

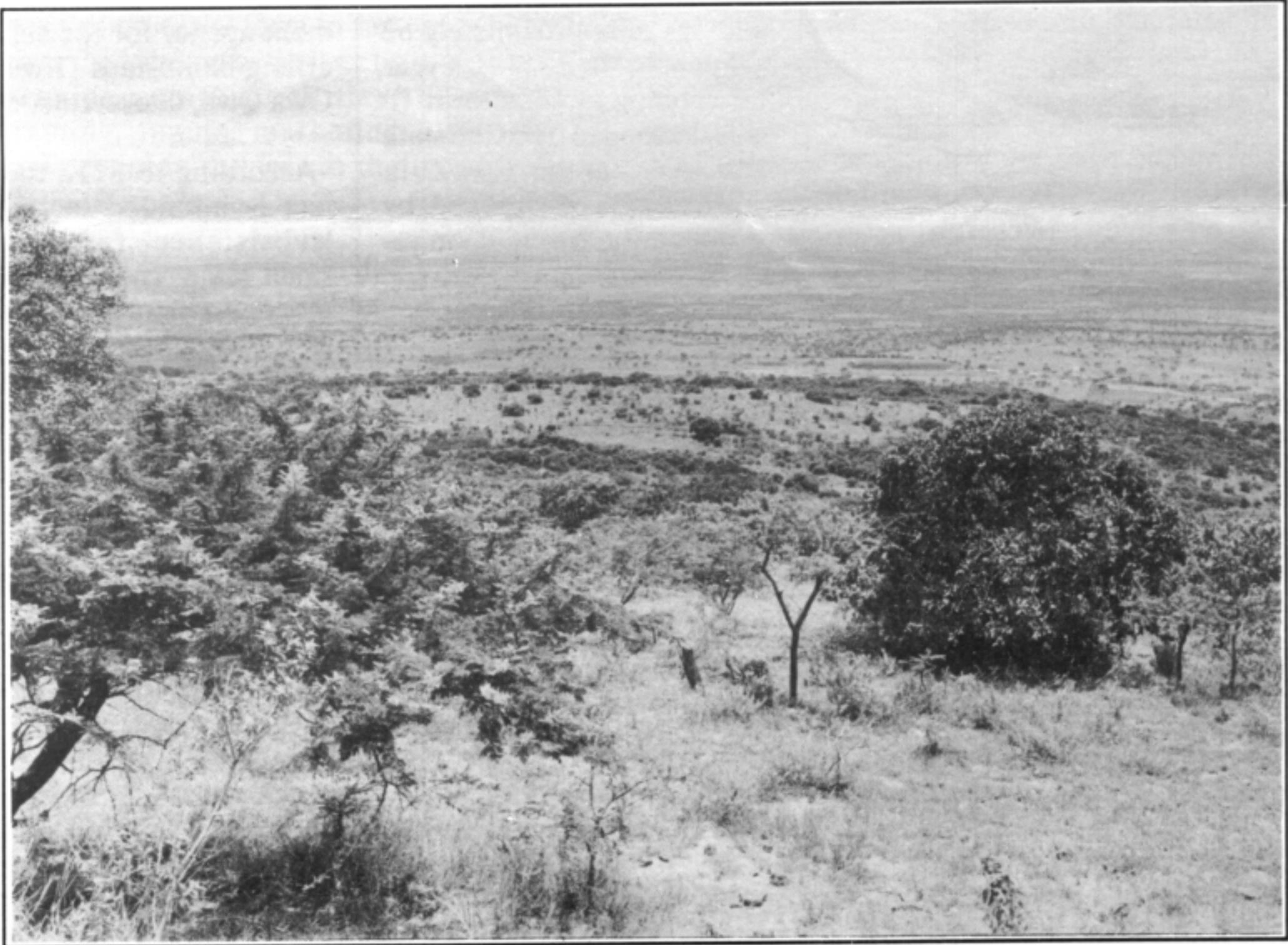
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AFRA

ASSOCIATION FOR RURAL ADVANCEMENT

Afra Newsletter (3) 1988



MJINDI/MAKHATINI: Removals, resistance & 'development'

REMOVALS FOR 'DEVELOPMENT'

THE CASE OF THE MJINDI/MAKHATINI IRRIGATION SCHEME

To date more than 5 000 people have been forced to leave their homes and land to make way for a massive state irrigation scheme which is taking place on the Pongola River floodplain of the Makhatini Flats in the Ubombo district of North Eastern Natal.

