

## Amos Cherishes Land Won Through Hard Work

Argus August 17<sup>th</sup> 2001

BULAWAYO. A maze of creases maps Amos Madunas face as the sun sets behind him. He says he is "seventy something" and it shows the years have taken their toll on this retired farm labourer who seems to have worked himself to the bone his entire life.

Maduma lives in Dombadema, one of Zimbabwe's oldest government land resettlement schemes in Matabeleland South. It lies about 140km south west of Bulawayo, the country's second city

The land is harsh and dry, suitable for game and cattle farming. However, the people who inhabit about 30 small villages which make up Dombadema plant whatever they can and rely on the rain for healthy crops

"We raise cattle and we grow maize and potatoes and nuts but this wasn't a good year" Maduma says. "We are going to make up by selling cattle or goats. To raise money for school fees we sell our maize to the: GMB (Grain Marketing Board) and other private buyers."

He says a good harvest yields about 42 bags of maize, roughly four tonnes, and that while the government parastatal GMB is offering his 28-family village about R572 per tonne, a 20 litre drum of the staple food can be sold for R30 on the "black market"

He knows that the government, trying to prevent food shortages across the country, has banned the sale of maize on the private market, but says that the GMB will not pay him enough to

survive and he will have to break the law.

"I am very happy because we have enough land to graze our cattle. I have 20 of them. We are managing to survive as subsistence farmers and we can usually sell our food too, depending on the harvest," he said.

"I benefited from the government's resettlement programme. I was the first to agree to this resettlement scheme and to come here. But things are different now," he says.

"There's a very big difference in the manner they are settling people now. The people who are being settled on the commercial farms are very violent.. They go there and harass people on that land. " When some of us were settled here in 1982 the government had already bought this piece of land and we came here in an orderly manner. We are not happy with the way people are being beaten on the farms at the moment

Maduma says the people of Matabeleland reject political violence. And even though Mugabe and his ruling ZanuPF party gave them the land 19 years ago, the people still hold the party and Mugabe responsible for about 30,000 deaths during a vicious security crackdown against dissidents soon after independence in 1980.

Recalling the time he moved to Dombadema, Maduma says that while the government did not keep all its promises (Dombadema still does not have electricity) it did help

create the basic infrastructure needed to farm.

"We were told there was going to be this Dombadema resettlement on some four farms the government bought here. We were even given riot police for protection while we were building here because it was during the disturbances that were going on at the time," he says.

It was tough going nothing was free. "When we started, the closest water was 4km away. There were no clinics, shops or schools or houses here. The government promised us a lot of things like boundary fences, food, ploughs and carts, schools and clinics. They said they would give us bulls and calves to start our own herds, too

"It was just political rhetoric. They did not give it to us. See we have no title deeds for this land. The government said we were just settled and we did not buy the land.

"They brought a planner, but we built the schools ourselves the schools ourselves - four of them. They lent us ploughs though, and in 1984 the ministry of water sunk some bore-holes on our farm and on the other farms in the settlement." Then, in 1994, after years of complaining, the government funded a dam on the settlement with money sourced from donors. The community built the dam.

Maduma says materials for the brick houses which dot the village cost about R385 each and that because of the interest which has piled up, some people are still paying the government for the houses.

Still, says Maduma, he and the rest of the Dombadema community were provided with seeds and some tools by the

government and are happy that they have land on which they can live, grow crops, graze cattle and bury their dead.

Maduma thinks the people being resettled on commercial farms could be doomed to starvation if they do not receive help from the government. "This is the bad thing. The government won't help them and they have no resources to be successful," he says.

"It was hard work, not violence that has given us what we have", he says, surveying his village as the sun finally goes down behind him. SAPA