

# Benefits of villagisation

23 SEP 1987

**OVER** the past few months MNR bandits from Mozambique have carried out a series of cross-border raids which have left 14 dead and many more maimed and wounded. Typical of the cowardly tactics they employ, the attacks have been made against innocent villagers unable to protect themselves against a heavily-armed aggressor.

Zimbabwe's security forces have the capacity to react punishingly and with lightning speed against such attackers, but with our immense border it is impossible for them to be on guard everywhere, particularly when we face a two-pronged attack from both Mozambique and South Africa.

For us to attempt such an impossible task would stretch our military manpower to the limit and weaken our defences — to the certain delight of our enemies. But our rural populations in vulnerable areas must be protected. To this end the development strategy of villagisation could play a significant role.

Villagisation has multiple benefits. The people get clear water and proper sanitation as well as schools, clinics, roads and other services which are impossible to provide when communities are scattered.

Banding together also means greater security. Strong residents' militias can be trained, not only to defend their own communities, but to play a wider role by helping our security forces keep on top of cross-border incursions.

The transition will not be easy. Traditional and family ties are strong and even though the border situation dictates quick action we must move cautiously.

Villagisation programmes have failed elsewhere because officialdom has become impatient, moving people willy-nilly, without preparation or explanation. People have also been moved with promises of benefits that never materialise.

Zimbabwe must get it right. Villagers asked to give up their traditional homes must be carefully educated to the point where they welcome the change. And promises must be kept.

Wielded properly, villagisation is a potentially devastating new weapon against this country's enemies.