About half of the displaced people have left the area altogether. Those remaining have been moved into a series of six closer settlement ghettos scattered about the scheme. Less than a third of

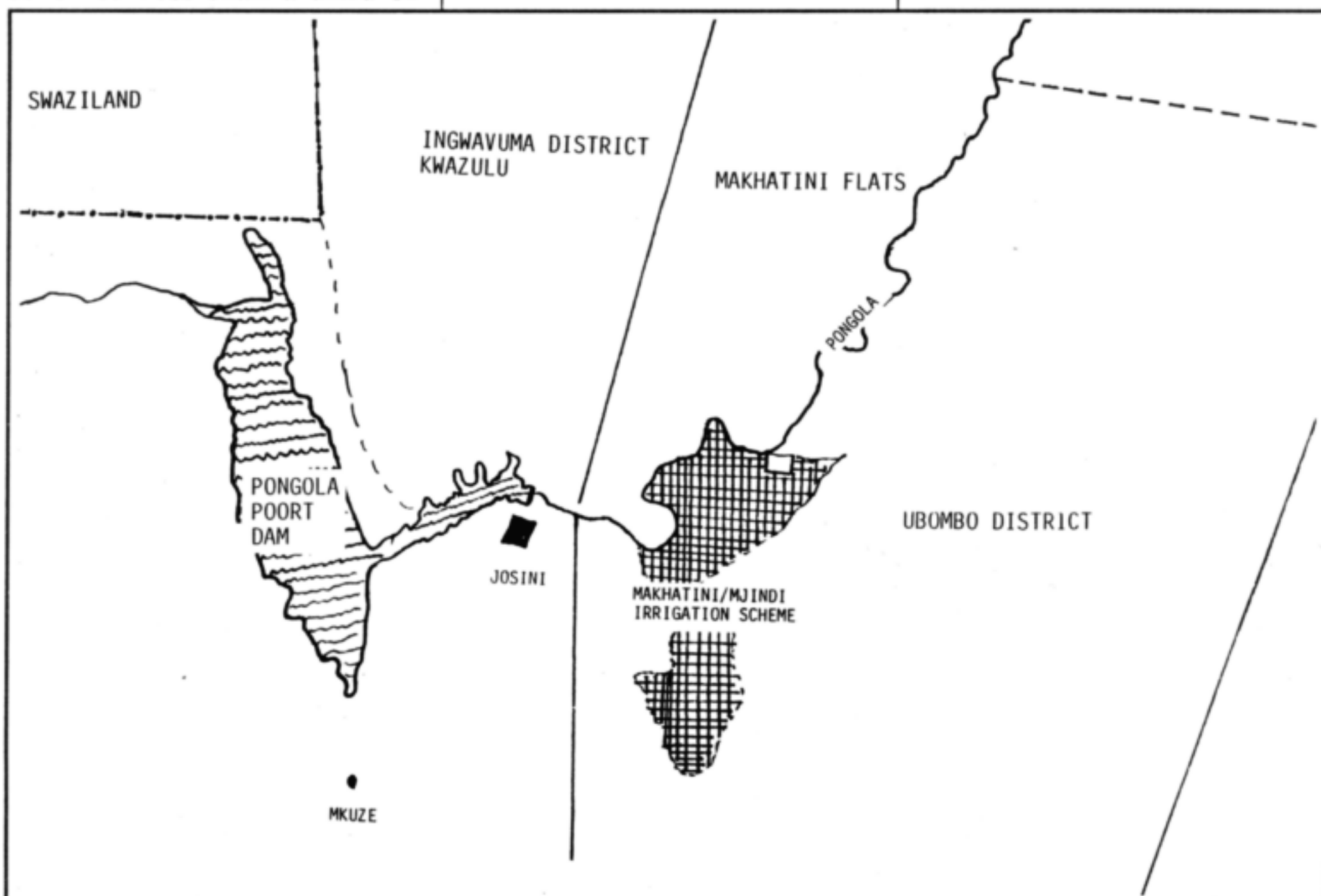
the families living in the resettlement camps have been granted land on the scheme, despite promises that they would be able to participate in and benefit from the scheme.

If the scheme is expanded as originally planned to take over most of what was previously the Makhatini Flats state-land corridor, it could eventually threaten the landholdings of approximately 62 000 people. In June this year the cabinet in Capetown finally decided to hand the state land over to the KwaZulu bantustan, as proposed by consolidation commission reports in the early 1970's.

