

## 3.3 DIMBAZA

### 3.3.1 Introduction

Dimbaza is about 15 km from King William's Town, on the road to Alice. The first people resettled there arrived in December 1967, but the main influx occurred between December 1968 and February 1969. By May 1969 there were an estimated 90 graves, 70 of which were for children. Dimbaza became a byword for the cruelty of resettlement when British ITV shot the notorious and aptly named film, 'Last Grave at Dimbaza'.

It was precisely this notoriety that seems to have prompted the South African and Ciskei governments to turn the squalid resettlement camp into an industrial showpiece. For instance, when foreign journalists covering the Ciskeian 'independence' celebrations asked to be taken to a resettlement camp, the officials grinned all over - they had been expecting this - and said, 'Yes, we understand your concern. We'll take you to Dimbaza.' Their nonchalance was understandable. As Charles Simkins of SALDRU has written:

Notorious in the early 1970's, Dimbaza has been greatly upgraded and improved, to the point of being rebuilt. It has factories, shops, churches, a beerhall and a police station. Different grades of housing exist; telephones are relatively easily obtained. A toy-making project and making of school uniforms takes place in the town hall. A steel foundry and new wool factory are being built... Dimbaza is, in fact, no longer a closer settlement but qualifies, in the phrase of Government circular 25 of 1967, for the title of 'self-contained Bantu town'.

The official population figure for Dimbaza in 1978 was 14 562. In mid-1979 (EPH, 17.07.79) Sebe announced that 25 of the 30 factories built or under construction in the Ciskei were at Dimbaza. Apart from those mentioned above, they include Microsteel (bicycles and auto components), Black Forest Clocks, Sotho weavers, Zipha (owned by the Dutch Reformed Church) leather goods, plus other furniture and plastic concerns. Some of these concerns are West German in origin and all have benefited substantially from Ciskei National Development Corporation funding. The transformation of Dimbaza is, it might be argued, a microcosm of the transformation of Ciskei as a result of South Africa's homelands policy. How valid is this claim?

This section will attempt to answer that question. We will begin with a description of the origins of the people of Dimbaza and the reasons for their removal. We will then look at the demographic composition of the town, at its agricultural capacity, at the work people do and the wages they get. We will consider where they live, how much they eat and what they think about their situation. Then, perhaps, we will be in a position to venture an answer.

### 3.3.2 Origins

The Minister of Bantu Administration told Parliament in May 1969 that 2 897 people of whom 2 041 were children had been moved to Dimbaza. Of these, 203 families came from Middelburg, Cape, 67 families from Burgersdorp and 39 families from Cape Town. Most of them had been forcibly evicted and brought to Dimbaza by truck. They were victims of the decision to move the coloured preference area from the Eiselen Line to the Kat-Fish Line. The pattern did not change much subsequently, although after 1971 most of the removals were voluntary. Most of the people of Dimbaza originated in small town locations (43% of the sample) and white farms (30%). 76,6% of Dimbaza residents had lived in their previous places of residence for more than 10 years, and 40,7% had lived there for over 20 years. It is also believed that many Robben Island ex-prisoners are sent to Dimbaza so that the security police can keep an eye on them.

Although the statistical information is incomplete, it would appear that most Dimbaza residents were unskilled workers employed in the service sector before the move to Dimbaza. Many of them were unemployed, though this may have been because they were too young to work before the move took place (about 70% of the early resettled people were children).

### 3.3.3 The removal

Forced removals mostly took place in the period from 1967-71. During this time 15 of the 84 households sampled were evicted and forced to come to Dimbaza, and 9 evicted households came to Dimbaza out of choice. 18 households left their earlier residences for Dimbaza voluntarily. After 1971, with the upgrading of Dimbaza, this picture changes completely - the overwhelming majority of households (37) arriving voluntarily, and only 5 coming as a result of evictions.

14 of the evicted households were brought to Dimbaza by train, and 7 by truck:

After the superintendent had been door to door in the township (Middelburg) asking heads of families where did they come from originally, we were evicted.

We tried to ignore the endorsement but the following month the house was locked and my clothes and furniture were locked outside.

We went to the Superintendent to know the reason for the move. Afterwards we were told the trucks are waiting for us and if we resist we would pay train fare.

The Republic sent us here. We had a special train to take 200 of us to this place.

My husband and myself were given a couple of days to pack and leave Bethulie. We decided to defy the day because we thought about the hardship we will experience at Lady Frere where we originally came from. That resulted in the arrest of my husband twice.

