

SECOND CARNEGIE INQUIRY INTO POVERTY  
AND DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

What's the matter with Msinga?

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## WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH MSINGA?

"A man cannot go with his wife and children and his goods and chattels on to the labour market. He must have a dumping ground. Every rabbit has a warren where he can live and burrow and breed, and every native must have a warren too."

- Sir Godfrey Lagden, Transvaal Labour Commission, 1897.

HUT BURNINGS and murder, fence cutting and theft, starvation and ignorance, tribesmen feuding with automatic weapons, tribesmen working in South Africa's towns and cities as migrant labour, women hoeing rocky fields or sitting at roadsides selling produce imported from Natal: all this is part of the fabric of Msinga life.

For many years now, this unhappy district has stood as an extreme example of conditions generally existing in the fragmented and under-developed "homeland" of KwaZulu. It has been described - in a masterpiece of understatement - as "socially unstable"; it manifests in painful abundance all the classic social and economic problems caused by over a century of separatist policy and legislation; it lies, like a diseased heart, almost at the exact geographical centre of Natal/KwaZulu; and it has, during the drought of the early 1980s, provoked sufficient instability in the White-owned land which partially surrounds it to force an inquiry motivated from the highest governmental quarters.

Preliminary findings by the commission were not unexpected: Msinga suffers from over-population, poor quality of life, insufficient job opportunities, survival problems. What follows here is an attempt to describe these conditions, to uncover their causes and to examine some of the results.

ASKING THE way in Msinga one day, I saw a polaroid camera dangling from the bead-adorned arm of a woman in tribal dress. It was a telling anomaly. The high technology of the First World is as close to Third World Msinga as that. In fact, this explosive area of KwaZulu is not much more than two hours drive from Pietermaritzburg, and only barbed-wire fences or rivers separate it from land owned and worked by sophisticated White farmers.

Yet it is in the light shed by this proximity of extremes that the massive problems which fester in Msinga can most clearly be understood. Indeed, the proximity all too often is the problem.

At first glance, of course, things appear normal enough. Driving north from Greytown, the nature of the country changes abruptly as you begin the long descent to the Mooi River. The ordered fields and orchards, pastures and plantations of the Natal Midlands have given way to hills of red-brown stone where goats feed off thorns and cattle graze on little more than dust. You are in Msinga now. Brightly dressed women carry water in plastic containers; children wave and gesticulate as you pass; picturesque huts dot the hillsides. It is the sort of "traditional" scene which overseas tourists love to photograph. "Here is an authentic piece of Africa," they say. In fact, bead-work by Msinga women sells like hot-cakes in the fashion salons

of Paris and New York.

Yet the anomalies are there if you care to look for them. Climbing out of the Mopi valley you see places where people have tried to clear the stones and plough the arid earth, and when finally you look down into the huge sweep of the Tugela valley, Msinga's heartland, you are struck by the presence of a succession of pylons which marches obliviously across the barren landscape. There is precious little electricity in Msinga, however.

On the banks of the river near the small village of Tugela Ferry, you notice a fair amount of cultivation. On the southern side, water flows in a system of irrigation canals. Someone told me that the canals had originally been built by the South African Department of Agriculture and that the local people had grown vegetables in large quantities. But, unsupported by an adequate marketing system, the gardeners had produced gluts which inevitably fetched low prices and they had consequently become discouraged. Only maize is planted now, and some of the canals are full of stones.

On the northern bank, on the other hand, you come across a well-irrigated field under strawberries. It seems too ironic for words. If people are supposed to be starving in Msinga, why plant a crop which offers no yield in terms of either carbohydrate or protein?

"We take them to supermarkets in Durban," a man called Nicholas Sikelela told me, adding that he was manager of the project.

In fact, the project is a KwaZulu Development Corporation "tripartnership". This means that it is jointly financed by the corporation and private enterprise - in this case a White Durban-based company - with the idea of offering jobs and training to local people, and with the eventual sale of shares in the business to any KwaZulu

citizens who can afford to buy.

