

The Basarwa/San/Bushman Question in Botswana. Community Economic Development (CED): Creating Opportunities for Empowerment

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ABSTRACT

It is now accepted that past and current development strategies among Basarwa communities in Botswana have been unable to satisfactorily achieve the objectives of improving incomes, employment and general quality of life. While these objectives remain of critical importance, there is an urgent need to determine more effective ways that can make them realisable. Basing its argument on the original objectives of the Remote Area Development Programme (RADP), this paper suggests the need for modification and application of new alternative strategies to suit the prevailing circumstances of the Basarwa. From its inception, RADP has been criticised, mainly on the grounds that it has been undertaken by the government with only limited community involvement. This has contributed to a dependency on government support rather than to a momentum of self-standing, sustainable improvements (Ministry of Finance and Development Planning, 1997). Community Economic Development (CED) proposed in this paper draws lessons from general failures of RADP and builds on its strengths. Its main argument is that it is necessary to continually review approaches to development of Basarwa communities with a view to overcoming past short-comings and establishing more effective strategies for the future.

Introduction

The continued marginalisation experienced by the Basarwa in Botswana is a function of structural inequalities emanating from decades of slavery and serfdom. Because the post-colonial government did not cater for the welfare of the Basarwa, they did not develop sufficient infrastructure to facilitate improvement of their socioeconomic conditions. Instead of changing and transforming oppressive institutions reminiscent of the old order, and creating a foundation for empowering

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relationships and strategies aimed at promoting growth and potential for self-reliance after independence, the Botswana government pursued and continues to pursue development policies that are inadequate and inappropriate relative to the problems and needs of the Basarwa. It is important to note that in Botswana there is controversy surrounding the effectiveness of traditional development efforts employed by government agencies, which focus only on individuals and not the structural forces that impinge upon people's total environment. This has led to calls for new perspectives on development and the formulation of development strategies that suit the special circumstances of the Basarwa.

This discussion will focus on Community Economic Development (CED) as a strategy that seeks to address in an integrated manner, social, economic, political, and personal factors that militate against efforts towards positive social development of Basarwa communities. The paper begins by describing the Basarwa situation and outlining the problems they face. Next, it focuses on the role of CED. Finally, the Basarwa situation and CED are linked by demonstrating the potential of CED relative to the situation faced by the Basarwa.

Characteristics of Basarwa Communities

Hitchcock, et al (1987) made an interesting observation that the quality of life for most indigenous peoples in Africa and elsewhere has declined as a result of interaction with more complex systems, not only because of exploitation, but also because of environmental destruction or dispossession. A combination of factors, including population pressure, technological change, provision of handouts, and paternalistic development policies, has served to undermine the traditional socio-economic systems of indigenous groups.

The Basarwa, an ethnic minority in Botswana, are among the few indigenous populations that are left in the world today. Although there is some evidence to the contrary (Wilmsen, 1989), it is generally believed that they have from time immemorial lived a predominantly nomadic mode of life centring on hunting and gathering. Today, some of the descendants of the Basarwa are living in different countries in Southern Africa, mainly concentrated in South Africa, Namibia, Angola and Botswana (see Fig 1.1).