The reasons given for eviction varied:

We were told that we were old and not working. Therefore we were not entitled to a house at Middelburg.

My husband was told that since he was not born at Middelburg, he was not entitled to a house of local resident right.

They said that was not the place for blacks, our place is Transkei (sic).

The magistrate said the Xhosas have their own country namely Ciskei. The Xhosa chiefs are in need of their people.

Others were evicted from farms, as a result of personal differences or change in ownership.

He disallowed us from keeping livestock after he took over ownership from his father. Because my family disobeyed that order he evicted us. Others were allowed to stay because they were not keeping livestock, and many of them were young couples.

Evicted because there was not a single family member worked for Van Niekerk.... The owner needed the house so that he can get new people.

The farmowner sold the farm. The household did resist but the farmer told us that the newcomer would bring his servants.

A household member had a fight with the owner's son. Then the farmer evicted us.

The Head lost sight and they could no longer live there without someone working for the farmer.

12 of the households said that they had sold their stock before the move. Only three of the households said they had received compensation.

The first arrivals were put into wooden huts with zinc roofs. These were followed by two-room cement and asbestos houses without ceilings or floors. It took a year before running water was provided.

After dumping, the houses were full of ground inside. They used to leak on rainy days.

Water was fetched from tanks which were far away. There were no street taps.

People used to queue at the offices for a gift of wood per family.

On our arrival, there was too much starvation. There is even now, but not so critical like before.

### 3.3.4 Demography

The average household in Dimbaza has 7 members. 79% of residents in the sample lived in households of 5 persons or more, and 39% in households of 8 persons or more. 38,7% were children of 14 or under, and 4,1% were 65 or over. These figures are very close to those for the urban areas of the Ciskei, and indicate that the demographic pattern in Dimbaza conforms to the town's hastily acquired urban status. The substantial numerical superiority of females to males (1,22:1) shows that despite its supposed industrial base, Dimbaza operates very much as a dormitory suburb for commuter and migrant labour. Only 37% of the permanent residents, including children and old people, are male. Females married and living permanently at home outnumber males 2,7:1.

Just over a third of the 60 households who responded to the questionnaire reported infant mortality since their arrival in Dimbaza. 15 households had lost one child, 4 households had lost two children, and two households had lost three children. 39 households had not suffered from infant mortality. The sample indicates an infant mortality rate of 169 per 1 000 live births.

### 3.3.5 Agriculture

24 households indicated that they had kept 'some' cattle or small stock before the move, but only 11 that they had had access to fields. 8 households had kept goats, 6 had kept pigs, and 3 had kept horses. 5 households had sold produce. 6 households reported that they had produced much more in their old places than they did in Dimbaza. This page of the questionnaire was very irregularly filled in, so it seems difficult to attach too much significance to these figures. They seem low, but this might be due to the fact that a high proportion of Dimbaza residents come from small town locations rather than from white farms or tribal land.

Out of 77 households questioned in Dimbaza, 55 produced some agricultural products, mostly maize, beans and potatoes. None kept cattle though a few kept small stock and fowls. This compares poorly with pastoral production prior to the removals, when 29% reportedly kept cattle. The result in terms of nutrition will be discussed later on.

### 3.3.6 Labour

Possibly the most revealing figures in the Dimbaza survey relate to the rate of employment. It should not be forgotten that Dimbaza is the industrial showpiece of the Ciskei, the place where the Ciskei National Development Corporation has spent perhaps R30 million (i.e. 5/6ths of the R36 million spent on industrial development by February 1980), for the benefit, so we are told, of Ciskeians. Yet even here, in a small town, containing only a minute fraction (16 - 17 000) of the Ciskei's total population (600 000+), the sample showed an unemployment rate of 35,1%, with unemployment rising as high as 48% in the crucial male age bracket of 15 - 24 years. Unemployment is much worse among females (46,5% of total economically active) than among males (23,3%). This is probably due to the fact that occasional domestic service (charring, taking in washing) is not available in Dimbaza as it was in the small town locations. Not much is known about wages received in Dimbaza. Effective incomes mentioned for unskilled workers were of the order of R2 - R3,50 a day and 35c an hour (men), and R6,16 a week (women). Low wage rates were commented on by several respondents, and it was felt that problems would be solved if fair wages were paid.

Although there are more factories, one needs to do something else (in addition) for living.

