what they intend doing about their problems, however, most people answered "Nothing" or "I feel so confused" or "I feel helpless". The most frequent response to a question asking who they thought would help them was a vague "GG" (government) - "they put us here, so they are responsible" or an equally vague "GG and the leaders". They themselves have no sense of involvement or power.

One interviewer reports that several people struggled to remember how many people live in their households, even, in some cases, what the names of all their children are. In the words of her report: "The people are so depressed that they have lost touch with the world around them...they feel unattached, sort of hanging".

This apathy and sense of dislocation can be directly related to the government's policy of resettlement that has been and is being inflicted on millions of black South Africans. Given the picture presented above, it seems inconceivable that anyone would want to move willingly to Compensation. Yet this is what officials say about the people of KwaPitela. (See AFRA Report No.5) In a country where the bulk of the people have so little control over their lives, official notions of what constitutes "voluntary resettlement" have to be viewed with extreme scepticism.

(A more detailed report on Compensation is available from the AFRA office to anyone who is interested)