There were about 20 women, casual labourers who earned R1.20 a day, picking strawberries when we visited the project. Mr Sikelela explained that in the planting season there were jobs for several hundred.

"There'll be even more this year because we're going to plant gooseberries as well. We have 25 hectares in this project."

I asked why vegetables or basic foodstuffs were not grown instead, and he replied simply: "We have tried vegetables. We have planted potatoes, watermelons and pumpkins. But then we stopped because the problem was theft."

Is it fair to change this statement and say instead: the problem was, and still is, hunger? Hardly more than 20 kilometres upstream from the strawberries, on a farm run by an organisation called Church Agricultural Project, the bones of dead animals are exchanged for mealie-meal. Since 1980, many thousands of Msinga people have swapped nearly 500000 kilograms of bones for half that quantity of basic food. Other exchange schemes offer mealie-meal for acacia pods which are in turn shredded for cattle fodder. Yes, it probably is fair to say that one of the fundamental problems in Msinga, especially in these years of intense drought, is poverty and the attendant hunger. But why are the people so poor?

To find an answer, we must examine some of the basic facts concerning this troubled corner of the country. It comprises just over 174000 hectares of rough and arid thornveld. According to the 1970 census (the 1980 census was apparently incomplete in Msinga) the number of people living there was about 115000, while more recent estimates suggest figures of up to 160000.

As long ago as 1954, the Government-appointed Tomlinson Commission calculated that an average family in Msinga would require 83 hectares to produce an annual income of R125. In other words, Msinga could adequately carry only about 2100 families. However, it has been estimated that there are now more than 14000 extended families, of ten to 12 individuals each, subsisting in the hills and valleys of Msinga.

When I asked Dr John Erskine of the Institute for Natural Resources in Pietermaritzburg what he saw as the possible solutions, simply from an agricultural point of view, he replied immediately: "The pressure on the land must be reduced."

He told me that according to the KwaZulu Department of Agriculture, there were 72621 head of cattle in Msinga in 1980. "But the optimum grazing capacity of the land there is 10 hectares for one large beast or six smaller animals such as goats."

These were staggering figures. What Dr Erskine was saying was that there should be no more than a maximum of 17400 cattle in the area. Meanwhile, although many have perished in the drought, there are probably at least 60000 cattle and three times as many goats.

Dr Erskine said: "Apart from the traditional values which Zulus place upon cattle, we must remember that there is no opportunity for land ownership in Msinga, so the people can't invest in fixed property. There's really nothing for them to invest their money in, so they put it into a movable asset - into cattle."

The results of this almost savage overstocking are everywhere plain to see. There is a landscape in the high places near Sinyameni in south-western Msinga which sums it up. Dongas have become small valleys which split the hillsides; soil has given way to a crumbling grey shale; stone-built huts squat in a scene which is almost lunar in

it's desolation. Unlike other areas of Msinga, here there is no grass at all. On a steep-sided spur in one of the dongas a solitary thorn-bush persists in staying alive while goats reach up to take the meagre foliage.

In the early 1850s, a local magistrate described the bulk of the land in Msinga as being "as worthless as the sands of Arabia". And there's not even any oil underneath it. Yet in the 19th century the people of Msinga were more than able to provide for themselves. Listen to historian Colin Bundy: "In the same year (1882), it was reported that Whites in Umsinga district did not grow much maize, and that they depended on Africans for it." But those days are long gone now.

There can be little doubt that at the root of all Msinga's problems is the stark fact that there are too many people and their animals trying to live on too little land. But it should never be forgotten that this root has, in large measure, been created and nourished by more than a century of deliberate official policy. During the mid-nineteenth century, large parts of Msinga were declared one of the "locations" or reserves set apart by the Natal Government (at the insistence of Theophilus Shepstone) for Black occupation. Although Blacks comprised 90 percent of the population of Natal in 1910, the locations were a mere 11 percent of the land area. Even though the 1913 Land Act and the more recent creation of KwaZulu eased these absurd ratios somewhat, Msinga, like many "homeland" areas, is on one level at least little more than an over-crowded dumping ground, a place for people who are essentially surplus to the requirements of high-technology White South Africa.

