

OVERSEAS SERVICE BUREAU IN AFRICA

The Overseas Service Bureau is an independent voluntary organisation which encourages skilled Australians to work in the developing countries of Africa, Asia and the Pacific.

The OSB provides Volunteer Development Workers through the Australian Volunteers Abroad program and United Nations Volunteers, as well as for special projects. The Bureau was established in 1961, and since then over two thousand volunteers have worked in over thirty countries. There are currently about two hundred volunteers overseas, forty of whom are working in Africa.

The O.S.B. currently has twenty four volunteers in Botswana, sixteen are secondary school teachers, mainly working in rural junior community schools throughout the country. The other placements in Botswana include a physiotherapist, and social worker with the Ministry of Health, and a crops protection officer with the Ministry of Agriculture. A very exciting project in rural development is the Rural Industries Innovation Centre at Kanye in southern Botswana, where the main aim of this non-government Centre is to respond to the needs of rural Botswana, by providing appropriate technical assistance, and rural training programs. At this centre, OSB currently has an engineer working mainly with the wind, and animal driven pump project. Another Australian is working with Rural industries helping to set up improved publication, and promotion service. There are over 5000 refugees at the Dukwi Settlement in northern Botswana, as well as many others in different parts of the country. O.S.B. has a very experienced person working as a project officer at the Settlement. He works as part of the team to assess funding needs, and help refugees set up self help projects.

In Zimbabwe placement have been with the Ministry of Education, we currently have eight teachers, mainly working in rural secondary schools. Zimbabwe has a very ambitious and commendable policy of providing "education for all". But they are in desperate need of teachers, with a current estimate of over 5000 secondary teachers required to adequately staff schools. Although O.S.B has only made a small contribution in regard to numbers, we have been able to send experienced teachers who contribute a lot more than what is normally expected from a teacher. We have Australian teachers in Zimbabwe helping coach and organize sport and clubs throughout their schools. An example of contributing

a "little extra" to the development of the school, and community, is an Australian teacher working near Masvingo in Zimbabwe. He was able to get a small amount of funding from the Australian High Commission for an agriculture project. The project has now been running for twelve months with the school now having over three acres of vegetables, which are either consumed by the students, or sold locally. He has also helped establish a chicken project at the school, where fattened chickens are sold at six weeks to the local restaurants. This project as well as providing a small income for the school, is also giving the students very practical skills in agriculture. When funding becomes available, they would like to commence a rabbit breeding project at the school.

FUTURE PLACEMENTS IN AFRICA

We will continue to respond to requests for technical aid, but at the same time consolidating our African program. In Botswana we currently have requests for secondary teachers, an industrial design engineer, and accountant for an Appropriate Technology Centre, a forester or horticulturist to work with the non-government Forestry Association. A very exciting request is for a small business advisor for a small self-help village pottery. The pottery at Thamage, approximately 50 kilometres from the capital Gaborone was set up to employ and train local people,

they currently employ 19 people from the village, and are producing very marketable products. If O.S.B. is able to recruit people with the right technical skills we will place more people with the Rural Industries Innovation Centre, and a splint maker with the hospital of Gaborone.

Zimbabwe has requested secondary teachers, a physiotherapist, occupational therapist, rehabilitation counsellor, road and construction engineers, water engineer and town planner. There are also some lecturing positions in Business Studies at the Polytechnics and University.

It is in Zambia that O.S.B is considering expanding its African program. We have had requests for business advisors for refugee co-operatives around Lusaka. The project will be run by U.N.H.C.R. in co-operation with one of the donor agencies e.g. Zambia Red Cross, Lutheran World Federation. Following a request from the SWAPO Chief Representative in Australia, Hadino Hishongwa, we are currently exploring possibilities of working with SWAPO in their Refugee Settlement in Zambia.

We continually get enquiries from other African countries, but as mentioned previously the Bureau wants to consolidate its program in selected countries before considering any significant expansion.

Being a Volunteer Development Worker with OSB does not just involve taking technical skills abroad, it is also about an exchange of friendship, understanding, appreciation, knowledge, awareness and skills. It is also about change, both for the volunteers and for the people with whom they live and work.

Graeme Bruce,
Field Officer - Africa.