In Burgersdorp we were certain of our earnings but here it is not the case because we now earn according to our production. When there is not cotton we do no work and we get no pay.

The only problem here is that, although factories are here, people are paid very low wages. We do not think that the Government knows that people are less paid by the factories. If they know they should force the factories to pay us. They must not cheat us.

The factories were, however, regarded as preferable to unemployment, which was mentioned as a major problem by 36% of households.

After work opportunities were created, people no more die due to hunger.

There is not enough work here than on the farms, even though we get low wages there.

If the children who are out of school could get work and be well paid, that can be the solution.

I expect some of my children to work and help me educate the young ones, but there is no work here.

At P.E. we were employed, I could manage to pay medical fees and eat whatever I want.

All in all, the situation in Dimbaza does not say much for the ability of capitalist investment to provide jobs and living wages for the people. Rather, it would seem to suggest that the millions spent attracting the capitalists would have been better employed otherwise. Unemployment was far more acute among women (46,5% of the economically active population) than men (23,3%).

Even among those employed, many had recourse to migrant labour. The highest proportion of migrants was found among males of the 25 - 34 age group, amounting to 37,8% of those surveyed. Male migrants amounted to 11,2% and females to 4,7% giving an average of 7,6% overall. This is much lower than in the Ciskei as a whole. 25 of the male migrants (16%) were employed in construction, and 8 (5,3%) in mining. Most of the migrants were on the Reef (27%), followed by Port Elizabeth (23,7%) and Cape Town (15,2%).

A comparison of past and present employment shows that there has been a major decline in permanent resident employment (excluding commuters) from 71% to 10%, and a similar rise in non-permanent resident employment. Although there seems to have been a large-scale extension of wage labour, the level of skills shown remains much the same, the unskilled proportion rising from 47% to 49%. The services sector diminished in importance (because of loss of opportunities for female domestic service), and the manufacturing sector expanded.

The highest percentage of workers were unskilled (46%), with 13% in white-collar occupations. 8% were employed in manufacturing, with services (31%) the next biggest sector. Women outnumbered men in manufacturing (58% - 42%) - a good indication of the sort of work and wages offered. 47% of women were domestic servants, another notoriously badly paid occupation. Men were employed mainly as migrant labourers and in construction.

14,8% of households attempted to supplement their income by informal sector activities. One household head, who lost his job in King William's Town, did plumbing for his neighbours and another mended watches, but these were clearly desperate measures judging from the diet of their households. Several women expressed interest in dressmaking:

I would like someone to give me capital so that I can continue with dressmaking.

My wife thinks of resigning from work and start business as a dressmaker. I expect my daughter to help her. I want any organisation to help me with money to buy machine and material for them.

But it is not clear that dressmaking is a very rewarding activity.

Mrs B is making dresses for a white shop owner called Piet . . . . Piet brings Mrs B dress materials to make women's dresses. For a complete dress, Piet pays Mrs B 60c. Piet sells these at R8,99 and more. If Mrs B query, Piet would say 'Leave the job.' It is difficult for Mrs B to quit the job because it would be hard for her to get a better job. Bear in mind that Mrs B is using her own machine.

Other households hawk food and firewood around the township, although this is not allowed unless one pays the Ciskei government for a hawker's licence.

### 3.3.7 Income

The questionnaires yielded no direct information with regard to the income in rands of each household interviewed. It was possible, however, to make an estimate on the basis of number of earners in each household, and the type of work they did, modified by details of the household diet and comments on the questionnaires. On this basis, it was possible to divide the

surveyed households into four categories: those with no apparent source of regular income, or with such low income that it was clearly inadequate to maintain the household in the basic necessities of life ('destitute'); those with a regular source of income, but apparently barely sufficient ('breadline'); those whose income apparently met their needs ('moderate'); and those who seemed relatively comfortable ('upper'). Though this is admittedly a rough categorisation, almost all the respondents fell squarely into one of these groups.

In Dimbaza, then, 11 (13,4%) of the households surveyed were apparently destitute; 40 (49%) were on the breadline; 27 (33%) were moderately well off; and 4 (4,6%) were in the 'upper' category. 9 of the 11 destitute households arrived in 1971 or earlier. 4 were headed by former Robben Island prisoners who survive entirely on charitable grants and informal activities: there are no jobs for such men in the Ciskei. The other 7 were all from small town locations or 'white' farms. (There was one household from each of Alicedale, Aliwal North, Bedford, Burgersdorp, Dordrecht, Middelburg, Port Alfred and Stutterheim. 5 of these had never recovered their equilibrium from the initial dumping, and 2 had been disappointed in their hopes of better things. The Port Alfred family was described as follows by a usually phlegmatic interviewer:

This family is starving. When I visited them there was nothing to eat and the day was rainy. There was no fire, six people of the family were on beds. People shared two beds, others lie on the cold floor.

