

# A MODEL FOR GOOD PRISON FARM MANAGEMENT IN AFRICA



PENAL REFORM IN AFRICA



**PRI** Penal Reform International

# Introduction

In most prison services throughout Africa, the main expense aside from staff salaries is food for the prison ration which is invariably purchased from outside contractors. The funds allocated for these rations are often only sufficient for one meal per day which is inadequate both in terms of quantity and quality.

Again, most prison services in Africa have access to substantial areas of land, but this land is either unproductive or under-producing. Farm managers are constrained by lack of resources. If Prisons come low down the list of government spending priorities, Farms appear low down the list of Prison budgeting priorities.

This document provides a framework for Prison Services to consider in seeking

## ways to improve productivity in their prison farms that are:

- cost-effective;
- sustainable; and
- rights-based.

Prisons are not a priority spending concern for the Treasury. This causes pressures to be put on the prison service budget. In practice pressure on the Prison Service budget means that:

- low priority spending is reduced or delayed.
- resources for farming are funded too little and too late.
- seasonal deadlines are missed and planning is made impossible.
- farming activity gradually ceases.

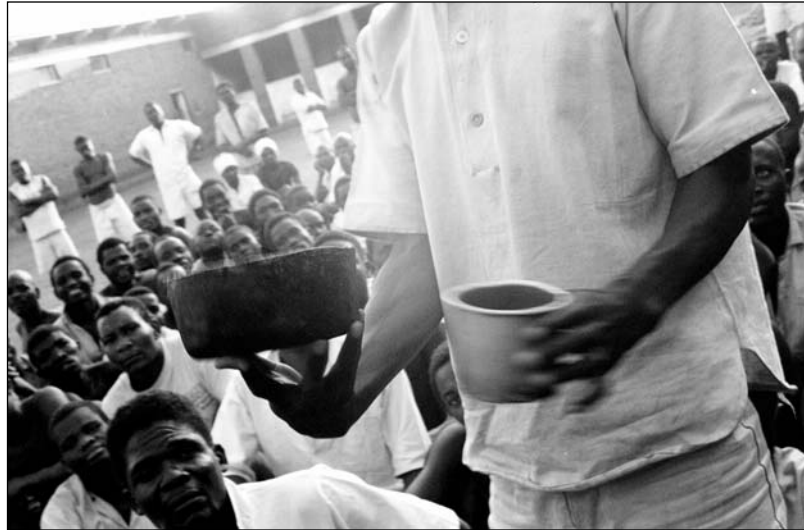
The framework is drawn from farming and management practices in eastern and southern Africa and PRI's experience on the continent. It is not a blueprint, but illustrative of what can be done to maximise profitability with scarce resources.

## What are the benefits of good prison farming, and to whom do they accrue?

There are a number of different beneficiaries. Their interests are mostly complementary, but the order of priority of these benefits needs to be considered.

Prison farms can provide **PRISONERS** with:

- useful, productive work outside instead of enforced idleness inside;
- more nutritious diet;
- experience of good farming practices;
- a more 'normal' working day in a more open environment;
- financial compensation for their work.



They can provide **PRISON STAFF** with

- improved morale and security in the prison flowing from a better working environment;
- more nutritious diet, as they share in the food which they produce;
- economic dividend as they can obtain foodstuffs at cost;
- training in good farming practices.

The **PRISON SERVICE** benefits from

- improved morale;
- improved security;
- more openness;
- better management;
- organisational benefits (e.g. reduction in transport of bought in ration);
- budget relief (reduction in overall cost of ration).

And the **GOVERNMENT** enjoys

- enhanced human rights profile;
- budget relief.

## Financial Appraisal

Food produced on prison farms is not free food. Its price is the cost of the inputs, the equipment, the labour and the organisation which go into growing it. *If they are run well*, prison farms can produce food for considerably less than the cost of purchasing from outside.

The cost of purchasing food from outside will be determined by local market conditions. The price of prison farm production must be budgeted and compared with the market price to check that there are savings to be had.

In all cases, the prison farms will only deliver their potential benefits if they are farmed effectively. The aim of farming to a high standard must be at the heart of any project of rehabilitation.

## Farming to a High Standard

Improvements in farming certainly require improvements in husbandry of crops and livestock. Prison farms will learn to use modern techniques of operation, modern varieties of seeds, and fertilisers and crop protection techniques. These can have a dramatic effect of raising production, and in themselves do not require a high capital input.

Improvement does not necessarily mean expensive mechanisation.. The advantages of mechanisation depend on the local situation - for example, the access to good spares and service for machinery. Unlike ordinary family farms, prison farms can draw on large numbers of people for important operations on the fields. A prison farm project does not have to commit to heavy capital expenditure at the outset.

Mechanisation need not reduce the opportunity for prisoners to work on the farm. It can be used effectively to ease the heavier field tasks such as land preparation and harvesting, allowing prisoners to work on more labour intensive tasks such as vegetable growing.

