

A matter of survival

Planning with the people

The KwaZulu Government recently commissioned the Institute of Natural Resources, of the University of Natal, to carry out three projects on its behalf and has partly funded a fourth in conjunction with a well-known Natal family Trust.

One project is concerned with soil erosion — where it occurs in KwaZulu and what can be done about it — the aim of another is to identify land of conservation and recreational potential. The third will be looking into the possibility of setting up home industries, using by-products of culled game and the fourth is looking into the whole cattle picture including the socio-economic factors inherent in cattle ownership, the effect on the land of over-grazing and so on.



In common with the rest of the world the population growth rate in South Africa has increased dramatically in the past century and is still increasing, with KwaZulu being no exception. The majority of KwaZulu's rural inhabitants wage an unremitting struggle merely to exist.

In many areas the carrying capacity of the land has been exceeded. That is, its inherent ability to sustain life is seriously threatened. In other words, in much of KwaZulu, and for a variety of reasons, too many people are living on too little land.

Victims of their circumstances, such people have no alternative but to exploit whatever natural resources they find around them and in this context that sometimes means "over-exploit".

All four projects slot precisely into the Institute's underlying philosophy of "conservation for development", a philosophy shared with the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) — the scientific arm of the World Wildlife Fund and of which the INR is a member.

The INR's founder and first Director, Dr John Hanks, is now "number 2" at the WWF and it is fair to assume his philosophy will begin to show itself in this international organisation's forward planning.

The KwaZulu Government and the Institute have been working together since the establishment of the INR five years ago, when the INR's specific objectives were accepted in principle by the KwaZulu Government.

Natal/KwaZulu comprises only 7% of the total land surface of South Africa and yet it is the home to 20% of the total South African population. A far cry from the days of King Shaka and before colonial administrations and their successors busied themselves with "border adjustments".

Gone are the days when land seemed limitless and nature's abundance sustained people who lived lives which bears no resemblance to those lived by their descendants.

It is difficult to realize today that early settlers in Port Natal, later Durban, and Pietermaritzburg bought much of their fresh produce from Zulu farmers.

The problems of soil degradation, poverty, malnutrition and unemployment have driven thousands of rural Blacks away from their homes, and also from those areas where they have been "resettled", to the cities where they hope to find some way of earning enough money to keep their families alive.

Sadly many such people are hamstrung from the start because they lack, through no fault of their own, the necessary skills to give them the chance of employment, so they join the ever-lengthening queues of South Africa's unemployed. Hopeful and hopeless, their numbers increase daily — outside factories and labour bureaux throughout recession-ridden South Africa, while the threat of disinvestment compounds the nightmare.

In 1981, deep in rural KwaZulu, three Chiefs and members of the Biyela Tribal Authority met a group of INR ecologists, soil scientists and agriculturists to discuss the enormous problem of the self-generating cycle of rural poverty.

The Institute presented to the Chiefs and their colleagues its ideas and thoughts on how a change in rural life could perhaps be achieved. This was the start of many sessions of lively debate and discussion between Chiefs, Tribal Authorities and INR personnel.

The INR made it clear it wished only to help — if that help was wanted. From the start the INR's philosophy has been



that people must not be "planned upon"; "planning with" and "on-going intimate involvement of the local people" are the key phrases used constantly by INR staff. In fact, the most important factor of all has been that of the local people's involvement.

The INR emphasised that projects undertaken would be relatively small in size; this was seen as desirable from the socio-economic point of view.

The KwaZulu Government decided that the Biyela region was suitable for the start in researching development systems — if the people agreed — for the significant reason that the Biyela region was not an easy area to develop and exhibited many of the problems typical of so many rural areas — for example, lack of infrastructure, services, lack of employ-

ment opportunities, (agricultural and non-farming), shortage of food and water, steep land, over-grazing, removal of trees and soil erosion. Success achieved in this region could be adapted for implementation in other areas.

The Chiefs were informed that a detailed survey of the area should be carried out (soil types, vegetation cover and so on) but before this could come about, the Institute needed, and got, the Chief's and Tribal Authorities' approval to go ahead.

The survey would form the basis of the INR "Project proposals"; these would act as precursor trials and demonstrations of what could be done in the area prior to the drawing up of an overall rural development plan.

Many of the proposed approaches to development systems were innovative and time would be needed to confirm which



Prince Gideon Zulu and Gavin Pote examine cabbages growing at the irrigation scheme in Chief P Biyela's ward. Three members of the Ladies' Garden Committee discuss their work. On the other side can be seen part of the lucerne trial.

were most acceptable to the people.

Development Committees, democratically elected and representative of the local committee, were formed in each Tribal Authority area to assist in the process of the formulation of the development proposals and, most importantly, select the trial participants. In finding suitable sites and participants for the trials the Development Committees made the final decisions.

After the completion of the survey and the choice by the Development Committees as to which of the suggested precursor trials were to be set up, a Field Manager was employed and Prince Gideon Zulu (a member of the Zulu Royal House) agreed to act in a liaison capacity.

KwaZulu Government Extension Officers and KDC personnel completed the team. Everyone involved knew that at all times it would be vitally necessary to be aware of what the people really wanted and to make sure that these wants were adequately expressed through the Development Committees and other existing social structures. Awareness of people's real needs is essential and no better example of this can be found than in the fine work done by the Red Cross in KwaZulu.

The trials in which the Development Committees participated were:

1. A four hectare irrigated lucerne trials.
2. Three afforestation plantation demonstrations.
3. Two poultry units (one a broiler, the other an egg unit).
4. Two dairy units.
5. Development of water resources in association with the trials: gutters, tanks for rain-water collection, wells, boreholes and pipeline supplying water under gravity from the perennial stream to one of the dairy units.