Between 1969 and 1972, for example, about 20000 people from the Weenen area were shoved into a corner of Msinga after farm labour

needy. You begin to wonder how many people simply die and are buried in the hills without any official recognition that they ever existed. Moreover, what health services exist are hopelessly inadequate. This 119 bed hospital, Msinga's only one and staffed by between two and four doctors, is serving a community of well over 140000 people. Extra patients lie on the floor between the beds. A new R1 million theatre complex has just been built, but nobody seems able to get the air-conditioning to work. The dispensary is a rondavel where you can see daylight through the thatch, and people wait in the open air at the inadequately sized out-patients clinic.

"In fact, when it rains we have quite an easy day," a doctor said. "Nobody wants to wait in the wet unless they're really ill, and then of course waiting in the wet doesn't help."

I asked about vitamin deficient diseases. "We always have several cases of pellagra (vitamin B deficiency) in the wards. In fact, a woman was admitted recently who told the nurses that her husband had lost his job about a month before. She'd obviously been eating next to nothing since then."

Tuberculosis is another widespread problem in Msinga. At any given time, at least one third of the ward space at Tugela Ferry is occupied by sufferers of this disease. And then, as you wander round the hospital, you notice something else. There are plenty of pregnant women about.

"That's because it's September," a doctor explained. "September is baby month. We deliver at least three times as many babies in September as we do during any other month. At least 12 babies a day. Because of transport difficulties, women from outlying areas come to us two weeks before they're due. They sleep on the floor of the

maternity ward, waiting their turn."

It is not difficult to understand why September is in fact baby month. It's nine months after Christmas, when many thousands of men return to Msinga after a year of working in the cities. It has been estimated that more than 60 percent of Msinga men of working age are migrant labourers. This begins to tell us something about the nature of the Msinga economy: it is externally based. Yet, strangely, this fundamentally unhealthy state of affairs has proved to be something of a buffer against the ravages of the drought which has gripped the district since early 1980.

As a medical man with wide experience of Msinga put it: "The whole area is so poor agriculturally that even in years of good rain, the land has no hope of supporting the people. The support comes from the outside. Although the drought is exceptionally severe, the health problems, especially with regard to malnutrition among babies and young children, are not as overwhelming as would definitely be the case were the people more heavily dependent on the land."

Valid as this view is, it must be balanced by a consideration of the effect of the recession which has afflicted the South African economy over the past few years. The effect, from the Msinga point of view, is large influxes of migrant labourers who have been retrenched and obliged to return home where they live off meagre homestead resources until another job can be found.

Statistics compiled by the Church Agricultural Project from people who exchange bones for mealie meal indicate that 20 percent of the families represented in the bones queue had a father or husband without a job. A recent Church Agricultural Project newsletter sums it up: "Unemployment is filling Msinga's valleys with men. Families that

lived by selling their labour are now trying to live by selling bones."

Yet, even in boom times when jobs are less difficult to come by, much of the migrant wage earner's money is absorbed in town. Often he forms a liaison with another woman, and only a small percentage of his earnings filters back to his family. Some Msinga households are surviving on as little as R25 a month.

The more one tries to examine conditions in this desolate region, the more one is forced towards the question: just how do many of these people survive? It seems an inescapable conclusion that the normal economic infrastructure (subsistence agriculture, the hawking of fresh produce usually imported from White Natal, a few local jobs, some handicraft work and migrant labour income) is incapable of keeping Msinga alive. How then do the people manage? The answer lies in activities which economists call components of an "underground economy". We are talking here about theft, about poaching - and about the cultivation and sale of dagga.

Listen to another Church Agricultural Project newsletter: "It's the most important crop in KwaZulu. A multimillion rand industry. Some dagga gardens are barely five paces square, yet even these bits of ground can yield the grower R200. Small growers tend to barter their dagga for bread, sugar, tea, beans and soap..."