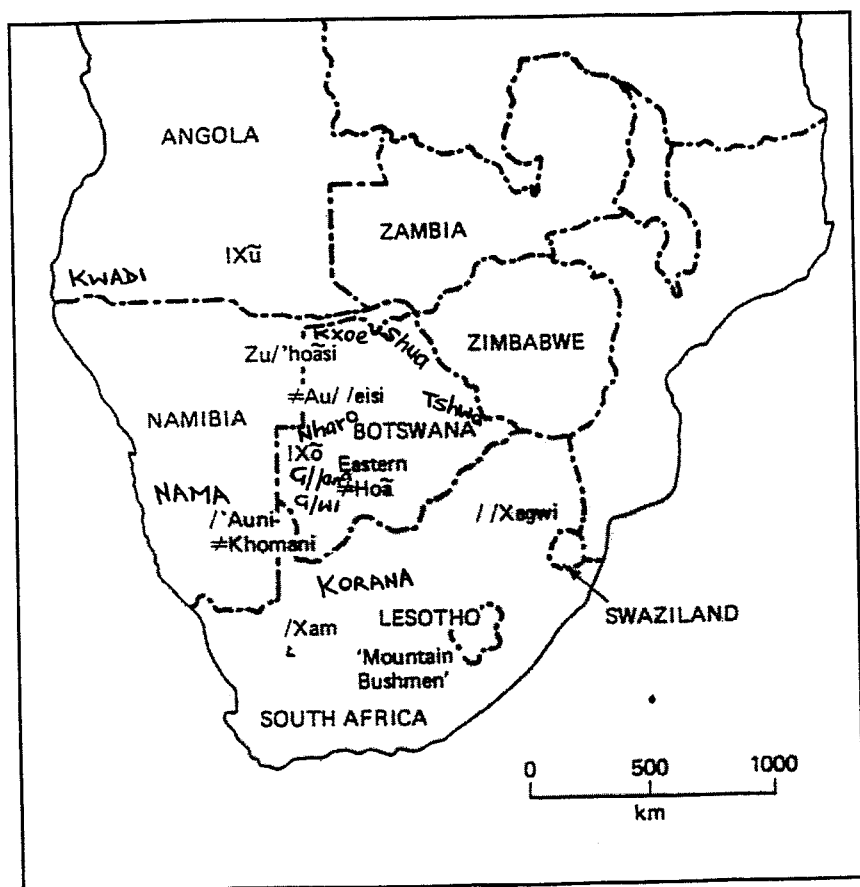


Figure 1.1 Geographic Location of Basarwa/San speaking groups in Southern Africa (Adapted from Barnard, 1992).

In Botswana, the Basarwa are mainly concentrated in seven of the ten districts in the country. Table 1 presents data on the Remote Area Dwellers (RADs) population (note that the Basarwa comprise over 80% of the RADs population) in Botswana as of early 1992 (Hitchcock, 1992).

Table 1: RADs Population in Botswana by District (1992)

District	Population
Central	25 500
Ghanzi	7 900
Kgalagadi	3 750
Kgatleng	800
Kweneng	4 000
North-West	6 500
Southern	3 800
Total	52 250

It can be seen from the above table that there are over 50 000 RADs in seven of Botswana's ten districts. However, there is no adequate data on the exact number of Basarwa in Botswana. According to reports from the Government Statistician, responsible for census data, the difficulty is that people are not counted and identified by ethnicity. However it is estimated that currently their exact number can be found between 50 000 and 100 000. Thus, they comprise approximately 5 percent of the total population of Botswana which is currently estimated at about 1.5 million people.

The activities of the post-colonial state, with respect to the control and use of land resources, wildlife and tourism, have dispossessed the Basarwa of land, including hunting areas. This has ultimately forced them into permanent settlements coordinated by the Remote Area Development Programme (RADP).

The main objective of this policy is to integrate the Basarwa into mainstream Tswana society, by creating settlements and providing them with basic social services and facilities as well as opportunities for cash incomes. The RADP treats the Basarwa as a component of a broader target population called RADs of which the Basarwa constitute over 80%. RADs communities are characterised by among other things:

- (a) low and scattered populations
- (b) great distances from social services and facilities
- (c) heavy dependence on government handouts
- (d) under-development, and
- (e) widespread relative poverty.

Basically the RADs constitute the poorest of the poor in Botswana.

