

The Termite Strategy: Transforming Rural Africa from Within

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PREFACE

This book is about smallholder agriculture and rural development in Africa. It uses examples from Southern Africa where the contributors were born or lived for most of their lives. Events in Zimbabwe overtook the writing of this book and the authors were forced to reconsider the validity of their paradigm. While the gestation of the book was more painful and lengthy than anticipated, we feel that the original concept is still valid.

The paradigm is that magnificent structures like termite mounds, can be built by Africans who focus on solving problems relevant to the rural poor. These termites work unobtrusively out of the limelight, dedicated to improving lives. There are examples of successful innovations, adaptations and the implementation of exciting new approaches in peasant agriculture, despite an essentially hostile environment. The macro and institutional environment is very important in determining the ability to spread and make best use of these innovations. The underlying thesis of this book is that people do know what is best for themselves. They should be given the opportunity to take control of their lives. African governments need to become facilitators rather than owners and managers. The experiences of emerging entrepreneurs in Zimbabwe who were given a brief window of opportunity shows what rural industrialisation and commercialisation needs. Innovative farmers have shown what is possible even under difficult conditions and committed, local NGOs have been active in establishing and spreading the innovations.

The real problem for most Africans arises when the system cuts them off from effective communication with the outside world and where even their ability to feed themselves is affected by a violation of their freedom of movement and association. Communications, the free flow of information, flexible systems and choice will spur development. For countries where the citizens are not being randomly victimised, there is considerable hope for the future. This book tells the story of those who have made it on the micro level, of the factors that were influential in achieving those successes and then goes on to explore the policy environment necessary to foster widespread creation of wealth and equity.

The book is not written as a textbook for academia. It is written for the general public. It is written for all those interested in how rural Africans are coping and what they need to ensure that Africa is part of the new globalised economy. The book is also directed at policy makers, agricultural and development workers, government agencies and NGOs. For its academic readership, there are several Appendices that include chapters that elaborate on some of these concepts and provide the references so important to academic enquiry.

Printing costs are now prohibitive and much local publishing has ground to a halt. We decided to change that -- so here is the CD. If it is well received and there is some support for a conventional book - we will be happy to provide a new edition! Until that time please feel free to print, copy, photocopy and distribute this information - provided only that you reference your source please! While the CD limits the readership - it does make it possible to include some music, more photographs and some interesting features and we hope you enjoy them.

Ideas, comments, and material for a new edition would be most welcome.

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APPENDICES

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