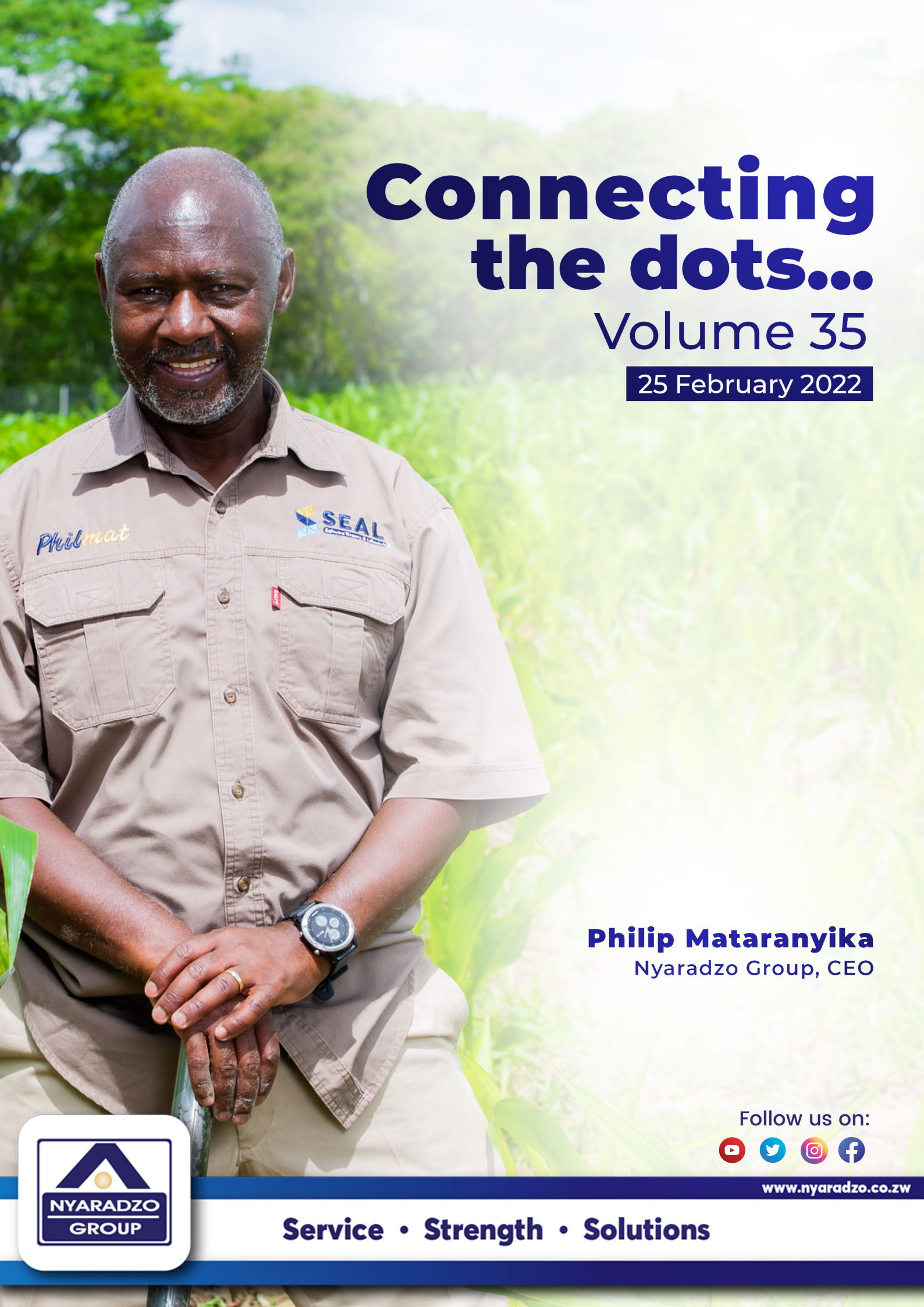

Connecting the dots...

Volume 35

25 February 2022

Philip Mataranyika
Nyaradzo Group, CEO

Follow us on:

NYARADZO GROUP

www.nyaradzo.co.zw

Service • Strength • Solutions

Making choices that set us on our way as a family!

One of the things that I immediately got down to upon my return to House Number 2195, Egypt in Highfield, following my almost two-year-long absence from the capital, was to pay a surprise visit to Mother and three of my siblings that were in her care, to check on them and get up-to-speed with developments.