THE SOUTH AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT TRUST CORPORATION (STK)

The Makhatini/Mjindi Irrigation scheme was started in 1980. It is being implemented by the Department of Development Aid and the South African Development Trust Corporation (STK), which is the government's development agency for the self-governing bantustans (KwaZulu, Qwa Qwa, Gazankulu, etc).

According to STK, the project is intended to "convert 'subsistence' farmers into small scale 'commercial' farmers". At first a large 1 200



hectare farm - called the central unit project (CUP) - was cleared below the Pongolapoort dam to provide the core around which a network of "settler" farmers on 5 hectare irrigated plots was later established.

158 "settler" farmers have been allocated irrigated plots mainly for the production of a cotton cash crop, although some rice and vegetables are also being cultivated. Settler cotton plots have more recently been increased to 10 hectares, from the original 5 hectares.

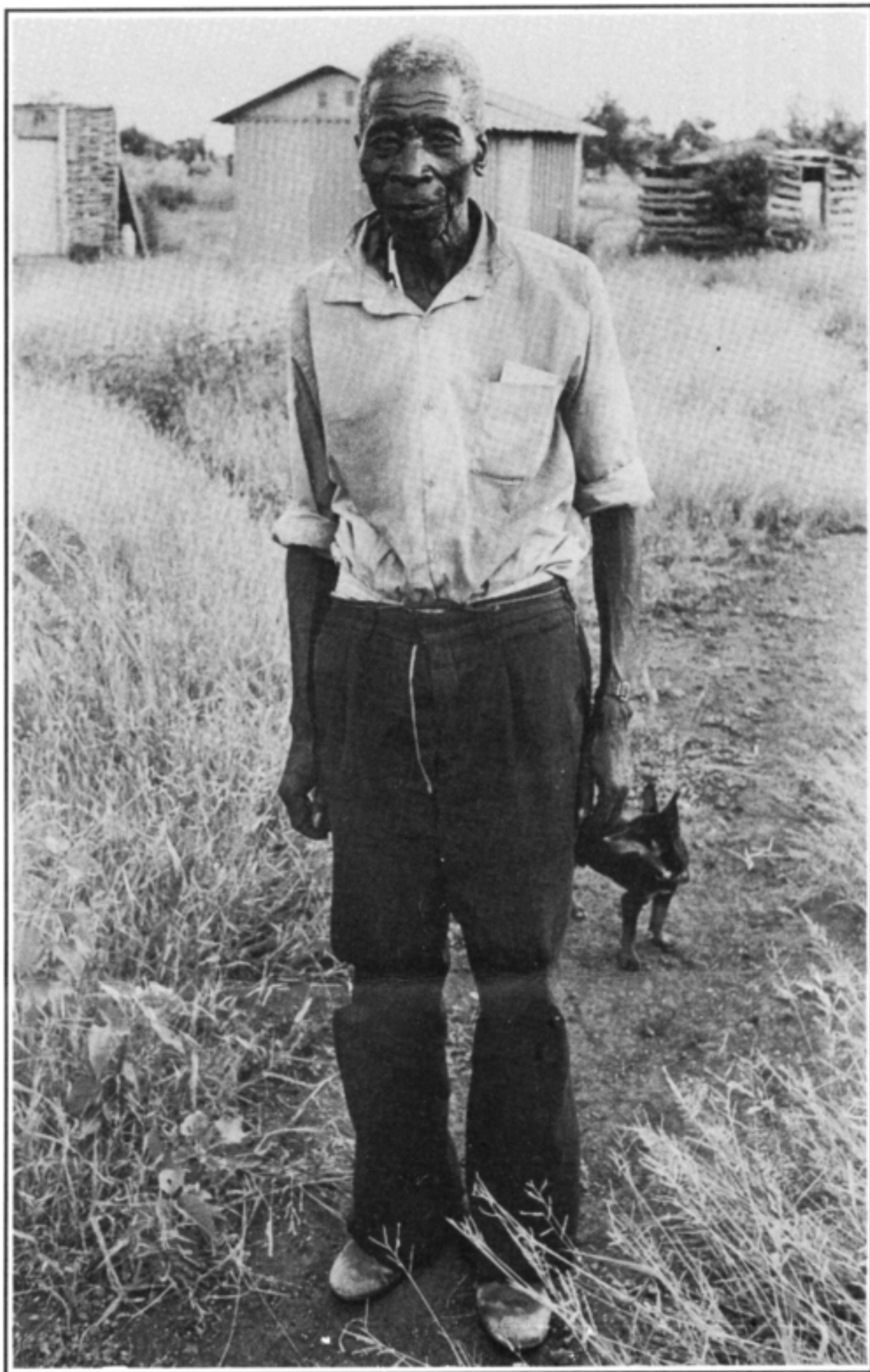
The CUP is being run as a large commercial farm to finance the scheme as well as to provide capital facilities, training, inputs, marketing and extension services to the settler farmers.

