

INTERVIEW WITH THE MINISTER OF STATE FOR POLICY IMPLEMENTATION, HON. W SHAMU MP – Sunday Mail

Q. Hon Minister, as the year draws to an end, what are your comments on the implementation of government policies, programmes and projects?

Hon. Minister Shamu

Generally Government Ministries have done a commendable job under difficult circumstances. Government programmes and projects were embarked on at varying times, and therefore are at different stages of implementation throughout the country. Some of the programmes have been fully implemented while others are pending and on- going. Government is sparing no effort to ensure the full implementation of these programmes.

Q. Can you give a few examples of government projects that have shown significant progress in terms of implementation?

Hon Minister Shamu

There are many examples! For instance, government is carrying out water supplies projects throughout the country, with Mushandike and Great Zimbabwe being 95% complete, while the majority are over fifty percent complete.

The Rural electrification programme has witnessed commendable progress with health centers, schools, chiefs homesteads, rural service centers being put on the national grid. Obviously this will go a long way in uplifting the standards of living of the Zimbabwean citizens as this will enable them to engage in economic activities. There are of course a lot more benefits of a social nature that come with availability of electricity.

The Government has also embarked on irrigation rehabilitation programme throughout the country which has increased the hectareage under irrigation from 70 000 ha to over 130 000 ha. A further 300 000 ha has been identified close to water bodies by the Department of Water Resources and infrastructural Development. Plans are underway to develop the land. This is a critical programme which will go a long way in enhancing

national food security in the face of persistent droughts, and it will be on-going.

As a long term measure, Government is also constructing a number of dams to support irrigation, such as Tokwe Mukorsi in Masvingo, Marovanyati in Manicaland, Mutange in the Midlands, Gwayi-Shangani in Matebeleland North and others.

Major repairs are being undertaken on some existing dams such as Lungwalala in Matebeleland North.

Construction on roads and bridges is on-going throughout the country to increase accessibility which is vital for development. On Food Security Government is implementing Operation Maguta/Inala

Q. Hon. Minister, what challenges are militating against the implementation of some of these programmes and projects.?

Hon. Minister Shamu

The Major constraint has been inadequate and late disbursement of funds. Limited resources are being spread over too many projects ^resulting in little progress being made in implementation. We are correcting that we hope to focus on few viable projects and complete them.

Other problems have been fuel shortages, erosion of funds by inflation, non-performance by some contractors, delays in awarding tenders, shortage of foreign currency, equipment break downs and shortage of spare parts for plant and equipment.

During the course of the year, my Ministry visited all provinces to review the implementation of programmes and projects which are the cutting edges of development. We have appraised the relevant government agencies of the state of implementation of programmes and projects with a view to expediting progress. We have also discussed with Provincial Development Committees the implementation of development programmes in their regions. We are strengthening the PDCs at DDCs as agents of development.

Q. Another area of government concern has been the performance of

parastatals. What are your comments, Hon Minister?

Indeed Government has expressed concern on the performance of parastatals because of the strategic position and critical role that they are supposed to play in the economy. Some of them have been accumulating losses while there has been lack of accountability in others. Government is working flat out to improve their performance through close supervision.

The Department of Policy Implementation has recommended that managers of parastatals and state enterprises be put on contract in order to be able to measure their performance in terms of concrete programmes and projects implemented. Government cannot entertain a situation where parastatals continue to be a drain on the fiscus.

In order to improve the performance of parastatals, we are calling for a review of the appointment of the board members of parastatals. Any appointments should be on merit, and new blood should be injected where necessary. It is necessary that these boards be put on performance contracts as well. Financial audits will be enhanced in the coming year.

Q. On a general note, Hon. Minister I now wish to draw your attention to other issues of national importance.

As the year comes to an end, and considering the economic hardships the country is facing currently, what would you have to say to the people?

Hon. Minister Shamu

Firstly, the people of Zimbabwe must be commended for displaying unparalleled resilience in the face of such acute economic hardships. It has not been easy at all for all of us. People's living standards have been drastically eroded to unprecedented levels. Yet they have remained resolute in their resolve to turn around the economy.

Secondly, what we are experiencing reminds us of the hardships that we had to endure during the struggle for independence. We were a people united, with one purpose to depose our common enemy. It was imperative for us then, to heed the call of our

nationalist leaders Comrades R. G Mugabe and J M Nkomo. We had to rally behind them for our own survival individually and corporately.

As it was then, so must it be today if we are to attain our goals of self determination and economic recovery. We need to put to shame our detractors who have imposed sanctions on us and vigorously campaign against us to have us totally excommunicated by the international community. The way to do it is to rally behind our leadership and play our part in nation building. We should stand together as one people with one destiny.