## Features of the new rehabilitated Prison Farm System

The aim is to have a prison farm system with the following features:

- Crops and livestock in sufficient amounts to improve the diet for prisoners and staff.
- Vegetables grown at each prison, through as many months of the year as possible, for the ration and for staff.
- Financial security achieved through good performance, allowing funds for depreciation of equipment with.
  - timely access to funds.
  - effective management at all levels incorporating good planning, work practices and reporting.
- Work provided for prisoners that is non-afflictive and in line with the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners.

# Breaking the pattern of under-production

## The approach

There is no secret about which crops grow well in a particular region. For prison farms to perform well, they must ensure that:

- the necessary inputs arrive in time;
- they are applied consistently and well; and
- a percentage of the profits from the harvest are set aside to cover the next season's requirements.

In other words, the approach should *maximize use of the resources available through good management, proper training and financial autonomy*.

PRI has identified **THREE MAIN STAGES** to this approach:

### FIRST

To increase food production, there needs to be a reorganisation of the planning and execution of the farm work. Experience suggests this will take a minimum of three harvest cycles before much progress is made.

### SECOND

To achieve the first objective, a financial structure is essential which ensures financial autonomy for the farms management and prevents farm funds from being raided or becoming subject to competing priority needs and concerns.

### THIRD

The Prison administration needs to ensure that the food produced does in fact reach the intended recipients, whether the prisoners, the staff or others (e.g. sales of produce).

## Commentary

**Stage 1:** Many of the problems are common to prison farms throughout the world. Inadequate equipment, lack of technical knowledge, poor organisation and insufficient crop inputs all conspire to depress production. These are all matters which can be quickly and effectively tackled in a project of rehabilitation.

**Stage 2:** The creation of a suitable financial structure may be a policy matter for which the relevant Ministry is responsible. A positive attitude from the Ministry is most valuable, both in facilitating the necessary changes, and in supervising the progress of the Prison Service in the correct use of the new arrangements.



**Stage 3:** This third stage tends to bring into the project the wider problems of Prison Service administration. While a farms project will contribute to an improvement in the overall management capacity of the Prison Service, its own success relies heavily on that management capacity. The obvious danger is that the Project is financed, the staff and prisoners do the work, but the farm inputs and/or produce are lost through bad management and misuse.

# A WORK IN PROGRESS: the Malawi Farms Project

In 1995, the Malawi Prisons Service (MPS) had a population of 4,500 in 23 prisons. The nine farms were producing virtually nothing from the 520 ha of land available. Following a feasibility study in 1997, a three year project to rehabilitate the prison farms began. This ended in 2000 with the following situation:

- the farms producing 45% of the prison maize ration (for 4,500 prisoners).
- vegetable plots established in each prison, many producing 100% of the needs of staff and prisoners in the dry months.
- fruit and firewood trees plantations established in suitable areas.
- a prison farms management system ready and able to carry out a plan of steady growth for the seasons ahead.

## Results

By the end of the third season:

- the farms were all active producing food crops for the prison ration and cash crops to purchase farm inputs.
- all prisons, whether urban or rural, had established a vegetable garden.
- production, which before had been negligible, had reached 25% of the ration requirement for maize (population had increased to 7,500 in the interim).
- the crises that had periodically affected the feeding of prisoners had abated.
- the success of the project led to greater openness of the prisons service to outside intervention, attracted the interest of the national media and politicians, improved morale among prison staff in general and the farms unit in particular.

## Diary of events

- 1995:** Needs assessment of the MPS assisted by PRI. A recommendation of the report was that the prison farms should be revived.
- 1996:** Discussions between PRI, the Ministry of Justice and the MPS led to a visit by a PRI agricultural consultant in 1997.
- 1997:** Feasibility study: PRI worked with the Prison Farms manager of the MPS to examine the state of the farms and to propose a way forward.
- 1997:** Pilot project (DANIDA funded). The success of this limited project led to a more ambitious project incorporating the entire prison service and individual stations funded by DFID.
- 1998/**
- 1999:** Second planting season.
- 1999/**
- 2000:** Third planting season.



# Problems to overcome: government funding

The problems of the past centred around the adequacy and timeliness of funding the farms' inputs.

The funding came out of the main Prison Service budget. This budget was, itself, under-funded. The MPS was living from hand to mouth, using all its budget to cover its most pressing needs. The result was that farm inputs could not be bought in time, and seasonal deadlines were missed. Planning for the farms was thus rendered impossible.

## Finding a way ahead

The solution to this was set out in a plan that would:

- ensure that funds would be available for the farms when required.
- introduce planning and management which could be relied on and thus.
- increase production, and to ensure that the produce would go to the intended recipients.

### The Pilot Year

In the first (pilot) year, three farms were chosen to produce some crops for sale and some for the ration. The farm manager concentrated on these, and operated them using the newly created farms bank account. The other prison farms received a small quantity of seeds and fertilisers to allow them to be active during the year.