The scheme has been developed at great cost, approximately 37 million rand to date for the development of approximately 3 500 hectares with an annual input of about 8 million rand per annum.

This has included the introduction of an extensive canal system to bring water from the Pongolapoort dam. The Development Bank of Southern Africa has just recently agreed to underwrite another 72 million rand for an additional phase of the project. It is estimated that the total cost of the project will be in the region of 400 million rand.

THE POLITICS OF DEVELOPMENT

The Mjindi/Makhatini Flats Irrigation Scheme has to be



An old man stands in front of his resettlement home. His family have lived on the Makhatini Flats for generations.

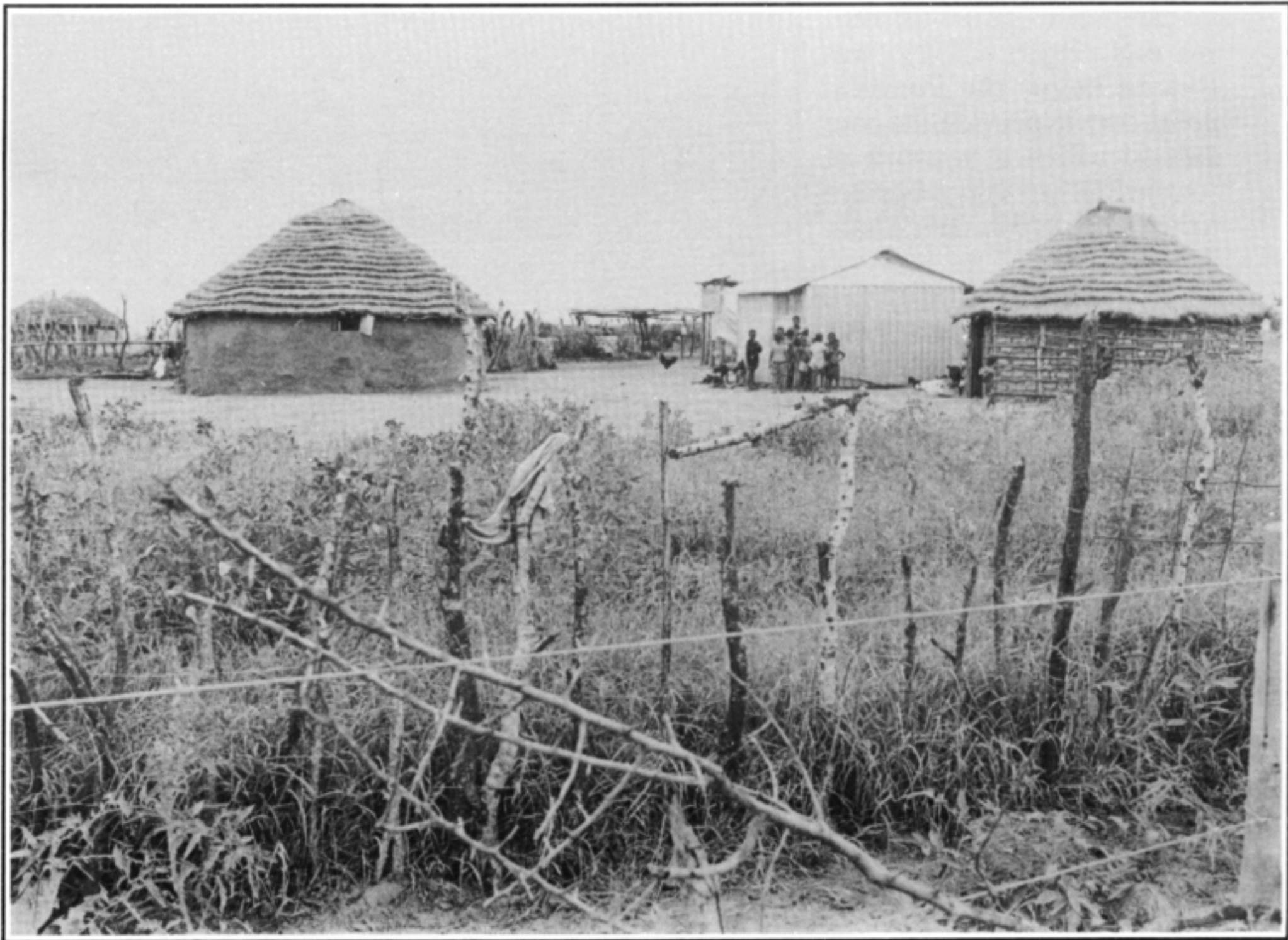
seen in the context of the South African government's bantustan policy.

