WORKING WITH INTELLECTUALS:
A GOVERNMENT PERSPECTIVE

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Paper 2

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"WORKING WITH INTELLECTUALS : A GOVERNMENT PERSPECTIVE"

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It is a pleasure for me to address an academic gathering after seven solid years of absence from academia. Recently it suddenly occurred to me that although to all intents and purposes, I am now permanently out of academia, I still continue to read advertisements for professional jobs at universities, as I had always done when I was still active in the field. The question of course is whether this abiding interest in University vacancies is due to nostalgia for academia or a sense of job insecurity on my part. A sense of job insecurity as it maybe, I think I am still an academic at heart and as such cannot divorce myself completely from the academic world. I believe this is true of many of my colleagues in the Cabinet, including the Prime Minister himself who is an academic on his own right.

A non-academic Minister would probably treat the subject of my paper, "Working with Intellectuals: - A Government Perspective" with greater perception than I am able to entertain because he would have the distinct advantage of being free from the prejudices of an intellectual background. This means that the reader of this paper should not expect a strictly "Government Perspective" in this paper. What I have attempted to do, is to present my personal views on the role of intellectuals (or put more accurately, the role of academia) in a developing country.

The role of intellectuals in a developing country depends upon the orientation of the intellectual community on the one hand and the attitude of the government of the day towards that community, or the willingness of Government to seek the services of the intellectual community in a practical way. A development-oriented intellectual community providing leadership in development, means a community capable of translating its training into serving the demands of economic, social, cultural, political and scientific development of the community as a whole.

In short, intellectuals cannot play a useful role in development without a conscious and deliberate effort by both themselves and Government to address the practical needs of development and to work together to address these needs.
Does the orientation of the intellectual community have to take ideological lines? What does this orientation mean? In my view this depends upon the path of development that the individual country chooses to follow. In the case of Zimbabwe, we have chosen to follow a socialist path of development. But this socialist path is being charted against the background of a fairly well established capitalist economy whose reality cannot be blinked away. This is to say that although the ruling party has chosen a socialist path of development, there is no blinking the fact that capitalist development is a legacy with which our socialist choice might have to coexist for some time in the future. Correct orientation on the part of our intellectual community means understanding this reality, and thus being able to address the practical needs of the country's development against that background.

But as the cliché goes it takes two to tango! The intellectual community on its own cannot address practically the development needs of its country without working closely with the Government. There should be a symbiotic relationship between the intellectual community and Government. This can be realised through the medium of the ruling political party in which intellectuals should play a critical role. When intellectuals exist outside the sphere of the ruling party, they tend to carve for themselves a world of their own far removed from reality and the practical demands of national development. In a developing country, an intellectual community which exists outside the ruling party is in danger of drifting into a state of chronic alienation with the process of social construction.

Such a state of affairs breeds false consciousness which often degenerates into anti-social, anti-institutional or even anti-state tendencies. In the majority of cases, such an alienation of intellectuals gives birth to the rise of competing and unproductive elites often subject to manipulation and exploitation by hostile alien interests.

A society which wants to harness its human resources for development should encourage its intellectuals to play an important role in its economic
cultural, social, and political life, it is not being suggested that intellectuals should be accorded a privileged position in society. What this suggests is the point that an efficient and effective deployment of human resources means the recognition and the acceptance of the important role of intellectuals in national development. The failure to recognise the critical role that intellectuals must play in development results in the dissipation of human resources. This human resources wastage can become a potential source of instability as it renders its victims fertile ground for subversion by alien interests.

The biggest achievement that any society can eternally boast of is the effective development of its human resources for development. The capacity to mobilise and deploy human resources effectively is the singular factor which distinguishes a viable state system from a system based on fragile institutions.

In a paper of this nature, one is in danger of overstating the role of the intellectuals in development. In our own experience, our intellectuals are products of a colonial culture, racial degradation and exploitation, and of an education system that distorted their image irrespective of whether they were exploited or privileged during the old regime. If they came from the privileged settler class, they were educated in the confidence that everything in life was bound to work to foster their success in life. If they came from the down trodden black majority, they received an education system that could not allow them to become more than secondary school teachers or some such professionals. Their total dependence upon the system that suppressed their intellectual development was ensured.

After achieving independence, the crucial task facing Zimbabwe is the socio-economic development of the country. This process calls for an integrated and coherent approach to all areas of development i.e. economic, cultural, political and social transformation of our society to construct state
power based on sound and viable institutions that can out-live individuals. The construction and forging of such state power is not a simple process. It is a complex process which calls for a conscious effort on the part of the people to define their goals and then set out to achieving those goals with a single purpose, namely the process of building a nation with a character of its own.