Police regularly raid the Tugela valley, one of South Africa's premier dagga growing areas, burning hundreds of tons of the stuff. In 1979/80 nearly 600000 kilograms valued at well over R100 million were destroyed. But there was, and still is, plenty left for sale.

It is not difficult to understand that all these economic realities are profoundly affecting the traditional social systems of the people.

and, equally important, the attitudes of the young. For all too many people, survival means operating outside of the law. The consequent sense of lawlessness and instability in Msinga is almost palpable.

Family unity, the basis of the old tribal system, has been weakened by migrant labour, and weakened further, many claim, by the present three-tier system of government in KwaZulu. Under this system, the chiefs have become the paid employees of Ulundi. In practice this often means that their loyalty is divided and that they no longer speak up for the elderly, the women and the children who comprise the bulk of the population while the men are away in the cities.

The result of these economic and social conditions is that the real power in Msinga is passing from the chief and his indunas into the hands of young men, expectations sharpened by contact with the cities yet constantly frustrated by the whole apparatus of apartheid, who have learned how to survive by illicit means and how to wield authority through the barrel of a gun.

Although written in the sixties, this comment on tsotsis by Absalom Vilakasi makes a perfect description of many young men in Msinga: "They are tough; and they have demonstrated to everybody that 'crime does pay'."

This then is the background against which the violence in Msinga needs to be viewed. Overpopulation of man and beast, degradation of the land, an externally based economy (both legitimate and "underground"), an increasing lawlessness, and underlying everything a grinding poverty and ignorance. One could almost say: it's no wonder they fight among themselves.

They certainly do. In 1983 alone, close to 100 people were killed in and around Msinga. It is a community at war with itself.

IN THE early hours of a Saturday morning in September 1983, for example, a band of armed tribesmen surrounded a hut in the Mashunka area of Msinga and opened fire. Two men were killed instantly, and three were injured. The injured were taken to Tugela Ferry hospital where a third man died after an emergency operation. He had been shot through the stomach and his liver had been shattered. The two remaining survivors were hurriedly removed to another hospital when it was learned that their attackers were coming to deal with them in the ward.

Such incidents, almost always rooted in tribal or factional rivalry, are common in this violent district. In 1981 a young South African paratrooper, Lieutenant Johan Verster, was brought to trial, charged with the murder of 14 tribesmen while allegedly acting as a mercenary during bloody tribal fighting between the Sithole and Zwane tribes in Msinga. It was alleged that Verster had hidden on a hill and sniped at the Zwane impi during a battle on June 4, 1979. Witnesses testified that he had tried to recruit other paratroopers for future fights, telling them that they would be paid between R600 and R800 a battle. Verster's defence was that on June 4 his leg had been in plaster and that therefore it would not have been possible to negotiate the rough terrain where the battle took place. Although acquitted of the murder charges, he was found guilty of participating in terrorist activities and of contravening the Defence Act. He is currently serving an eight-year prison sentence.

The trial focussed national and even world attention on the ferocity of the fighting in Msinga which, it has been estimated, has claimed the lives of nearly 1000 people during the past six or seven

years. But why do such things happen?

It would be an extreme oversimplification to say merely that the fighting is part of the "traditional" way of life of the Zulu people. On the other hand, it is true that tribes have clashed in the area since the early 1880s, but as long ago as the turn of the century, the Colonial authorities were grudgingly admitting that this tribal fighting was generated by valid grievances which were rooted in a shortage of land.

Although by no means the only factional problem in Msinga, the Sithole/Zwane problem is a classic example of a land-related conflict. The problem began a long time ago when a Sithole chief married a Zwane woman and the Zwanes were granted a small home, hardly the size of an average White farm, inside traditional Sithole territory north of the Sundays River. In fact, the tiny Zwane clan is surrounded on three sides by Sitholes. As populations increased, not only naturally but by influxes of unwanted people from Natal, the pressures became unbearable and a grim struggle to survive began.