For KwaZulu to succeed as an independent ethnic nation, the government is attempting to ensure rapid economic growth in the bantustan.

It is for this reason that an agricultural development project involving increased production of an export-oriented

cash crop rather than locally required food crops has been undertaken at great cost.

According to the developers, this high yield agriculture requires high technology and commercial management. Because the scheme must pay for itself and the cost of implementing bantustan structures, the central concern of the developers is production targets and project debts. As a result



Sibongile resettlement camp. The villages have suffered from official neglect and services are almost non-existent.

production is transformed in a way that is completely out of the experience of local people.

If the government wished to develop a project for the benefit of the people living on the flats, it would have introduced a project sensitive to the basic food needs of the area; before introducing high technology it would have taken note of the lack of local skills and the inaccessibility of this technology to the people in the area.

The establishment of small-scale commercial outgrowers on the scheme is also motivated by considerations of bantustan policy. The government is attempting to divide

rural people into two classes in the bantustans; commercial peasant farmers and labourers. The former are intended to help create the middle class which the government hopes will support the bantustan structures.

The third world is littered with the debris of poorly conceived "economic growth" models of development which have impoverished both communities and their environment. This has led to a serious re-evaluation of imposed models of development which are not determined by local needs. But on the Makhatini Flats, these lessons have gone unheeded.

DISPOSSESSION

For the vast majority of the people in the area, the scheme has meant dispossession and impoverishment. The average landholdings of the families removed from their land was about 5 hectares. Many had as much as 20 hectares. Robbed of their land, they have been forced to become casual labourers on the CUP or to work for the settler commercial farmers for as little as R2 00 per day.

CONDITIONS IN THE RESETTLEMENT CAMPS

Although the developers have put a lot of money into capital works to increase agri-

cultural production on the scheme, the resettlement ghettos - which are referred to rather euphemistically as "centralised villages" by the developers - have been seriously neglected. Promises of schools, clinics and other facilities, have simply not materialised.

Basic services such as water have either not been provided, or provided in a very rudimentary way. The water system in one of the resettlement camps, Biva, was out of order for almost the whole of 1987. Water was then provided by a water tanker (waterkar) on certain days. In December last year the water tanker itself was out of commission.

Many of the camps have not been properly sited, and are in areas of high water tables. This combined with rudimen-

tary sanitation facilities poses a constant health hazard.

OUTSIDERS

The scheme has benefitted the few at the expense of the majority. This situation has been made worse by the fact that the developers have favoured people from outside the areas to participate in the scheme. About 80% of the settler farmers are not originally from the area.

In fact a number of the settler farmers are alleged to have been brought across from Swaziland with their tractors and equipment, where they had been successful cotton farmers. This has led to greater tension between the dispossessed and the new class of settler farmers who have benefitted from the scheme.