The difference between developed and developing countries is not just the difference in the level of technological or industrial development. Before these were achieved, the nations that are today recognised as developed, first developed the capability to create authentic state power by constructing a viable political community. It is only after a society has achieved the capacity to manage state affairs that it can organise itself effectively for meaningful development in all other areas. For then it is able to mobilise and deploy its human resources effectively and efficiently.

The role of intellectuals in this process is very critical and positive particularly if they are part of the political process spearheading such transformation. If they function outside such a political consensus their role tends to be elitist, negative and counter-productive. An observation has already been made that when intellectuals seek to function outside the political mainstream, they risk the danger of degenerating into victims of subversion by alien interests. But an intellectual community working within the political mainstream of society is bound to play a very critical role in shaping the ideological and cultural thrust of that society.

The present generation of our intellectuals is the product of a colonial system of education whose main thrust was to protect minority rule. The colonial education system was based on a regime of meritocracy which sought to transform those Africans it "favoured" with education into a social buffer zone between the ruling minority and the oppressed African majority. This system set up standards in education which had no relevance to the development needs of the ordinary African people. This means that in seeking to provide leadership in the economic and cultural development of their people, our intellectuals ought to consider the relevance of their
own training and attitudes to the development needs of the people they wish to lead.

Because the education background of our present generation of intellectuals is rooted in the ethos of our past colonial rulers, some of our intellectuals have a tendency to accept the supremacy and infallibility of the education standards of our colonial past. What we often forget is the fact that British education standards reflect the history and the social structure of that people. These standards are a product of the socio-economic experience of the British people and hence the evolution of these standards can be identified with definite developments in the experience of the British people in history. Although British rule has had some impact upon us, we have not travelled the whole road of British culture, and should, therefore not pretend to be British by trying to swallow their culture hook, line and sinker. Their education system is not wholly suitable for our own development.

There is nothing more ludicrous than to listen to two Zimbabweans (one educated in the United Kingdom, and the other in the U.S.) arguing over who received better education between themselves. The issues are rarely who received relevant education to our development needs. The argument is often over details of quantity of knowledge which in both cases might be totally irrelevant to the needs of the country. This false elitism often leads to disfunctional social values whose result has been the isolation of the so-called intellectuals from the mass of the people. In the majority of cases, what has been learnt cannot be translated into the real life people live from day to day in our own developing environment.

Equally a student who has studied Karl Marx out of the context of his time, space, and culture is unable to distinguish between Marxism as a philosophy and socialism as a practical model of that philosophy. The value of an education system should be judged by its capacity to teach its benefactors to distinguish theory or philosophy from the practical model which that theory or philosophy projects in the context of an experience or objective situation.
Our intellectuals should provide leadership in the debate to seek useful reforms to our education system. Recent experience in seeking solutions to the problem of development in Africa has revealed a lack of coherent and integrated approach to manpower development. Because their education systems do not provide an adequate base for the development of manpower for industry, developing countries lack the capacity to develop human resources and technological capabilities. What a developing country like Zimbabwe needs is a well articulated human resources development programme deliberately designed to promote technological capabilities.

People often complain of lack of local control of industries or enterprises in developing countries without dealing with the factors standing in the way of indigenising these industries or enterprises. No meaningful indigenisation of the economy can take place in the absence of a coherent and integrated plan to develop interpreneurial capabilities, managerial, technical, and administrative skills of the local people. This calls for an articulated programme of human resources development in all the productive sectors of the economy.

As we have already observed, before independence the socio-economic environment in Zimbabwe did not encourage or facilitate indigenous participation in the economy, and as a result no indigenous entrepreneurship could develop during that period. Even seven years after independence, indigenous entrepreneurship, such as it is, is restricted to activities like import/export, retail trade and services. There are just not enough indigenous people equipped with interpreneurial, managerial, technical and administrative skills in this country.

The situation could remain the same (or deteriorate) in the next twenty-five years if the country fails to design and develop a coherent and integrated programme of human resources development.

A coherent and integrated programme of human resources development can be achieved through the combined efforts of Government and other institutions.
This includes institutions of higher learning and private enterprises. In a recent study, "Transformation and Trends of African Economies", A. Benachenhou reveals that Africa spends very little in scientific and technological research. For instance, the study reveals that Africa accounts for only 0.7% of the world scientists and engineers engaged in research and development activities, and spends only 0.4% of world resources in research and development. It is further revealed in this study that Africa has 53 scientists for every 1,000,000 inhabitants as compared to 5,000 in the USSR, 3,548 in Japan and 2,685 in the U.S.A.* What is disturbing in this study is not so much the statistics, as the revelation that for the most part African research and development's objectives lack clarity, the programmes are inconsistent, research management is ineffective and the status of researchers is poor.

The poor quality of research in developing countries is largely due to lack of cooperation between research and economic activity, i.e. between research institutes and business firms. In order to achieve an integration of effort between research and the producer the two must have capabilities in specific fields. Otherwise it makes no sense to have a highly developed research centre if the companies do not have the technological capabilities or they are unable to master the technology they already use.