The family is survived by maintenance grant which is received by Nomakhaya and Themba. The house head is trying to get another grant for Sindiwe who's got chest trouble and Bulelwa her baby. A1 to A9 never worked here, and are looking for jobs.

Five adult members of the Dordrecht household (arrived 1974) have died since 1977.

Of the 38 households who arrived before 1972, when the upgrading of Dimbaza began, 20 households fall into the 'breadline' category, 9 into the 'destitute' and 9 into the 'moderate'. The later arrivals tend to be better off, and several households came to Dimbaza to get a job or a house that they could not get elsewhere. Of the 9 households who moved to Dimbaza from urban or tribal areas after 1975, 5 (56%) were in the 'moderate' or 'upper' categories.

Two of the 'upper' families were employed in education, and the other two in the church. There are no obvious differences in composition between 'moderate' and 'breadline' families. Size of household and number of employed were among the variables affecting the prosperity of the household, but did not consistently push in one direction: for example, a large household with three sons away as migrant labourers was clearly better off than a smaller household without adult males. 10% of all households had one member employed as a migrant, and 32% had one member employed locally. 32% of all households had two earners and 16% had more than two earners. 29% received some form of transfer payment. Most earners, both migrant (78%) and local (84%) regularly transmitted remittances to their households.

One effect of the passage of most Dimbaza residents from the rural economy to Dimbaza has been that they became fully proletarianised, that is (apart from the garden plots) entirely dependent on a cash income. This has caused great difficulties to people unaccustomed to paying cash for housing, transport and, to a great extent, food.

The difference is that money is used on everything here.

It was better on the farm - we had stock, no rents, we had fields, and the farmer helped us whenever our children got sick. No transport expenses.

We understood the last place but I do not understand this one... There are no ways of cutting wood and selling here as on the farm. If we could return back to the place where we used to live before, we would be very glad.

When I was on a farm I used to eat every day because I was rationed food.

Even for those not actually destitute, life for many in Dimbaza is no more than a matter of hanging on from month to month.

The family solely depends on a salary of the head's wife .

A3 sends money which carry the family throughout the month .

The family survive by buying food which can last until the next pension is available .

### 3.3.8 Housing and diet

The first people at Dimbaza were literally dumped . Then plank houses were put up , and later concrete two-roomed houses without floors or ceilings . Later the more sophisticated houses typical of townships everywhere in the Republic ('matchbox') were erected . Some of these are four-roomed and others five-roomed . It seems that in one part of the town , the older houses are still standing and that their tenants do not pay rent . Of the 20 households (25% of sample) who did not pay rent , 14 were early arrivals , some of whom were still living in temporary accommodation , 4 were ex-Robben Island prisoners , one seems to have been a special case of indigence , and one had been given permission to erect his own shack . 13 households (16%) were or had been sub-tenants . Others obtained houses by taking over the lease from someone who could not pay the rent .

Al's sister-in-law gave us one room and we shared a kitchen with her .

Al's sister got another house then we occupied her first house .

We pay R5 for a room to the landlord . We are still living as lodgers . (Arrived 1969 .)

The landlord asked us to keep his land because he is working in Uitenhage . He left us with his shack , so that we could live while still looking for a house .

Rents in Dimbaza seemed to range from R14 to R18 a month in 1980 . Frequently a four-roomed house would be unofficially divided between two families who split the rent . Nevertheless , access to housing remains one of Dimbaza's greatest attractions .

Here I have got my own place whereas in Zwelitsha I did not live comfortably . Even though rent is very high . We were lodgers in Zwelitsha . We got a house in Dimbaza . (Family of 10 in two rooms)

The difference is that on the farm , if the Baas does not want you at work , you lose place of living . But here you can stay even if you are fired from the factory .

It would seem from an examination of nutrition patterns that most Dimbaza residents suffer from serious protein deficiencies . Whereas 70% or more of Dimbaza households ate maize , bread , tea/coffee and sugar daily , only 14% drank milk daily , and 72% drank it less than twice a week . Consumption of eggs (5% daily , 85% less than twice a week) , fish (4% daily , 88% less than twice a week) and cheese (5% daily , 90% less than twice a week) was even lower . 27% of households eat meat less than once a month and 48% drink milk less than once a month - devastating figures for a people with a stock-farming tradition .