I had missed them terribly and longed for a reunion, particularly because following my successful turnaround from zero-to-hero in my studies and having found favour in God's sight, I had plenty of food for their ears. After word had reached my ears that Mother's situation had soured, I knew the feeling was mutual since a lot had happened in her life from the last time we were together.

From my side, apart from letting Mother and my siblings know that I was back in town and that I was done with school, I also wanted to see for myself if there was any substance to what was being said about them, in the hope that none of it was true.

Our first meeting was emotionally charged! With warm embraces, sobbing with joy, wiping of teary eyes, smiling and laughing, we greeted each other and shared our experiences that would have made for an exciting read, rivalling Charles Dickens' Oliver Twist.

In the moment, we forgot about the many challenges we all knew could consume and condemn us to a life of perpetual poverty if we didn't take action. Mother was particularly overcome with joy and happiness upon seeing me, as were my brothers who could barely conceal their excitement and delight. As their big brother in the room, I had to man up, doing my best to reassure them that all would be well in good time, even though deep inside, I knew I was at my wit's end.

Like Socrates, whose appetite for information was legendary, we needed to find out how we were all coping. Oh boy, the questions came thick and fast! Mother was keen to find out how I had fared at school and how life had been treating me. As I recounted my journey over the preceding two years, Thomas, Donald and Garikayi were in awe, as if they were watching the main character from one of their favourite action movies.

With my new-found understanding of the value of education, I asked for my little brothers' school reports so I could impress upon them the importance of education as a powerful tool for eradicating ignorance and poverty. Going through their reports, I was amazed to find that they were all doing very well at school, despite the odds being heavily stacked against them. I was encouraged!

Because I had been away for so long, nobody wanted me to go back to Egypt, where I was staying at Uncle Tongai Mataranyika's house. Consequently, we reached the unanimous agreement that I should stay with them, if not permanently, at least for a few nights. Initially, I was not comfortable with the idea, not because Mother's one big room in the hostel was divided by a curtain to give a semblance of privacy between the sleeping men and women, it was mainly because the place was already overcrowded. Because I didn't want to hurt my family members' feelings, I decided to stay.

It was also for a good reason! I felt that not staying with them would be like a betrayal of my love for them. We had been through a lot together therefore a few nights together wouldn't kill. After all, we had lived in almost similar conditions when Mother had stayed with her childhood friend, Abigail Muropa, at Matererini Hostels.

Having decided to stay and be with my immediate family, I had to quickly adjust to my new environment. While there was no electricity back in the village at Gwangwara in Rukweza, my living conditions there were far better than those at Magaba.

In the village, I had a whole room to myself in the four-bedroomed, tin-roofed house built by my Uncle, Tongai and his wife, Laina. The property, which was one of the few tin-roofed houses in the village, gave me a lot of pride and a sense of belonging, kuda zvinhu, 😊😊😊

By virtue of it being a Mataranyika homestead and the fact that I belonged to their bloodline, I was royalty and felt it, even in my bones. From Mbare Musika where Sekuru Edward and I stayed in makeshift accommodation of a disused Volkswagen to Matererini where two families shared one big room to my own room at the village, I was in heaven.

Only when one asked piercing questions would they get to know that I was an impostor seeking refuge in borrowed robes. That I could claim to belong, helped build confidence and self-worth in me.

To illuminate our village home in the evenings, we used paraffin or kerosene lanterns/lamps and sometimes candles. Despite the financial burden it placed on us as villagers, it was more than sufficient to cater for our lighting needs. For cooking, we used firewood, which would also heat our bath water and keep us warm, especially during winter, when temperatures drop to uncomfortable levels.

Admittedly, the use of firewood, for whatever reason, is contributing to the destruction of our forests, which is why in later years, I would become actively involved in efforts to re-green our country through Friends of the Environment (FOTE), a not-for-profit organisation that I founded in November 2010. FOTE would go on to establish a tree seedling nursery at my former school, Rukweza Secondary School, in 2013, where I was thrilled to meet up with some of my former classmates from the Class of 1985.

Back in the village, whenever nature called, we would use pit latrines that were later on improved to what is commonly known as "Blair toilets." These derived their name from the then Blair Research Laboratory, under the Ministry of Health, which came up with the invention before the lab changed its name to the National Institute of Health Research, under the same Ministry.

Before its renaming, the laboratory had been named after the former secretary in the Ministry of Health, Dr Byson Blair, whose thirst for solutions that addressed Zimbabwe's rural water and sanitation challenges was second to none.