Hundreds of Zwane and Sithole tribesmen have been killed. In 1980 alone, no less than 46 people died in the fighting. These figures are all the more appalling when it is realised that the Zwanes number less than 1500, and the Sitholes not much more than three times that amount.

It is interesting to note that traditional Zulu stick-fighting (umGangela), which seems to have developed originally to give expression to, and in many ways to control and limit, competition between neighbouring districts, exists today only in the less crowded northern parts of KwaZulu, while in Msinga it is totally absent. A reason offered for this by anthropologists is that the problem of

territorial protection in Msinga is too serious a matter to be resolved by the partly symbolic "play" fighting of umGangela. The tribesmen of the district have always indulged in what traditional Zulus from less troubled areas would describe as outright war.

As more and more people crowded into the relatively small tribal areas, local chiefs, faced with acute land shortages, used inter-tribal fighting in an attempt not only to gain more land for their subjects but also to maintain their own shrinking power.

The situation was exacerbated when assegais and knobkennies were replaced by firearms, and tribesmen began to die in larger numbers. Matters have become even worse recently when the massed faction fight, with large numbers of men turning out for a scrap, is increasingly being replaced by ruthless killer gangs whose guns are often for hire, and who strike their targets by night at remote homesteads or at road blocks, or even in hostels and residential areas in the cities.

"There have only been three real faction fights between opposing impis this year (1983)," a senior police officer told me. "It's outright murder now, with these small gangs which strike by night."

The problems faced by those concerned with law and order are immense. The few roads in Msinga are in poor condition, while large tracts of tribal land are virtually inaccessible, except on foot.

"We have a lot of trouble laying charges and a lot more making charges stick," the police officer said. "The local people are reluctant to talk against each other, witnesses disappear, others change their stories in court. I think they do this because they're frightened. You can't really blame them. After all, they have to live together afterwards."

It is clear, therefore, that many of the killings go unsolved, and

the lawlessness goes on in a never-ending spiral in which the women and children are the real sufferers.

A medical man with long experience of Msinga told me that faction fighting not only aggravated the malnutrition problem, but also had a profound effect on the economy of the area.

"When the men are fighting or when an attack is expected, the women take the children and run away. They live, sometimes for weeks, on inadequate food supplies and away from the comforts of the homestead. Economically, the result of this sort of disruption is very serious indeed. Faction fighting inevitably means the destruction of valuable livestock and property."

During the Sithole/Zwane war, for example, a Church Agricultural Project worker interviewed nearly a thousand people who between them had lost 1003 cattle and 1716 goats.

"But most serious of all," the medical man continued, "is that wage earners, vital to Msinga's economy, are killed. Even those who survive the fight and return to the cities to work often feel too vulnerable to further attack and in consequence give up their jobs (and often the only incomes enjoyed by their families) and return to the relative safety of their tribal homes."

A further question which needs to be examined is: where do Msinga tribesmen get their weapons? Someone once remarked to me that about half of all firearms stolen in South Africa could probably be found in Msinga.

I asked a Weenen farmer where he thought the weapons came from and he replied: "Possibly some of them are stolen in the big cities. But there can be no doubt that gun trading is going on as well. I'm not saying Whites or Blacks, Indians or Coloureds are doing it, but

someone is."

While South African Defence Force service rifles and equipment, including machine guns, are definitely in circulation in the area, it is clear that some tribesmen fight with more primitive firearms, some of them probably surreptitiously "home-made" in industrial workshops around the country.

An Msinga doctor told me that on treating a wounded man recently, fragments of thin metal had been found at the entrance to the wound. "It seemed obvious to me that the bullet didn't fit the gun and that whoever shot the man had to wrap some thin metal around it before loading. I've also heard that some people have bought cartridge reloading kits and are making their own ammunition."

I went to see a high-ranking police officer in Pietermaritzburg and asked him about firearms in Msinga. He told me that since 1954 a "special firearms squad" had been stationed at Tugela Ferry. Its task: to confiscate firearms in the area.

"Since 1979 the squad has collected 1361 weapons," the policeman said. "Over the last six months the figure has been 263, or 44 a month. Do you want to know what sort of firearms are being collected?"