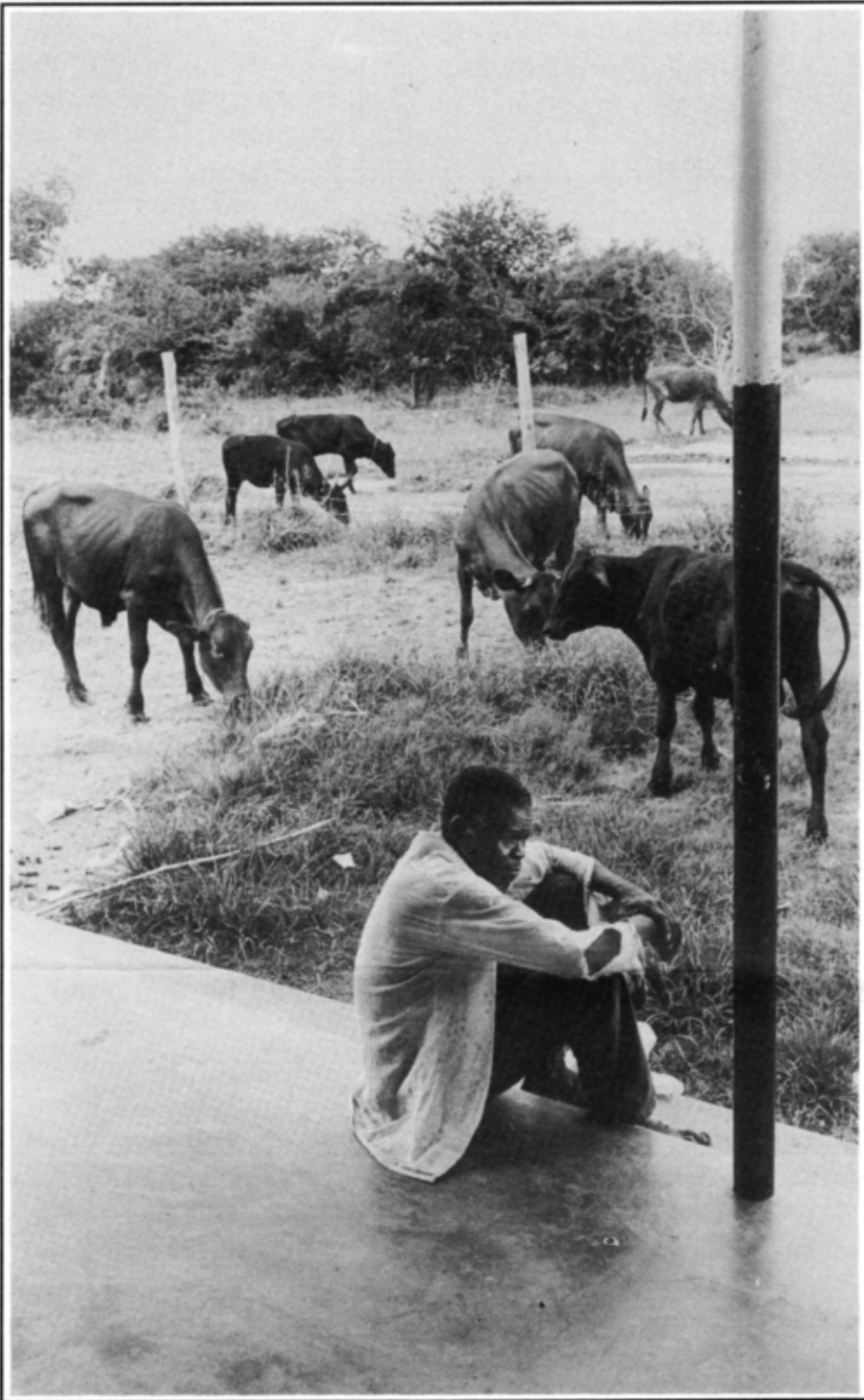
There is also a growing crisis over access to communal grazing land. Those who have benefitted from the scheme have put their cotton profits into purchasing more cattle, while those who have been dispossessed are more dependent than ever on cattle as their only means of investment. This has aggravated social tensions.

CONSULTATION, CONTROL AND CENTRALISATION

Since the scheme was started, it has simply been imposed on the people of the Makhatini Flats without any consultation. Decisions about who would be moved, who would get land, what crops would be grown and how they would be marketed have all

A landowner points to his fields which he fears will be taken from him by the irrigation scheme. The scheme threatens the landholdings of thousands of people.





The scheme has led to an increasing shortage of grazing land and growing social tension between the cotton farmers and the original residents of the area.

been in the hands of STK officials.

