

## Working Conference on the Role of the Church in Rural Development

In October, 1971, two representatives of Agricultural Missions, Inc., J. Benton Rhoades, Executive Secretary, and Dr. Dean Freudenberg, Agricultural Programs Consultant, visited Rhodesia to assess how the Rhodesian churches might be assisted to undertake development in the rural areas. An informal meeting was arranged which was attended by representatives from various churches and other organisations involved in rural development. From this meeting a number of questions emerged, concerning the role of Mission Farms and the responsibility of the churches in respect of the use and development of land.

It was agreed that there was a need for the churches to come together to discuss these and similar problems, and so a planning committee was appointed. It agreed on the need for a national conference, widely representative of the Christian church in Rhodesia, to consider the role of the church in rural development. As a preliminary to the national conference it was decided that a series of two-day regional consultations would be held on the same theme. It was considered that the regional consultations would be valuable in highlighting regional problems, in suggesting guidelines for the national conference, and in enabling wider participation of those involved in rural development.

Agricultural Missions, Inc., generously agreed to finance both the regional consultations and the national conference, and the Principal, Revd. Professor R. Craig, agreed that the University of Rhodesia should be host to the National Conference, which duly met in August, 1972.

*University of Rhodesia*

The conference organisers were extremely fortunate in obtaining the participation of Dr. E. F. Schumacher, founder of the Intermediate Technology Group in the United Kingdom, who delivered the introductory keynote address entitled 'The Church and Rural Development — Some Suggestions'. Dr. Schumacher later gave a public lecture entitled 'Guidelines for Rural Development', and made valuable contributions to the conference discussions.

The Conference programme was built around three main themes which emerged as areas of concern from the regional consultations, namely:

1. *Training Schemes*: the need for a wide range of training courses for rural development at a number of scattered centres.

2. *Extension and Development in Rural Areas*: how might this be effectively carried out by the various denominations to meet the urgent and widespread problems underlying rural poverty?

3. *Ecumenical Action in Rural Development*: organisation needed for the various denominations to work together on a co-operative basis for rural development.

A report of the conference, including summaries of regional consultations and background papers, is available and can be obtained from either Revd. L. Blomquist, Old Umtali Mission, P.B. P7024, Umtali, Rhodesia or from Agricultural Missions Inc., 475 Riverside Drive, New York, N.Y. 10027.

G. A. SMITH