He showed me the list: 44 rifles, 15 shotguns, 95 revolvers, 101 pistols, and eight home-made guns.

"The last figure is significant. It indicates that there's definitely not a gun factory in Msinga. It's also interesting that I've never found these guns to have been used in city robberies a f t e r they have found their way to Msinga."

The special firearms squad is visible as a collection of tents and low buildings on the southern bank of the river as one crosses the single-lane bridge into Tugela Ferry. I asked the commanding officer,

an elderly man who was been with the squad for 25 years, whether he often collected South African Defence Force weapons, and he replied:

"It varies. We've got an R-4 here now which we've just picked up, and two months ago we confiscated six R-1s."

Where did they come from? "I presume that servicemen sell them or exchange them for dagga."

And what about Russian AK-47s and other foreign military weapons? He shook his head. "There is no evidence of terrorist weapons in Msinga."

Do you think there is an African National Congress presence in the area? Again the answer was no.

The senior police officer in Pietermaritzburg had told me that the people of Msinga armed themselves because they were afraid of their neighbours. From other sources I have heard that the people are also afraid of the Msinga-based police. Charges of brutality against several policemen have been laid, and at least one made to stick. I have heard, too, that there is considerable conflict between the people and various KwaZulu Government and Inkatha officials. "Nearly everyone with any authority in Msinga is a thug," someone at the Church Agricultural Project farm told me.

We asked a tribesman by the roadside one day what he thought of Inkatha, whether he was a member. He raised his hands, as if to ward off the question, and shook his head. "I do not want to talk," he said.

A picture emerges of a peasant community in turmoil, plagued on the one side by overcrowding and drought, poverty and ignorance, on the other by abstract forces which threaten the traditional social patterns. I have heard that political elections are farcical in

Msinga. But there are other forces besides new and complicated political ideas. There is the relentless pressure of the First World cities, leaving in its wake a flourishing sense of anarchy and a propensity to violence and crime which threatens to smash the old social system to pieces. What will replace it?

A White man I spoke to in Weenen said uneasily: "We are told there are a lot of guns over there, that in fact they outgun us. But we're not unduly worried about this."

My policeman friend in Pietermaritzburg told me: "These people aren't anti-White at all. Their major problems are with each other."

Valid as this comment undoubtedly is, an unavoidable question which emerges is: for how long?

Listen to what an Msinga Black is alleged to have said to the Weenen magistrate when a meeting was held to discuss the tensions existing between Black and White on the border between Msinga and White Natal: "Your Whites are the aggressors. One day our sons will retaliate. Do not think a White skin resists bullets. If a White is shot he dies just like a Black."

As already mentioned, the South African Government has set up a commission of inquiry into Msinga, and more recently has authorised the establishment of a permanent problem-solving body whose task will be to try to ease Black/White border tension. How does this tension manifest itself and is there a solution to it?

AS YOU drive from Weenen to Muden, there is a point mid-way between the two towns where the boundary fence is clearly visible as it divides a hillside away to the left. But it is visible only because

the country on either side is so different. On the one side, yellow, late-winter grass; on the other, vegetation eaten down to bare brown earth.

There can be no doubt that the tension on the Msinga border exists simply because the boundary, be it fence or river, marks this vivid contrast between properly managed farms and often appalling environmental degradation, in other words between technology and ignorance, financial resources and poverty. There can be no doubt, also, that most of the border problems are closely related to the problems of survival faced by the people on the Msinga side, problems which have been aggravated almost beyond endurance by the drought of the early 1980s.

"I've lived here for 25 years," a White in Tugela Ferry said. "And this is certainly the worst drought I've ever known."

But there have been other droughts, and the survival problem in Msinga is not a recent phenomenon. What has happened, therefore, to spark off the "border situation"? It is worth looking briefly at the history.

Before the late 1970s, no White farmers lived on the border farms on the Natal side. Fences were in a poor condition, and often non-existent, and Msinga Blacks paid little attention to them, grazing and watering their cattle on both sides of the boundary as they had done for generations, and making free use of traditional paths and tracks which led directly west to Weenen.