The Blair toilet was first designed in the early 1970s and has since gone through several improvements that helped revolutionise sanitation in many other African countries. Communities typically struggle with the old pit latrines and the so-called bush system, which are notorious for producing a foul, fly-attracting stench – making them a health hazard. To date, it is estimated that over half a million Blair latrines have been built across rural Zimbabwe since the mid-1970s.

At Magaba, most of the privileges I had in the village were non-existent. I found myself crammed up with my family members in one big room with very little living space, there was no privacy to talk about!

Whilst each family had exclusive use of their Blair toilet back in the village, at Magaba, families would share ablution facilities situated on one side of each floor, with a good number of the users not having any due regard to hygiene. Having been used to living like royalty, I suddenly became a square peg in a round hole – out of sync with the living conditions in my new environment.

How things had changed from the time I left Magaba in Mbare! When I left Harare for Rukweza in 1984, the area had some semblance of order, but not anymore.

Before the attainment of independence in 1980, the city fathers had been strict on who lived in the fifty eight hostels built in Mbare around the 1950s and 1960s, including Magaba, and would regularly have a roll call of occupants so that they did not exceed set limits.

The advent of self-rule changed all that, as the hostels that had originally been built for bachelors who were working in the nearby industrial sites, including the light industrial site of Graniteside, were invaded by wives and children – turning the one-roomed facilities into family quarters, even when they were not suited for families to live in. In no time, women started putting their names down on the housing waiting list at what became known as kwaKatsekera, and would be allocated these one-roomed bachelor hostels in their name.

Accounts differ about the origins of the name kwaKatsekera. Some say, it was an adulteration of the Zulu word, amasekela, which means a deputy clerk. By extension, it was therefore speculated that there could have been an assistant at the Council Offices who had the responsibility of administering the housing waiting list, whose charisma, or lack thereof, became talk of the town. Yet others say the offices became known as kwaKatsekera after an administrator by the name Katsekera was entrusted by the white city fathers who were running the show at the time to administer the housing portfolio, a responsibility that earned him fame in the area.

The long and short of it, is that as corruption and inefficiencies gnawed away at the social fabric amid the continued rise in urban populations, these societal ills also crept into kwaKatsekera, with the allocation of stands, houses and hostels becoming a dog's breakfast. This resulted in a situation whereby Magaba and other hostels exceeded their carrying capacities, right under the noses of the authorities.

Because most people who lived in these hostels didn't have much to their names, survival was by hook or crook. No vice was out of bounds for a good number of the residents, making the area a haven for criminal activities. As the situation is today, as it was back then, theft and assault are the prevalent crimes, with statistics on drug abuse cases increasing in and around Magaba.

We considered ourselves lucky to have been sheltered at Magaba, which helped instil resilience in my brothers and I. However, I strongly feel that something needs to be done to make the area conducive to raising children and the well-being of solid family units.

That my brothers and I were able to climb out of this dire situation and go to school – getting professional qualifications – is a miracle. We also owe it to the tremendous support we got from members of the extended family!

Thomas Munyaradzi would sit for and pass his "O" Levels at Harare High School – established by the colonial authorities in 1958 as the first state-run secondary school built for the black African child in Salisbury, before it was renamed Harare. He would train as a bricklayer at the Zimbabwe Iron and Steel Company (ZISCO), formerly the Rhodesia Iron and Steel Company (RISCO), founded in 1942.

ZISCO's transformation during its days as RISCO and its significance in the country's economy would, in 2012, inspire my team at Nyaradzo to establish a service centre in Redcliff as a demonstration of our confidence in the ongoing efforts to revive the giant steelworks.

Back then, ZISCO earned the reputation of being Africa's largest steel works, producing in excess of one million tonnes of steel annually, while employing more than eight thousand workers.

While Thomas, born on the 18th of December 1967, may no longer be with us, MHDSRIP, he used to enjoy the nostalgia of having passed through Harare High School and ZISCO.

Donald, who came after Thomas on the 17th of January 1970, also did well in school, passing his O Levels at Harare High with flying colours before doing his A levels at Marlborough High. Donald would go on to qualify as a fellow of the Chartered Institute of Secretaries, previously known as the Institute of Secretaries, when it was founded in England in October 1891. In 1902, the then monarch of England, Queen Victoria, would grant the institute the autonomy to become the Chartered Institute of Secretaries, adding currency to its expansion.

Thereafter, it would assume the name Institute of Chartered Secretaries and Administrators, heralding the establishment of the first branch outside of the United Kingdom in South Africa in 1909. The South African branch's mandate would be expanded in 1957 to cover the whole of the sub-region, including Zimbabwe. It was, however, not until 1992 that Zimbabwe would be granted autonomy.