Except in agriculture, this country's research capabilities are still very weak. In the field of agriculture, a great deal of progress has been made in Research and Development. This progress has benefitted both Zimbabwe and its neighbours in the Southern African Development Coordination Conference (SADCC) in which Zimbabwe coordinates the agriculture sector. The progress in agriculture research in this country has been made possible by the integration of effort between research institutes and producers.

The integration of effort between research and producers is yet to be fully achieved in the sectors of industry and mining in this country. Yet it is quite clear that the manufacturing sector has got to play a pivotal role in the economic development of the country. Although presently manufacturing accounts for only 26% of our Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (which is the highest in Sub Sahara Africa excepting South Africa) and is still, therefore, below agriculture, manufacturing holds keys to the future growth of the economy of this country.

It is my personal view that our university has not played a leading role in restructuring some of its research programmes for industrial application. There is an abiding tendency to follow the traditional academic route of basic research. Basic research can be directed to include possible industrial applications. But this can be achieved only if there is an integration of effort between the University and production firms. Such integration of effort should be a two-way stream along which the University gives the company the results of its research on the one hand, and it uses the experience of the company in directing its work towards the needs of the company on the other.

A successful integration of effort between research and production activity has in certain countries brought institutions of learning into the process of production itself when these institutions ended creating their own companies to produce results of their own research. Where this has happened, such institutions have been able to raise income to further the cause of research or raise revenue for their own budgets. Although such a development might not take place under present levels of development in this country, it might be worthwhile to project its possibility in our development plans.

At present too much of our research work takes place in isolation and there is very little communication between researchers and industry. The university and the industrial sector need guidance from Government in order to cooperate effectively in such development-oriented projects. In the first place, Government should provide clearly defined national priorities which should provide guidance to researchers in pursuing projects which are socially and economically desirable for the country. In the second place,
Government should provide adequate research facilities and capital to foster contact between researchers and producers. Thirdly, Government should also promote policy initiatives aimed at increasing private sector involvement in Research and Development efforts and at promoting much closer links between industry and the research resources which exist in our institutions of higher education.

Government and the University should consider science and technology in a coherent and coordinated way. The policy on science and technology should be integrated with other policy areas such as industry, education, trade, social welfare, employment and industrial relations. Our experience has shown that these areas of policy concern have been treated by differing and often conflicting views on science and technology and their role in society. The result has been a lack of coordination, focus and application in science and technology policy and in technological development.

In this regard, the contribution of the social and human sciences to the application of science and technology to development strategies should not be overlooked. The social sciences help to clarify factors favourable for creativity and for the dissemination of science and technology. They also provide the machinery for policy making, and as such are indispensable in the whole process of science and technology development.

In this country, we have taken the initiative to manage Research and Development under the Scientific Council of Zimbabwe which is in the Prime Minister's Office. This council coordinates all research taking place in various sectors. In the case of industry, we have already drawn up legislation to set up the Council For Industrial Research in which Government, the private sector and the University will be represented. We have included the private sector in the proposed Council for Industrial Research because we believe that effective industrial Research and Development, and the transfer of technology require the participation of government, industry, the University and research institutes. This broad representation in the Council will give it the capacity to identify the main industries targeted for expansion and modernization, and the technology suitable for these industries. It will also set up modalities for the adaptation, diffusion, anchorage and transfer of such technology.
In Zimbabwe, there exist all the major elements for developing local technological capabilities, namely a relatively sound education system, the Research and Development capability, specialist workshops and facilities, engineering and consultancy services, information systems, management, planning and financing facilities. The problem is that these exist in isolation and there is no coherent system of relationships among them, which would enable them to be supportive of one another. This promotion of coherence and effective coordination among all these elements is the function of integration of effort between the production sectors, and the University or research institutes.

In this process, those in charge of education and manpower development have a key role to play. In the first place, our education system must be oriented to the changing needs of the economy, and in this case to the changing needs of manufacturing and service industries and manpower development must become a continuous process in which individuals retrain and update their skills. In other words, the education system must not just concentrate in producing people with training relevant to current needs, but must educate them in ways which make them adaptable to changing circumstances.

This means that authorities in charge of education, manpower development, economic development, and other sectors of the economy need to work in close liaison in order to ensure that resources made available for manpower development are not wasted on irrelevant training.

Such liaison would enable those in charge of manpower development to train manpower according to the requirements of the production sectors. In this way training facilities would be effectively utilised for development.

CONCLUSION:

This paper deliberately avoided dealing with the topic "Working With Intellectuals: a Government Perspective", and chose to concentrate on the role the intellectual community can play in development, because I did not want to treat intellectuals as a separate entity from Government. It is my own view that the intellectual community should be integrated with Government as much as possible.