### Results

The harvest of 1998, from the pilot year of the project, showed that the basis of the plan was sound. The three farms had operated successfully, and the farm management and financial management had worked without serious problems. The proceeds of the sale of crops of tobacco, cotton and vegetables were remitted to the farms account to fund future inputs. In addition, some 10% of the Ration requirement for maize was produced over all the farms.





## Year 2

The second season saw the farm management and financial management extended to all the prisons in Malawi. In order to meet the increase in activity, attention was given to careful planning and project supervision. Two pickups were purchased for the Project to enable the farms staff to make regular visits.

### **Results**

The harvest of 1999 showed that this work had paid off. Maize production had almost doubled, and the quantity and quality of the crops for sale improved, with higher prices achieved. In addition, most prisons established a vegetable garden during the dry season of 1999 and started to produce fresh vegetables.

The Farms management instituted an annual review meeting in each region whereby staff from each station could share their successes and problems. In addition, certificates with small cash awards were made to those stations which produced the most or kept the best records. These meetings proved to be a focal point as they included all those involved in the work of the year and rewarded them for their efforts. In turn, this increased enthusiasm for improving production in the next year.



## Year 3

Plans for the 2000 season were made in good time:

- the use of fertiliser was increased to take advantage of the higher standard of crop growing by the staff and prisoners
- training courses were instituted for staff
- a computer was purchased to help with planning, recording and reporting

### **Results**

The harvest of 2000 reached a level which would have been unthinkable just a few years earlier. Some 500 T of maize were produced, together with high quality tobacco and cotton and fresh vegetables.

## Cost analysis

In 2000 and in 2001, the Malawi prison farms produced maize at a **cost** of MK **2,000** per tonne. The **purchase** price of that maize in 2000 was MK **5,000** per tonne (ie MK250 per 50kg bag), which is two and a half times the cost.

However in 2001, the **purchase** price is MK **20,000** per tonne (ie MK 1000 per 50kg bag), which is **ten times** the cost.

The **total saving** over purchase price **in 2000** (on 500 tonnes) was MK **1.5 million**, and in **2001** (on 625 tonnes) was MK **11.25 million**.

Farm production is especially valuable in a year when the market price rises sharply, because it protects the budget from such price increases. On an average year, the prison farms produce maize for less than half the normal purchase price.

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## Criteria for success

The experience of PRI is that for a project of this type to succeed, you need:

- A sound manager in place
- Autonomous financing for the prison farms
- To grow what is best for the land, not what you know
- Trained staff
- Transparent incentive schemes for prisoners and staff
- Emphasis on good husbandry rather than extensive cultivation
- Gradual extension of the project (over five years) rather than a sudden onslaught.
- Application of modern but low capital cost farming methods
- Regular meetings of those involved (maximizing participation and ownership)
- Reflect importance of farm professionals in the ranking hierarchy

At the same time, you should watch out for:

- Over-reliance on mechanization
- Search for quick fixes
- Corrupt practices ('gifts' to senior staff and visiting dignitaries)
- Over-extending cultivation
- Taking time to communicate the strategy to the prison staff and officers in charge

# Penal Reform International in Malawi

PRI has been working in Malawi since 1995 when the organization was invited by the Ministry of Justice to conduct a Needs Assessment of the Malawi Prison Service (MPS). This was done in collaboration with the MPS, Malawi CARER and a prison officer attached from the Zimbabwe Prison Service. The recommendations from the Assessment, together with the agenda for penal reform in Africa - set in 1996 by the Kampala Declaration on Prison Conditions in Africa -, formed the basis for PRI's work in the country.

PRI has sought to build up the penal reform network among civil society groups as well as lawyers, judiciary, social services, police and prisons by co-founding and supporting the Prison Reform Committee and assisting in the creation of a newsletter called New Hope. PRI has lobbied donor agencies to support penal reform and worked closely with the Malawi Prison Service to assist in the implementation of these projects.

The three most notable achievements to-date have been:

- the development of the Community Service scheme;
- the Malawi Prison Farms project; and
- the Paralegal Advisory Service.

Penal Reform International (PRI) is an international non-governmental organisation. Founded in London, UK, in 1989, PRI has members in five continents and in over 80 countries.

Penal Reform International seeks to achieve penal reform, recognising diverse cultural contexts, by promoting:

- the development and implementation of international human rights instruments with regard to law enforcement, prison conditions and standards;
- the elimination of unfair and unethical discrimination in all penal measures;
- the abolition of the death penalty;
- the reduction of the use of imprisonment throughout the world;
- the use of constructive non-custodial sanctions which encourage social re-integration while taking into account the interest of victims.

PRI develops programmes on a regional basis, assisting both non-governmental organisations and individuals to establish projects in their own countries. It promotes the exchange of information and good practices between countries with related conditions.

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