### 3.3.9 Services

As we have already mentioned , Dimbaza qualified as a 'self-contained Bantu town' . It possesses many facilities unknown to long-established rural communities , never mind resettlement camps . It has a shopping centre , a market , a post office , a butchery , a clinic and a police station . The

streets are lit at night by electricity, although they are not tarred. There are some sports fields, but there is no recreation hall and no cinema. There is a high school, and several primary and lower secondary schools. Nevertheless 105 (22%) of the 472 children of schoolgoing age (7+) in the households surveyed did not go to school. 125 (26,1%) were in secondary school, of whom 12 (2,5%) were in Standards 9 - 10.

There is a regular bus service to King William's Town (R1,80 return in 1980), and taxis are available. Dimbaza residents, especially those from small town locations, complain about the distance from 'town', which implies that they see Dimbaza as a location of King William's Town rather than as a city in its own right. All goods are cheaper at the chain stores (OK, Checkers, Pep, furniture) in King William's Town than they are in Dimbaza.

### 3.3.10 Attitudes

All residents said they got on well with their neighbours, although one early (1968) resident commented that in the beginning 'the children used to fight with children from other places, but now we live at peace'. Dimbaza is far too big, too built up and too diverse in its origins for cliques and home-area factions to form. When asked about their leadership 45 households (53%) named either the community council or their locally elected ward councillor. 16 households (18%) mentioned the Ciskei government or Sebe, 12 church minister, 7 teachers and 4 Mandela. The majority of households (57%) belonged to no organisations or associations at all. 18 households belonged to burial societies and 4 had life insurance. Only 3 households mentioned membership of the ruling party, the Ciskei National Independence Party, fewer than the 4 households which mentioned membership in church women's auxiliaries.

Not surprisingly, most of the later arrivals and some of the earlier ones found good things at Dimbaza. 34 households mentioned the presence of factories and employment, and others commended the post office, schools, shops, market and butchery. 14 households specifically referred to the absence of whites as a positive good. Most of these were from small town locations:

In Hofmeyr we were under Boers but here someone is not instructed to do this and that except at work.

This is a location under blacks, and the last place (Cathcart) is a farm under a white farmer who does not take blacks as people but as tools to be used to make him rich.

We don't experience police raids of passes and liquor like it used to happen at Bethulie.

In Dordrecht we were under hard rule of whites, but here at least attention is paid to our grievances.

Such comments do more to illuminate the misery of their previous existence than to extol the virtues of Dimbaza. 7 households mentioned security of tenure in their own houses as a benefit of life in Dimbaza - another sad commentary on their earlier experience.

The most commonly mentioned worry was shortage of money (39% of households), followed by unemployment (36%) and shortage of adequate accommodation (29%). 19 households complained of the lack of a hospital, 13 of the cost of educating their children, 9 of high rents and 7 of transport costs. 5 households complained that they were unable to keep stock, and 2 that they had no fields. 5 households longed for the pre-cash economy:

Here we buy everything but we do not buy everything in the villages.

4 households praised their former employers for providing them with goods and services they did not get in Dimbaza. 9 households said unemployment and living conditions were much worse than



in their previous home:

In Hermanus there was no starvation .

5 households explicitly complained of the Ciskei government:

Here there are always people who look for Government Donations , which was not the case in Middelburg . . . the Government should stop sending people to collect money from poor people like us .

It must be emphasised that the figures in this paragraph should not be taken as statistically significant , since not all households expressed themselves equally fully to the interviewers .

Asked from whom they expected help , 49 households replied that they expected help from the Ciskeian or the local authorities . This should be taken as a sign of apathy rather than trust , as the following comment indicated:

I have no faith in the Community Committee but if I could trust it I would like to forward my problems to it .

26 households did not expect help from anyone at all . 8 households thought that employers might help by offering employment or raising wages . Only 4 households mentioned members of their family .

### **3.3.11 Conclusion**

It is clear that Dimbaza has come a long way since 1971 , and that for many people it is not an unpleasant place to live in by comparison with their alternatives . But with unemployment running at 35% , obviously Dimbaza is not a solution for the problems of Ciskei nor a vindication of South Africa's policy of resettlement .