The major advantage of the RADP is that the programme has brought obvious social provisions in most Basarwa settlements, especially in terms of infrastructural development, in the form of providing basic services like water, education, health temporary employment in construction companies and opportunities for income-generation. The Basarwa have now moved into a more sedentary mode of life which is no longer based on hunting and gathering and also includes the generation of cash income. However, it is also clear that the objectives of the the RADP have not been totally achieved. The programme was introduced without proper grassroots input from the people it was intended to serve. The programme, like many other government programmes, was transmitted in a "top-down" manner that often took the form of directives, and did not allow for meaningful people's participation in its formulation and implementation (Harvey & Lewis, 1990). This is the point at which the programme experienced difficulties in being translated into practice. Despite Botswana's democratic traditions, the country continues with a rather bureaucratic approach to policy formulation and implementation, justified on the basis of low education and literacy capacity among the rural dwellers, and the need to meet urgent and immediate needs of people at grassroots level.

Numerous studies and past evaluations of this programme reveal that its shortcomings far out-weigh its successes and that there is a gap between policy objectives and the translation of these objectives into action. For example, the 1990 evaluation of the RADP (Kann, et al, 1990) found like others before it, that the impressive achievements in delivering services and infrastructure to RADs settlements were not matched by progress in developing new modes of income-generation, maintaining old ones and ensuring adequate access to land and natural resources for the RADs. The evaluation further noted the continuing insecurity and low social status of RADs, exacerbated by ignorance and negative attitudes among the broader public, government and district council staff. It is within this context that the nature and character of Basarwa communities must be conceptualised.

Today, Basarwa communities comprise mainly of small settlements, experience high rates of unemployment and limited capacity to generate income (Mogwe, 1992; Kann, et al, 1990). As a result, poverty tends to be more widespread and absolute than in other Tswana villages. The level of poverty is often indicated by poor shelter, inadequate food resources, low levels of nutrition, excessive alcohol intake, high levels of poverty-related diseases such as tuberculosis, inadequate clothing, poor sanitation, high dependency ratios and lack of cash and purchasing power (see MLGL, 1987). According to UNICEF (1989), about 90% of the Basarwa, especially those in the settlements, depend on food rations to meet their survival needs. Some Basarwa live in camps provided by their farm employers and may be chased out at the whims of their employers. Generally, the Basarwa farm labourers are underpaid and live under the most squalid conditions (Mogalakwe, 1986).

The pre-independence government did not do much to ensure that the Basarwa own land as an ethnic group. It would appear that the Basarwa are the only ethnic group in the country who do not own land. At a political level, the Basarwa have inadequate representation both at the local constituency and parliamentary level (there are few Basarwa councillors); they do not have a chief of their own in the House of Chiefs; they do not have representatives in the land allocation institutions (many of them live on ranches where they work or in settlements determined solely by government). It is only recently that a few Basarwa headmen are emerging (Mbere & Matsvai, 1993). The outcome of all this is that Basarwa as an ethnic community suffer infringements upon their dignity because they lack self-awareness and the self-confidence to articulate their issues (Mogwe, 1992; Hitchcock, 1992).

Current Efforts to Ameliorate the Basarwa Situation

The government of Botswana developed a Basarwa Development Policy in the early 1970s in recognition of the underdevelopment which confronted the Basarwa at the time. The policy was a precursor to the development plans currently undertaken by the government of Botswana to address "the Basarwa problem." Current plans as contained in a technical Project Memorandum prepared for National Development Plan 7 includes:

- Provision of land. The focus is on land for residential and arable purposes, as well as access to grazing areas (though no policy guidance is given).
- A campaign to combat negative attitudes in land boards and other institutions relevant to the distribution of land rights.
- Hunting rights through distribution and issuance of special game licenses to Basarwa living in Wildlife Management Areas.
- Economic activities as promoted through Economic Promotion Fund (EPF).
- Labour intensive works compensate the settlements for the withdrawal of drought relief programmes.
- Continued provision of water, education and health services.
(Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1996).

