



The Right Livelihood Award

for outstanding vision and work on behalf of our planet and its people

Organisation of Rural Associations for Progress (ORAP) (Zimbabwe)

(1993)



ORAP representatives

...for building a remarkable grassroots movement and motivating its million members to follow their own path of human development.

The Organisation of Rural Associations for Progress (ORAP) was founded in May 1981 out of the Rural Development Co-ordination Council, itself set up by a small group of people in Matabeleland to discuss development options following the independence war, which ended in 1980. The word development in the Sindebele language means taking control over what you need to work with, and ORAP has always worked on the basis that rural people are underdeveloped because they have been dispossessed of their culture, traditional knowledge, language and way of life, and of a voice in the structures that control and determine their lives. In seeking to reverse this condition, ORAP has always laid great stress on its own need to be democratic and participatory with regard to its members, and autonomous and in control of its priorities with regard to outside donors.

ORAP's growth has been fast. In February 1991 its membership was over a million people in over 800 village groups, certainly the largest such movement in Southern Africa. The basic unit is the extended group of 5-10 families, which is then represented through several higher tiers of organisation.

Programmes at the family unit level, involving both men and women, include all usual domestic and craft activities, some for home consumption, some for income generation. The next level of organisation, the village group, comprising several family units, undertakes small-scale community projects, such as construction of dams and weirs, boreholes, wells and irrigation schemes, preservation and multiplication of indigenous seed and trees, economic activities - grinding mills, retail shops, pig-raising, cattle fattening, poultry, sewing and tannery. At the district level Associations are formed with programmes including blacksmithing, carpentry, vegetable gardens and pre-school study groups. Eight of the associations now have Development Centres where these activities are located, and which also give training in industrial, agricultural and craft skills.

The basis of the village groups' working together is a tradition of collective work called 'amalima' whereby all the group members attend to each family's fields in rotation. Most jobs are done collectively - gathering firewood, fetching water, even home improvements, which have been extensive. A core aspect of ORAP's methodology is mobilisation - through singing, drama or discussion, all of which stress the need for ORAP members and groups to do things collectively for themselves. This spirit has been maintained throughout ORAP's process of growth and is reflected in all its activities.

Centrally the organisation is divided into different units to support and co-ordinate the local activities.

ORAP's budget of about US\$1.5 million per year comes from a wide range of NGO donors.

One of ORAP's founders and its best-known activist was Mrs Sithembiso Nyoni. Mrs Nyoni has worked to disseminate the experiences of ORAP internationally, and she is currently Chairperson of the international network IRED, which seeks to promote people-centred development throughout the South. However, Mrs. Nyoni later became Minister of Small and Medium Enterprise Development in the government of Robert Mugabe.

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