Q. Hon. Minister, in your view is the government doing enough to turn the economy around?

Hon. Minister Shamu

Oh yes, definitely! Government has done quite a lot, and continues to do a lot more to revive the economy. The Department of Policy is there to ensure that targets set by Government to turn around the economy are achieved.

When the President put together the present Cabinet, he called it the Development Cabinet. The thrust was to ensure that development is achieved in all sectors of the economy.

Measures have been taken to revamp the key sectors of the economy such as Agriculture and Mining. There has been a lot of work done to improve irrigation infrastructure and industrial capacity utilisation while value addition programmes are being promoted. The country is determined to pay off its debt to IMF and in that regard, a substantial amount has been remitted to date to the international monetary body. The critical sectors of Education and Manpower Development continue to receive a lot of support from government in its recognition that human resources form the basis of sustainable development.

Clearly then, Government is doing a lot to create an enabling environment for development. Recently, we heard from the Minister of Agriculture that his Ministry is distributing 25 kg packs of seed maize for free to all AI and communal farmers so that at least one hectare of their land can be put under maize. This gesture, which is in the spirit of Operation Food Security,

Maguta/Inala is commendable.

The Government has also gone out to engage the various communities that make up our population to hear their views concerning such development issues as policy implementation challenges, the budget, etc. The intention was to bring on board views of all people. The private sector, farmers organisations, public servants, church organisations and many other groupings have all been consulted by Government in its effort to hear what everyone has to say.

Q. Are you therefore hopeful, Comrade Minister, for an economic turn around?

Hon. Minister Shamu

We are very optimistic! We now speak of economic take off. With the rains upon us, and the season promising to be a good one, the stage seems set for an agricultural boom! Obviously, we need to take advantage of this and exert ourselves fully to achieve high productivity. We need to take advantage of the peace and stability that we enjoy in our country to focus on productivity. Farmers should treat agriculture as an industry not a hobby for weekends. Let us now focus on agro-based industry and exports.

In this regard, let me appeal to the private sector to come up in full force and support Government efforts by providing financial support for commercial farmers. It is however encouraging and heartening that some of our financial institutions have heeded the call for assistance and have collectively provided funding to over two thousand commercial farmers.

To the commercial farmers, my appeal is that they may put a certain percentage of their farms under maize so that the country can be self sufficient in food supply.

The Minister of Finance, and the Governor of the Reserve Bank have also played their part in coming up with sound fiscal and monetary policies respectively and deploying financial resources prudently to all sectors of the economy.

The country stands to benefit from increased productivity in

Agriculture. This will give buoyancy to our economy. Our increased agricultural exports will boost our foreign currency inflows, a trend which is vital to enhance investor confidence and to reduce inflation.

So, we are very optimistic that we will achieve economic take off.

Q. In conclusion, Hon Minister, what lessons can be drawn from our present situation as a nation?

Hon Minister Shamu

Firstly, we need to take note of the fact that we are the sole architects of our destiny. His Excellency, Comrade R G Mugabe has hammered on this point repeatedly in many fora. As such, we need to desist from looking to some donor for benevolence. Let us therefore look to ourselves for solutions to our problems.

Secondly, it is vital for all of us to appreciate that we cannot achieve our goals and intentions if we prevaricate in our resolve. Our direction towards Agrarian Reform is therefore irreversible and therefore the people that remain intent on hampering the land distribution programme should be regarded as enemies of the people. Farmers should therefore put the land to maximum use to achieve high productivity.

Industry should be innovative and productive so that we deal effectively with shortages and the black market. We deplore, in the strongest terms, unprofessional and unethical practices by industry which have led to unwarranted price hikes of commodities, and the fuelling of the black market. It should be made crystal clear to all and sundry, that hiking prices to levels that are ungazetted is a criminal offence. Sectors such as the oil sector and others, need to heed the warning and to keep prices within the gazetted limits all the time.

Parastatals and companies need to embrace the concept of corporate governance and to enforce this principle in their operations. There is need to come up with cost saving measures in the way companies operate so that profit is increased. Workers at all levels should be made accountable so that companies are not prejudiced through unscrupulous work ethics.

Our whole society, including our civil servants, need to embrace a

new work culture where we all put in a hundred percent effort.

Finally, let us all realise that we cannot achieve much if we do not stand together as we seek to turn our fortunes. Let us all rally behind the Presidency, and cherish our nationhood enough to want to contribute to the well being of the country. If it was possible for us to stand together as one people during the struggle, it should be possible to do so again today. As a united people with one voice, we certainly will be able to muffle any mischievous dissenting voices from among us.

There is need for government and the private sector to have a common goal. Government should come up with policies to make the private sector viable. The private sector should ensure that they increase capacity utilisation. There is need for cooperation between private sector and the public sector. It is our wish as a nation to implement policies and programmes that improve the lives of the people.