Although these plans have in some instances succeeded in addressing some of the above-mentioned problems, they have had little impact on the Basarwa's ability to raise their living standards continuously above poverty levels. They also have the disadvantage that they generate a culture of dependence which tends to undermine the Basarwa communities' potential for self-sufficiency.

Community Economic Development (CED)

There is much literature on CED. However, given the diversity of its origins and current evolution, there is no consensus on its precise definition among practitioners and academics (Jacquiever, 1994; Perry, 1980; Shragge, 1993). The main features of the debate over the definition of CED are described below. According to Blakely (1989:4):

"local economic development refers to the process in which local governments or community-based organisations engage to stimulate or maintain business activity and/or employment opportunity in sectors that improve the community use of existing human, natural, and institutional resources."

In this view, local development is aimed at increasing a community's capacity to adapt to change and at encouraging and supporting entrepreneurship.

Perry (1980) and Lemelin & Morin (1993) see CED as a means of transforming low-income communities through community-based businesses, job creation and job protection. In contrast (though in some ways complementary) to this emphasis on the pursuit of local economic growth, another perspective emphasises community empowerment (Swack & Mason, 1987; Fontan, 1993; Lewis, 1994). Swack & Mason define CED as:

"an effective and unique strategy for dealing with the problems of poor people, powerless people, and underdeveloped communities. As an intervention strategy in an underdeveloped community it does not seek to make the existing conditions in the community more bearable. Instead, CED seeks to change the structure of the community and build permanent (new or changed) institutions within a community. As a result, the community begins to play a more active role vis-a-vis the institutions outside the community, and residents of the community become more active in the control of community resources...the starting premise for CED is that communities that are poor are in that condition because they lack control over their own resources."

CED as a strategy for integrating social and economic interests seeks to promote a real sense of community participation in, and control over, decision-making processes involving the allocation of resources at the local level. CED is a bottom-up approach to social change that relies upon action and skills of a community in its implementation (Goldenberg, 1978). Thus the basic premise and strategy of CED revolves around local ownership and control of community resources.

Brodhead (1994:3) says that a CED initiative should meet the following requirements:

- Be a response to or emerge from underdevelopment and marginalisation at the community level.
- Seek to build local capacity to plan, design, control, manage and evaluate initiatives aimed at revitalising the community.
- Be inclusive, not exclusive, in its outreach – enabling disadvantaged and disempowered groups in the community to create partnerships with others interested in a sustainable future for the community.
- Favour medium- and longer-term approaches over short-term ‘quick fixes’ to job creation.
- Ensure that benefits accrue directly to the community at large rather than primarily to individuals within the community. Also, wealth should be generated and circulated within the community.

While there may be some diversity in these definitions of CED, there seems to be a common core perspective that CED is essentially a consciously directed collective process, that seeks to improve social conditions through sustained economic opportunities, for people marginalised by and from mainstream economic activity. A CED enterprise may appear in many different forms (cooperative, loan association, worker-owned industry, etc), but they all seek to create social benefits from independent income-generating activity. Therefore in general CED is concerned with enhancing the social, economic and environmental well-being of the people in their communities, through initiatives taken by them in collaboration with their governments, NGOs (both local and international), community agencies and other public and private organisations. Ultimately all these definitions of CED seek to strengthen local productive capacity, individual self-reliance, community cooperation and control over local resources.

CED approaches therefore represent a turning-away from centrally-based development efforts toward those that are more community-based. It advocates a reduced role for the government in the development of marginalised communities, such as those of the Basarwa, and an enhanced role for community-based organisations. Proponents of CED envisage decentralised and devolved structures of governance and assume that ordinary people have the potential and capability to manage their own affairs; that is, they can articulate their own priorities and organise around them. **The rationale for CED includes the following:**