But the White farmers were on the way, and with them came new fences. In 1977, the fence which marks the boundary between Msinga and the White farms was renewed, paid for on a 50/50 basis by the new farmers and the KwaZulu Government after the farmers had exerted

the border. Farmers are opening their gates and allowing Msinga cattle in to water. It's only a minority of people on both sides who'd like to see a confrontation."

Do White farmers go around armed?

"Some people are armed with revolvers for their own safety. Quite a few Indians have come to the farmers' association for testimonials so they can get a firearm licence. A lot of people feel safer with a gun. Other farmers carry rifles in their vehicles to use against the hunting dogs. But for myself, I never carry anything."

What were some possible solutions to the border problem?

"There has to be dialogue with the Blacks," Mr le Roux said. "And we need to get away from this idea that every Black man is a farmer. We should rather spend more time training them to live and work in the cities."

This was interesting. The dialogue idea has already been taken up by the permanent problem-solving body, which will include in its membership representatives of White farmers' associations and prominent Blacks from Msinga. Even more interesting was the view that more Blacks should live in the cities. Do White farmers, especially those who live too close to the country's crowded rural slums, view the whole apparatus of influx control rather differently to White city dwellers? It seems obvious that they do.

Yet for the moment many thousands of Msinga families are legally debarred from city life, and are trying, often against impossible odds, to be agriculturalists. The Government-appointed commission has recognised this: among its short-term recommendations for easing tension on the boundary is the provision of water and stock-feed for needy Black farmers.

The KwaZulu Department of Agriculture, of course, has also recognised that Msinga's essentially rural population is, at least in part, dependent on the land it occupies.

For nearly a decade, extension officers have been talking to the chief of the Mchunus, the tribe most affected by the border situation, about "betterment planning", a system of improvements which could go some way to upgrading the agricultural potential of the stony territory in which his people live.

Briefly, betterment planning works like this: the basic aim is to move people into residential areas, thus releasing ground formerly dotted with homesteads for development as properly contoured arable and for fenced areas where rotational grazing can be practiced. An obvious advantage of having the people in clearly defined residential areas, comprising surveyed half-hectare plots, is that water, health and educational facilities can be more effectively provided.

Discussions on betterment planning started with Chief SmaKathi Mchunu in 1972/73, but it was not until 1978 that he formally requested that the plan be introduced "to get my people away from the boundary and from friction with the White farmers".

In 1980, although there was still some resistance to implementing the plan, Chief Mchunu signed the necessary declaration, and the plan was put into action. The current situation is that residential areas at Nhlalakahle and Sinyameni have been surveyed and the plots staked out. Boreholes have been sunk and hand-pumps installed, and I was told that most of the people will have moved to the new areas by early 1984.

I discussed these things with Mr Chris du Toit, a KwaZulu agricultural officer. We were sitting in a hot car with files and maps

on our knees. Mr du Toit told me that many people had already moved and that compensation was paid to the families involved.

"We even pay for the fruit trees around the original homestead. But you must understand that although compensation can be as high as R2000, it's not necessarily the full replacement value of the previous house."

Why were some people not willing to accept betterment planning?

"They don't like living so close to each other," Mr du Toit said. "And, historically, the people of Msinga have not always been happy to accept change. Mindyou, there are now other Msinga chiefs who are asking voluntarily for betterment planning. Of course, it's no use trying to force it on anyone. In fact, we never do this. You have to persuade them that it's in their best interests."

I asked how much betterment planning at NhlalaKahle and Sinyameni would cost. The answer was about R1 million over four years.

I then asked Mr du Toit if he thought betterment planning was a feasible solution. Did he, in fact, see any hope for Msinga at all?

He looked at me in some surprise. "Of course there's hope. Otherwise we wouldn't be doing it."

