

The Food Problem By V. Tickner. Gwelo, Mambo Press, From Rhodesia to Zimbabwe 8, 1979, 76pp., Z\$0.85.

The author of this booklet is to be congratulated for producing a competent overview of the food industry in Zimbabwe. In doing so he has made good use of the limited data at his disposal. However, the book is marred by one or two irritating errors and by the occasional presentation of incorrect information which could have quite easily been overcome by checking directly with local organizations and individuals. A good example of this is the reference to Progress Trading Association and its involvement with the Whitsun Foundation. Tickner makes the point that the Association is attempting to attack the problem of distribution in rural areas and then gives the impression that the project is not receiving any support. In fact the Whitsun Foundation has made a substantial investment in the Association, which in 1980 will enjoy a turnover of over Z\$6 million. The Association has not made the progress originally envisaged because of the war but it is poised for rapid expansion now that the country is returning to normal.

The assertion is also made that the majority of the population is either undernourished or suffering from malnutrition. This assumption is not supported by hard evidence and his case would have been more balanced had he made reference to the fact that the food supply in Zimbabwe, in terms of calories per capita per day is the highest in the Southern African region. Estimates of food consumption also support the contrary view that, although the situation is highly skewed, the average level of food availability is well in excess of 2,400 calories per capita per day as an assessment of a reasonable supply of the energy requirements for human sustenance. The booklet pays little attention to comparative prices and, had it done so, it would have been clear that food prices in Zimbabwe are, by and large, well below those prevailing in the other States within the region and that these prices are effective prices since most food products are in free supply.

The persistent reference to an ascribed attitude of White farmers, who are assumed to oppose efforts at development of communal agriculture, does not conform with the facts. White farmers have a good understanding of the need to develop all parts of agriculture and in fact have demonstrated consistently in recent years a positive attitude towards this problem. In particular, the quotation on page 60 is not given a source and I would doubt very much if it can be substantiated by any official statement from local institutions.

Perhaps most serious is a general criticism that the booklet is too superficial. The guidelines suggested in the last chapter are of little value to the incoming Government and do not allow for the best use of the existing administrative infrastructure. Critical issues such as pricing policies and the management of food aid are almost completely ignored, and the author has, in this respect, lost an opportunity to make a substantial contribution to the debate on these subjects. As many other developing countries have come to appreciate, the creation and maintenance of an efficient and effective food-supply system is not a simple or an easy exercise. Many of the policy choices are difficult for a popularly elected Government to make. However, those who have responsibility for giving guidance in this respect should not avoid the hard questions but rather attempt to bring clarity and sound counsel to the issues involved.

A number of valuable points are made, these include: the need to pay greater attention to manpower training at all levels within the food supply system; the adoption of an integrated approach to rural development; and the urgent need to improve rural-distribution infrastructure. His call for a new

population census is also timely and will be widely endorsed in all sections of the community in Zimbabwe.

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The Woman's Guide to Law through Life *By The Women in Development Research Unit*. Salisbury, University of Rhodesia, Centre for Inter-racial Studies, 1979, 43pp., Z\$0.50.

African Women in Urban Employment *By Joan May*. Gwelo, Mambo Press, Occasional Paper, Socio-Economic Series 12, 83pp., Z\$2.00.

The first booklet under review attempts to outline the law as it affects African women in matters concerning marriage, birth, children, death and widowhood. The title does not give an idea of the target population of the handbook, and the fact that it focuses on African law excludes non-African women who could also benefit from a simplified handbook (witness the success in Britain of Anna Coote and Tessa Gill's *Women's Rights: A Practical Guide* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1974)).

The handbook will be of limited use to a large number of African women who are not literate in English but who could benefit more from a vernacular version of the handbook. Some points are given briefly without an accompanying explanation, e.g. why it is necessary to have a 'genuine go-between' if the guardian of a woman who is getting married is a Purchase Area farmer.

However, the handbook is useful, simply because it raises points for discussion on procedure, thus stimulating more interest and inquiry by women into the whole arena of customary law and its effects on African women's status. It is also useful to community workers who deal with women in clubs and so forth, and can help bring attention to legal issues that women are not aware of.

The second booklet highlights the cultural, economic and social disadvantages imposed on women in urban employment. It makes useful suggestions for improving the lot of women, e.g. the establishment of women's bureaux. This is a useful suggestion in view of the shortage of information that can be used to guide action in the field of women's welfare and emancipation. However, the author falls short of her stated intention of identifying motivational factors which would draw women into agriculture where, she says, there is a chronic labour shortage. Also she does not suggest how women can realize their potential in a rural, agricultural setting where agricultural and economic activity is male-dominated and male-oriented. Despite this, the paper highlights the wastage of female resources and presents a challenge to agricultural and rural policy-makers and their counterparts in urban commerce and industry.

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