A group of people who now live near the town of Josini after being forced to leave their land told AFRA how they had come to learn of the scheme:

'The very first time we found out that we would have to move was when a bulldozer

began to plough up the trees around our homes. It was a white man driving the bulldozer. We went to see our chief about this. He told us that we must not disturb this man. He also told us that we would have to move from where we were. The Chief then held a another meeting, but he refused to answer any questions about the removals. He said that no-one had a

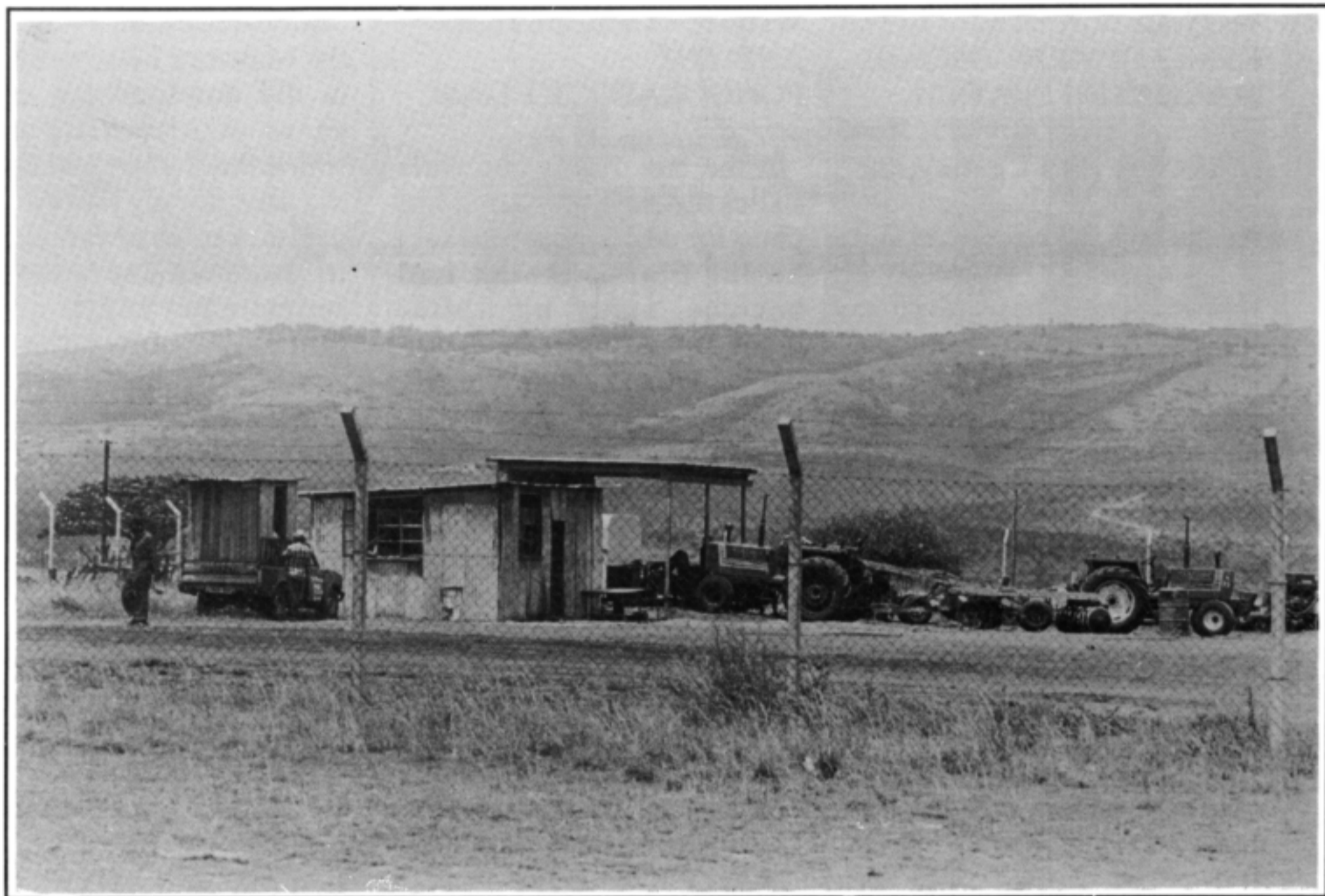
right to speak. He said that the land was for the white men and the government. He said that they were going to put water pipes onto the land. He said that people must fill in application forms to get land. He said that they would be told later about the land.'

But even those who have been fortunate enough to get land on the scheme complain about the lack of control they have over their affairs. Settler farmers are forced to complete loan agreements specifying what crops they must grow, binding them to marketing these through the developers.

Although the developers talk about "community participation" and "local control and involvement", a number of examples clearly illustrate the absurd levels of control and centralisation that exist on the scheme.