The Institute qualifies chartered secretaries and chartered governance professionals and also offers public and in-house training for governance professionals across different sectors, as well as bespoke training for boards, amongst other things. The last born in our family, Garikayi, born on the 28th of January 1972, also carved his own story, graduating as an Agricultural Engineer from the University of Zimbabwe after attending secondary school at Harare High.

Letting pass the opportunity to study for my "A" Levels in order to get a job so I could help my mother fending for the family was one such sacrifice and decision I will always look back at with a sense of pride and joy. Notwithstanding the disappointments I encountered along the way, the experiences and choices I made undoubtedly helped shape the person I am today and created the platform for the independence of each of my younger siblings.

But first, upon my return from Rukweza, I had to fit in for the love of the family, while remaining true to my values and beliefs. As I adapted to my surroundings and gelled with members of my immediate family, the thought that one day I would get them out of this invidious situation grew in my mind.

I vowed that nothing would stand in my way! I was twenty-one; fit as a fiddle, and had just finished writing my "O" Level examinations which I hoped to pass. The days that followed saw me going all out to translate my thoughts into actions.

At the top of my list was to get a job as soon as I could to contribute to the family kitty and make life easier for everyone. After some days, I went back to Egypt to link up with my nephew, Elijah Mberi, who I thought could help me get a job.

There were many job opportunities back then, especially holiday jobs at big departmental stores such as Haddon and Sly (in Bulawayo), Meikles, HM Barbours, Greatermans, Woolworths, Truworths and Edgars, who hired students to help them during busy periods such as Easter and Christmas.

Depending on where one was in the economic spectrum, holiday jobs meant different things to different people. Back then, they were meant to enable students to have an appreciation of how the real world worked, whilst at the same time earning them an extra income.

For those from well-up families, it was purely to get an appreciation of different industries, thereby helping students with decision-making in their career paths. It was also a chance to gain first-hand experience to boost students' Curriculum Vitae (CVs) or resumes and help them secure required courses in their desired universities.

For most students from poor backgrounds, it was a means of earning much-needed extra income to help with their studies. I belonged to a different category where whatever little I would earn, was for the upkeep of my mother and my siblings.

Like most holiday jobs, they were primarily lowly roles such as cleaning, packaging, and runners. One needed only to patronise premises of those companies offering holiday jobs around the holiday periods. On a day they were hiring, they would randomly select applicants from those milling around their premises. Hence, after spending a few nights with Mother and other family members, it was time to go back to Highfield so I could start looking for a job and see if Elijah would be able to assist.

Once back in Egypt, Elijah made my day when he told me that his employer, National Foods (NatFoods), had maintained the tradition of hiring casual workers during the festive season to help them cope with increased demand for their products. All I needed to do was be by their entrance gate on days they were recruiting. Officials from their HR department would come to the gate, file in hand to pick out those they thought made the grade.

After a few false starts, I was lucky one day when I was one of the chosen few whose star shone as I was picked to get a casual job as a despatch worker.

I was so happy to get this job, even when at the back of my mind, I thought this was not the type of job I had gone to school to get. I knew I had very few choices to make, if any, regarding jobs, given the dire situation my family was in. For the love of family and progress, I was prepared to sign up for anything called work to earn an income.

So it came to pass that I was hired by National Foods, working in the despatch department as a general hand, My responsibilities included moving and stacking ninety-kilogram bags of flour, fifty-kilogram bags of roller meal and pearlenta among many other processed grains we loaded onto delivery trucks.

This was about two years after the National Foods Workers Trust had been formed to empower employees. It would become the first workers' Trust to be established in Zimbabwe, long before employee ownership schemes became the country's buzzword around 2007.

As one of the general hands, my duties involved a lot of hard physical work. It involved offloading grains – wheat and flour – and loading trucks that would be outbound to retailers. Despite being used to hard work, the job was exhausting, such that I would sleep like a log upon getting back home.

My then employer's history stretched as far back as 1920. It was, however, not until mid-1975 that the name NatFoods emerged when Joseph Palte's son, Jack, and the Harris brothers, Mark and Cessey, merged their company, Palte-Harris Industrial Holdings with the Rhodesian Milling Company to form NatFoods in June 1975.

When NatFoods was established, Spillers owned twenty-five percent and Tiger Oats about sixteen percent of the business. Spillers was subsequently acquired by Dalgety PLC in 1979, which then sold its stake to Astra Foods in the 1980s.