- Governments all over the world, particularly in developing countries, are finding it increasingly difficult to plan and direct all development activities from headquarters. This has proved inefficient and very expensive in the face of dwindling national incomes, leading to questions about where additional capacities for development management can be found (Honadle, 1985).
- Bureaucratic approaches to dealing with problems of poverty, unemployment and social exclusion have proved unworkable, hence the need for communities to manage their own development efforts can no longer be ignored (Ministry of Finance and Development Planning, 1997).
- The focus of CED is not on the development of communities, but rather on the establishment of institutional and human capacities at local levels which can contribute to broader developmental efforts (Uphoff, 1984).
- CED emphasises the promotion of 'bottom-up' development approaches, but at the same time not neglecting the positive contribution that may come as a result of 'top-down' efforts. (It is paradoxical that where traditions of central control predominate, 'top-down' efforts are sometimes necessary to initiate 'bottom-up' endeavours).

CED strength lies primarily in its community approach in dealing with problems of poverty, unemployment and social exclusion. Proponents of CED strongly believe that community organisations are generally more responsive to the needs and problems of the local people. Further, they are more likely than governments to have the interest and skills to adapt development projects and programmes to local conditions. There may be some continuing assistance from outside, but it should be given in ways and on terms that do not displace people's own efforts to generate income, enhance their quality of life or create infrastructure. Thus CED seeks to enhance the well-being of the community at large by increasing economic

activity, as well as empowering community members. For example, many CED organisations focus on education, employment and training needs of community members in an effort to improve the quality of their lives.

Linking CED to the Basarwa Situation: What Could Work?

When I asked myself this question, *"What would be the appropriate strategy for the development of Basarwa communities?"*, I came to a very simple provisional answer that the strategy should neither be paternalistic nor patronising, but should be empowering and sustainable. Thus, such a strategy should be aimed at promoting more participatory modes of development. It should have a conviction that the Basarwa have the potential, in that they have ideas, a spirit of community-hood and leadership qualities to contribute to the process of development. Yes, there may be some continuing assistance from outside, but it should be given in ways and on terms that do not displace peoples' own efforts and undermine their capacity for self-reliance.

From the foregoing discussion two things are clear. Firstly, the appalling situation and underdevelopment of Basarwa communities. Secondly, the potential of CED. To this end, two questions arise:

- (i) How can CED be employed in Botswana to deal with the problems facing Basarwa communities?
- (ii) What is the appropriate role of CED given the level of underdevelopment in Basarwa communities?

Hitchcock (1992) notes that over the past two decades the Basarwa have formed local action organisations in an effort to ensure the protection of their rights and to promote their development. The formation of these organisations were a result of a collaborative effort between the Basarwa, government and NGOs. These grassroots organisations range from Village Development Committees (VDCs) that plan development strategy, to multi-purpose organisations that engage in everything from agriculture to running small businesses and providing day-care services. While the effectiveness of these community-based organisations has been somewhat uneven, there is no doubt that they have served to stimulate self-help and enhance the quality of life in Basarwa communities. For example, a number of Basarwa communities have embarked on development activities that are sensitive to both economic and social goals and have proved to be sustainable over the long term. The community of Zutshwa in the Kgalegadi District has with the help of the Rural Industries Innovation Centre (RIIC) initiated a de-salination project which produces salt. This salt is then sold to people in other communities.

The Kuru Development Trust in northern Ghanzi District has also with the help of the Dutch Reformed Church initiated a whole series of innovative development activities (Nthomang & Rankopo, 1997). In other parts of the country, a number of Basarwa communities have suggested establishing small-scale rural enterprises such as bee-keeping, sewing, woodworking, horticultural and agroforestry projects, as well as poultry production units.

CED, as demonstrated by the above case examples appears to be unique amongst growth and development approaches, because it promotes both social goals and economic development. Most conventional approaches to economic development do not include a clear position on social goals. As an holistic approach to development, CED insists on the inclusion of both social and economic objectives (Galaway & Hudson, 1994). Thus CED is a strategy that seeks to enhance the material well-being of communities without sacrificing their social well-being.