Afforestation was started on steep slopes which at once controlled the problem of grazing and crop cultivation on unsuitable areas and prevented soil erosion.

Loans at low interest rates and payable within three years were made to each trial participant. Each participant has been taught how to keep production and sales records, and Institute personnel work side by side with each one, teaching, guiding and monitoring.

All produce is sold in the area — to the benefit, obviously, of the trial participant, but also to the buyer who is buying fresh, cheaper produce. Some participants repaid their loans within 18 months and are eager to expand, which is where the KFC (KwaZulu Finance and Investment Corporation) plays a major role.

The trials are run on minimal costs — poultry units operate without lighting at night — unlike large-scale commercial units. Production has hardly been affected. Rainwater, collected and channelled, is sufficient for those units where water is essential.

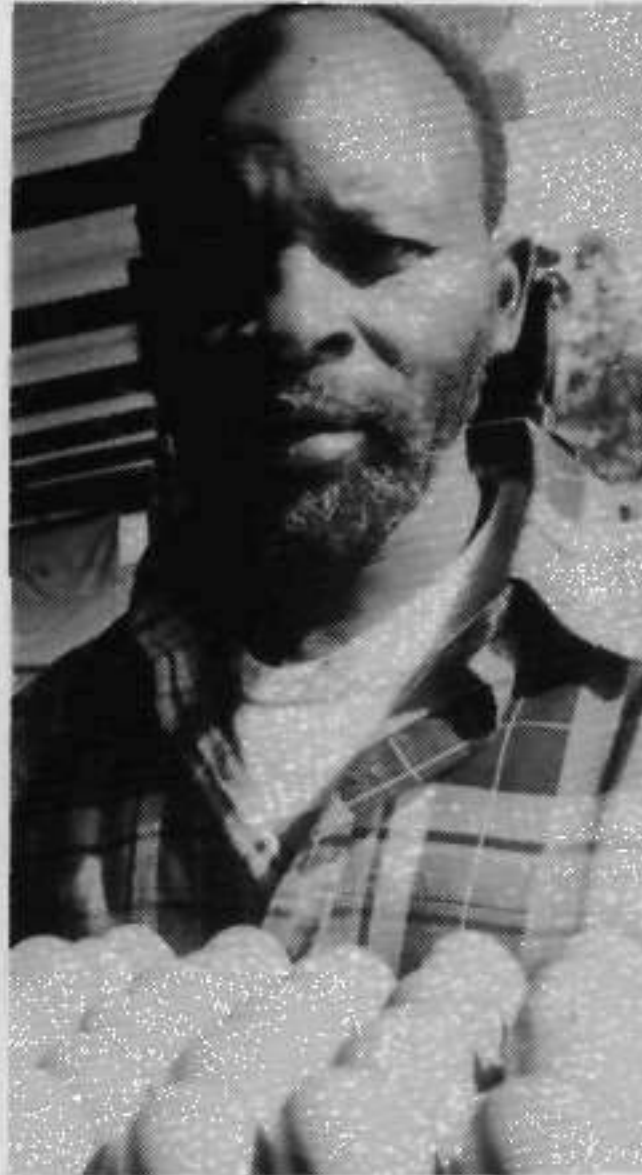
Every project is conducted with an eye to simplicity of operation and low running costs. On-going INR monitoring ensures that trial participants feel comfortable with what they are doing and any problems are immediately dealt with

and advice given when required.

Based on the information gathered from survey work, the trials and demonstrations, a report on preliminary development proposals has been submitted to the KwaZulu Government for its approval.

The next phase of what is known as the "Biyela Project" has already started and consists of:

● Explaining to the local community, through their Development Committees, the results of and conclusions drawn from various trials, the advantages and implications of introducing to the area the elements of the integrated rural development "package" and the details of the proposed 1 000 hectare pilot project which will test the technical feasibility, economic viability and social acceptability of the "package" and;



Mr Walter Mnyandu of the Ndundulu Egg Project

● Establishing the pilot scheme, in close co-operation with the KwaZulu Department of Agriculture and Forestry, KFC and private sector organizations — if the local community is in favour of, and fully committed to, participating in the project.

The Biyela project is one of the Institute's major projects, but it doesn't stand alone. Integrated optimum land use is the nub of Institute thinking and the following list of some other projects clearly defines the "integrated" aspect of the whole programme:

1. Development of an agricultural marketing system for KwaZulu
2. Strategies for improving the livestock situation in KwaZulu
3. Settlement, food production and consumption patterns in a rural community in KwaZulu
4. Water and sanitary development unit
5. Evaluation of better crop varieties and new crops for planting in KwaZulu
6. Rural energy unit
7. Establishment of a geographic information system (GIS) for Natal/KwaZulu, which will be of incalculable benefit in land use planning

There are still more projects, all links in the integrated land use chain, and all are being carried out in co-operation with the KwaZulu Government and the KFC.

What the Institute hopes for is a balance between industrialisation and agricultural development. Increased food production is a priority — but no more so than care of natural resources, many of which are finite. The Institute is striving for a transition from failing subsistence farming to small-scale, income-generating, commercial farming, while never forgetting that care of the environment is the bottom line.

During his opening speech at last year's Environmental Education Symposium, Chief M.G. Buthelezi said: I am deeply aware that much of our land is seriously degraded and that some 70 percent of my people living in the rural areas are trapped in this downward spiral of degradation and degrading poverty. These people, the victims of circumstances beyond our control, have no alternative but to exploit their immediate environment. It is for them a matter of survival."