One settler farmer complained bitterly about the manner in which STK goes about providing certain services. He said that STK would spray his fields regardless of whether he had requested this or not. He was extremely perturbed about a R470-00 account he had received from STK for an aerial spray that he had neither requested or witnessed being done.

The most graphic example of people's lack of real involvement is the story of a woman who, after being granted land, complained to the STK officials about a strange grass that was growing in her plot. She didn't realise that this was rice that had been planted on her behalf by STK!



The emphasis on high technology and commercial management means increased dependence on outside management and control.

HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT

Large-scale Irrigation schemes throughout Africa have caused health and environmental disruptions. The Mjindi/Makhatini scheme is no exception. There has been an alarming increase of malaria in the area. Water spilling from the irrigation canals has created large areas of swampland which is being trampled by cattle, leading to profuse mosquito breeding. Health statistics in the area reveal that the the number of malaria cases in the area have risen from an average of 7 to 621 in 1987.

There has also been a long held concern on the part of en-

vironmentalists that the soil on the Makhatini Flats is not suitable for extensive irrigation. Researchers are reported to have found the soil to be light in texture and with a low humus and clay content and an inferior ability to hold nutrients and water. There exists a real danger that the scheme could transform the Makatini Flats, described as a "natural wonderland", into a dust bowl.

The dispossession process is also forcing people to utilize increasingly marginal land that is extremely vulnerable to erosion.

Furthermore the cultivation of cotton requires the use of highly toxic pesticides that pose a threat not only to the families living in close

proximity to the scheme, but also to the environment. It can be predicted that the draining of these toxins into the Pongola floodplain will have a devastating impact on the fragile and unique ecology of the area.

INAPPROPRIATE DEVELOPMENT

A project that forcefully removes people, benefits the few and impoverishes the masses, concentrates on production at the expense of human and social development, poses a health and environmental threat - is the most inappropriate and undesirable form of development for the people of the Makhatini Flats.

THE HISTORY OF DEVELOPMENT ON THE MAKHATINI FLATS

Since the 19th Century, the Makhatini Flats has been subject to the development and planning whims of successive ruling classes. These development plans have all been characterised by deceit, exploitation and treachery. They have each compounded the impoverishment and insecurity of the people living in the area to this day.

EARLY HISTORY AND ANNEXATION

The people living on the Makhatini Flats paid tribute to the Zulu Kingdom. After the defeat of the Zulus, the Makatini Flats was incorporated into Zululand which was annexed by Britain in 1887.

SQUATTERS ON CROWN LAND

After Zululand was handed over to the Natal settler government, a commission decided in 1904 to declare most of the Makhatini Flats as government or "crown" land. Overnight people living on the flats became squatters on land they had occupied for generations. They were only officially informed of this in 1935. They were made to pay a "squatters" tax of 2 pounds per year for each hut on crown land as well as a hut tax of 14 shillings per year.

WHITE AGRICULTURE AND THE PONGOLAPOORT DAM

In the late 1950's and early sixties the state had ambitious plans for developing the Makhatini Flats - which had become "state" land after union - into a major sugar producing area under white settlement.

In 1962 work started on a huge dam on the Pongola River. It was planned that the dam would bring a vast area of the Makhatini Flats under irrigation - some 64 000 morgan initially, rising to about 70 000 morgan - and thus support a white settler community of 3 500. In 1964 the Makatini Research Station was established.

CONSOLIDATION AND REMOVALS

In the 1970's however plans for the opening up of the Makhatini Flats for white settlement were radically revised. The government's bantustan policy and grand apartheid vision now saw the need to hand over the state land for the consolidation of KwaZulu and this formed part of the 1973 and 1975 consolidation proposals.

There were also plans to re-settle people removed from other areas for consolidation purposes onto the flats. In August 1978, the then Department of Plural Relations circulated a memorandum proposing that compensatory land for Reserve Four (near Richards Bay) be found on part of the flats.

But the decision to hand over the Makatini Flats to KwaZulu did not spell the end of years of insecurity under which the people had lived in the area. Firstly there was the decision to go ahead with the irrigation scheme in 1980, and secondly the unilateral decision by the South African government to hand over the northern sections of the Makatini Flats in the Ingwavuma district to Swaziland, as part of a strategy to turn as many black South Africans as possible into foreigners.

The latter plan has failed, but the former still goes on relentlessly.

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Thanks to Cedric Nunn for the pix.