The Role of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)

NGOs have been involved with the Basarwa communities since the late 1970s. They have been involved mainly in a wide range of rural development activities focusing generally on the development of income-generating activities. Their most significant contribution to date, however, is probably in the promotion of issues related to the Basarwa. There have been repeated campaigns from the NGO sector to inform the public both locally and internationally about the plight of the Basarwa and to combat discrimination against them. NGOs brought up a whole range of human rights issues, including the issue of Basarwa land rights, the situation of women, and the economic situation of farm workers. These are all controversial issues, and although they have by no means been resolved, the NGO sector has put them on the political agenda in Botswana. NGOs continue to play what amounts to a "conscientising and empowering" role recommended by Kann, et al (1990). They were also actively involved in the 1993 Second Regional Basarwa Conference in Gaborone.

It is important to note that in Botswana donor assistance is critical to the overall development of rural communities. They help in the initiation and implementation of local projects, a task that has eluded many rural communities in Botswana. International donor agencies which have been very active and instrumental in the development of Basarwa communities include among others, NORAD, SIDA, Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Netherlands Development Organisation (SNV), Kuru Development Trust (KDT), etc. Therefore there is need for one or more external persons (NGO workers, church workers, state agency employees, etc) to

get the process going (Joensson & Swatuk, 1998). This is important because NGOs, particularly foreign ones, often provide financial and human resources that are crucial in implementing a process of empowerment. This is the case in countries where the central state is reluctant to be involved financially (Swatuk, 1996). NGO strengths also include: the capacity to innovate; to take up pilot activities in difficult circumstances; to adopt unconventional structures and solutions; and to work more closely with rural people than is usually the case for government agencies.

So far, most income-generating projects in Basarwa communities have been set up with the involvement of foreign NGOs and donors (in particular NORAD), as well as various government agencies. It is the responsibility of NGOs and government to make communities aware of their own potential. It is also essential that Basarwa communities, after having gained and digested the information about the role of NGOs, show interest and place themselves at the forefront in the project initiation, formulation and implementation process. These efforts are very important in helping to shape the Basarwa's future at the time when government continues to change and adopt free market economics and as such displacing the Basarwa.

A CED strategy is recommended for Basarwa communities in that it employs a diversified set of approaches; allows local people to take part in all discussions and decisions about their own development; enables communities to have a final say over the kinds of projects to be undertaken; invests a lot of resources in training, employment creation and retention activities; facilitates a process whereby communities can pursue their own social and economic development in places of their choice; and promotes the establishment of a large number of employment opportunities and capital for loans to individuals and groups in Basarwa communities.

Given the above linkages, it is important that Basarwa communities not only have a conceptual understanding and vision of CED, but that they are able to transmit it over time as a guide to organisational action. Without this vision, the organisations will likely be absorbed by the state as is the case now, through both the processes of funding and partnership.

Conclusion

To conclude, there is a need to look at the appropriateness of the CED strategy in the development of Basarwa communities. Linking CED to the situation of Basarwa communities brings into focus the role of people as participants or partners. CED views people as interacting within their social, economic and political environment. The degree to which they interact successfully is dependent upon both their participatory competence skills and the opportunities for participation within that environment.

This paper has attempted to examine the current state of Basarwa communities, focusing on the problems they face and current efforts to ameliorate such problems. It has also identified and explained the advantages and disadvantages of the Remote Area Development Programme (RADP) and the difficulties it has to go through in its efforts to grapple with the Basarwa problem. Finally, CED has been suggested as an appropriate strategy which can be adopted to work with the Basarwa. In order to effectively address the problems cited above, Basarwa communities will have to be empowered. This process will afford the community the opportunity to develop the capacity to operate and manage development activities at a local level, and increase the potential to raise popular participation and commitment to local development activities and reduce dependency on the government and international NGOs. To this end, CED strategy offers hope since it is based upon the strengths of the people and views the development of empowering relationships as a means of increasing the possibilities for positive change.

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