In 1994 Astra Foods sold its stake to Anglo American Corporation (Anglo) and Tiger Oats, increasing their shareholding in NatFoods to forty-three percent and about nineteen percent, respectively.

Tiger Oats renamed its company to Tiger Brands in 1999. In 2003, Innscor Africa became a shareholder in NatFoods by buying around a thirty six percent stake in the company, and Tiger Brands increased its stake to about thirty percent in the same year.

In 2007, Innscor Africa became the majority shareholder of NatFoods with a stake of about fifty percent after buying out Anglo. In 2011, Innscor Africa reduced its stake to about thirty eight percent, while Tiger Brands increased theirs to about thirty seven percent.

Today, Innscor Africa and Tiger Brands, together with the Workers Trust form part of the top three shareholders and collectively own eighty-five percent of the business.

Working for such an established employer was priceless as it introduced me to corporate life, although I was way down the company's ranks. A few weeks into the job, I would receive news that our "O" Level results were out.

I caught the next bus to Rukweza to collect my results, having requested a day off. News about who had passed and who had not had already spread like wildfire at the school, What remained was confirmation of our symbols.

Thankfully, I passed with good grades as I had hoped. Many of my friends were pleased to know that I was now working for NatFoods and wished that I could help them get onto the payroll also.

Generally, in the mid-1980s, Zimbabwe still had a very sound formal economy with a flourishing industry. Solid companies included the National Railways of Zimbabwe, NatFoods, the Postal and Telecommunication Corporation, Astra Paints, Air Zimbabwe, Hwange Colliery, the Zimbabwe Mining and

Smelting Company, the Cold Storage Company, Blue Ribbon Foods, Olivine Industries, the Grain Marketing Board and CAPS Holdings, to name a few.

There were several ways through which job-seekers could seek out employment opportunities back then. Normally, companies and training boards would publish their vacancy notices in newspapers; hence the value of tabloids and broadsheets were not only for news and entertainment but also for these important announcements that any serious prospective employee did not miss.

Usually, employers would respond to applications through letters or telephonic communication – if the applicants had landlines in their homes or their neighbours' homes. Employers often used the telegram if they urgently needed the prospective employee to report for duty.

For university students, it was quite common for organisations to offer graduate training after headhunting the best students directly from the university. For the rest of the job hopefuls, it was a dog-eat-dog affair.

Job seekers would push their luck by dropping their CVs and certificates door-to-door at various companies. Often, employers would seek the services of employment agencies to advertise and fill job positions. In such cases, applicants were required to register with these agencies, with one such agency being Valcol.

For menial work, where most of us belonged, it was common for job-seekers to wake up early in the morning to go job-hunting, otherwise commonly referred to as "kunoforera basa." Employment was never guaranteed, but if you were lucky, or had favour from the foremen, you could secure a job for a day, week or month.

For menial jobs, it was also common for children to inherit their father's positions in the event that their parents were nearing retirement. White bosses who valued loyalty above everything often replaced their workers with their close relatives in the hope of continued loyalty. It was also common for people with inside information to secure work for their relatives.

Unlike my colleagues in Rukweza who were trying to shoot in the dark, I am grateful that Elijah was there to give me a head start. As I departed from the communal lands of Rukweza, my heart sank, feeling for my peers, who, without connections such as Elijah, faced a bleak future.

My trip back to Harare was the shortest because I was in my own world, busy building castles in the air. Even though I had decided against proceeding to "A" Levels, there were still many other attractive options for those who would have done well in their "O" Level exams.

These included nursing, teacher and apprenticeship training, which were equally well-respected in the job sector. As these were offered for free, with students often being paid during the courses. Most families of limited means opted for these routes instead of the additional cost of "A" Level.

Based on my previous experience while working for Sekuru Samson, I wanted to train as a motor mechanic, which required at least five "O" Level passes with grade C or better. At the time, the government was pushing through apprenticeship training to provide a mechanism that would ensure the availability of qualified skilled workers based on industry requirements.

Training covered trades such as aircraft maintenance, electrical, mechanical and automotive engineering, building and construction, printing, business studies, commercial subjects and hairdressing. In 1985, one thousand five hundred and nine apprenticeships were completed in aircraft maintenance, hairdressing and printing industries.

Once I had collected my "O" Level results, I started applying for apprenticeship training and other job openings that were being advertised to escape the menial duties that I was doing at NatFoods. Three months into the job, my attention would be drawn to another opportunity at Carnaud Metal Box (CMB).