I want to believe that he is right. Meanwhile, Msinga must stand as an often unsightly monument (but not the only one) to an ideology which never had any hope of practical success. Msinga makes you realise that "separate development", even as its foundations were laid in the mid-nineteenth century, has never meant much more than the almost ridiculous underdevelopment and overcrowding of what are now best described as rural dormitories for labour which is surplus to the requirements of White South Africa. It makes you realise, also, that "ethnicity" or "ethnic identity" are terms used to justify Msinga's

often astonishing remoteness from the mainstream of the twentieth century. Meanwhile, we break Msinga family life and social structures in the name of economics, and at the same time we teach the people too much that is tawdry and foolish about Western civilization - including how to shoot our guns.

The results of all these things will haunt and plague Natal, and indeed South Africa, for many years to come.

FREQUENT MENTION has been made in this paper of an organisation operating in Msinga called Church Agricultural Project. Masterminded by a man called Neil Alcock, this self-help organisation aims at guiding rural people towards a form of agricultural self-reliance which is not based on costly inputs of fertilizer, machinery and so on.

Alcock started his career as a farmer in the Underberg district of Natal, but for the past 20 years has been actively engaged in working for underprivileged Black people in the province. In 1962/63 he founded Kupugani, a low-cost nutritious food outlet which has improved the health and long-term opportunity of countless thousands of Black children over the years. He then turned his attention to Church Agricultural Project.

Alcock established project farms at Maria Rachels on the Natal border with Swaziland and in the Highflats area on the South Coast. Then in 1971 he established another project farm, Mdukutshani, on the edge of Msinga and began to grapple with the often appalling conditions in one of South Africa's most notorious rural slums.

Over the years, Alcock became deeply involved in the affairs of the

area. As an unrelenting champion of the underdog, he made many enemies. He was instrumental in legally forcing open one of many traditional Black rights-of-way when White farmers, who (as we have already seen) moved onto the farms on the Weenen side of the Natal/Msinga border in the late 1970s, had closed them. He was instrumental, too, in securing maintenance for the child of a young Msinga woman who had been raped by a White farmer. In 1981 his house on Mdukutshani was burned down, but he continued to live there with his wife, Creina, a lonely and often controversial figure engaged in a seemingly hopeless but determined struggle to bring stability and a better quality of life to the people of Msinga.

In September 1983, he became embroiled in the affairs of the Mthembu tribe which was torn by internal strife. Those men already mentioned, gunned down in their hut in the Mashunka area, are part of the story. Alcock struggled for peace. Towards the end of the month he organised a meeting of the four bitterly hostile factions. The meeting took place at Tugela Ferry. On the way home (he was lifting members of one of the factions) his vehicle was ambushed. Five of his passengers were killed in the hail of bullets. Alcock himself did not survive.

The first time I met Neil Alcock, hardly six weeks before he died, he was talking to a woman who squatted at the door of his stone and thatch Mdukutshani home on the southern bank of the Tugela River. He showed me some spent cartridges the woman had brought with her.

"Her hut was shot up last night by a gang of thugs," Alcock said in his blunt way. "They were looking for her son who had refused to join in some act of tribal revenge. But she tells me her son is in Johannesburg. They shot her only cow."

I asked what he could do to help her. "Might be able to get some

sort of compensation."

Would he go to the police? Alcock looked at me and snorted mildly. "She's already been. Now she's come to me. I think I know some of the people involved."

I asked him what he thought were the basic problems in Msinga. He looked away down the river and replied: "The peasantry is being destroyed. Graft, corruption, exploitation, murder. Nearly everyone with any authority in Msinga is a thug. The ordinary peasant people bear the brunt of it."

Next Alcock was buried privately on Mdukutshani. His voice is silenced. The brutal facts of Msinga remain.

These papers constitute the preliminary findings of the Second Carnegie Inquiry into Poverty and Development in Southern Africa, and were prepared for presentation at a Conference at the University of Cape Town from 13-19 April, 1984.

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Quoting (in context) from these preliminary papers with due acknowledgement is of course allowed, but for permission to reprint any material, or for further information about the Inquiry, please write to:

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