

NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS AND ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY IN BOTSWANA - OPPOSITION OR COLLABORATION?

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Abstract

This paper is one of several prepared as part of the Global Environmental Change Open University (GECOU) Project which is aimed at investigating why NGOs are influential in the development of certain policies relating to global environmental issues. The paper argues that NGO influence via the collaborative, entrust route is unlikely to be effective in Botswana, whereas oppositional strategies may work, at least from time to time, since there is accountability through multi-party elections and internal plurality of power centres.

Introduction

This paper is one of a series prepared as part of the Global Environmental Open University (GECOU) project which is aimed at investigating why NGOs are influential in the development of certain policies relating to global environmental issues. Clearly NGOs are not always influential. The question is why and how they are so influential in some cases.

Many writers associate the growth of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) with democratisation. Botswana is often lauded as one of Africa's best example of a successful multi-party democracy. Environment is a big issue in Botswana because of the threat of land degradation in what is an arid part of Africa. Thus one might expect NGOs to be active in Botswana and to be playing a role in environmental policy.

In fact, NGOs are not prominent. For example, they appear to have played very little role in the adoption or implementation of the New Agricultural Policy. The exceptions are where NGOs seem occasionally to be able to prevent a project from going ahead. The best known example is the Southern Okavango Integrated Water Development Project (SOIWDP), when an alliance of local and international NGOs apparently influenced the government decision to shelve the project.

How can we explain these apparent paradoxes? Why are NGOs not generally more influential on policies which have environmental implications like the fencing of communal lands? And what is special about the few occasions when they do manage to have influence? Do these examples show that opposition is an effective strategy? Or do they show that there are only certain circumstances in which NGOs can have influence in Botswana? Do they have to find the strategy which fits the needs of the occasion - which could be oppositional or collaborative? If so, how can we characterise the circumstances which are associated with NGO influence?

The Approach in this Paper

In the "GECOU" project we see a large part of the explanation why NGOs have influence over certain policies but not in others. Where they do not exert any influence these are usually in contextual factors outside the immediate control of any particular NGO. The three main contextual areas identified are: the nature of the issue; the nature of the "target institution" whose policies it is

sought to influence; and the political context in which an NGO is working. In addition, an NGO's own organization and strategy will have some impact, and alliances and networks of NGOs may have particular importance. The third of these areas, political context, relates directly to questions of democracy and the kind of apparent paradoxes noted.

There are four main ways in which NGOs try to achieve influence: (i) collaboration and entryism; (ii) complementary activities; (iii) direct opposition; and (iv) indirect, generalised campaigning. The four ways are related to some of the five features of democracy to give the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1. NGO influence via the collaborative, entrust route is most likely to be effective in a highly participative political culture.

Hypothesis 2. NGO activity of the complementary kind will occur most and be most likely to lead to policy influence where there are alternative power centres, particularly externally-derived ones.

Hypothesis 3. Opposition strategies by NGOs may work, at least from time to time, where there is accountability through multi-party elections and internal plurality of power centres.

Hypothesis 4. Finally, indirect campaigning and consciousness-raising is most likely to be successful where civil and political rights are upheld.

In this paper we look more closely at two cases; namely the policy on fencing of communal lands, where NGOs have not had much impact, and the shelving of the SOIWDP, where NGOs apparently had some success with an oppositional strategy. In the concluding section, the two cases are then used to discuss the hypotheses and to see how far they provide an answer to the above paradoxes. It is pointed out how further details of the "stories" in the two cases should help make these answers more definitive.

NGOs and Environmental Policy in Botswana

Botswana has a reputation for open, democratic institutions. However, these have almost all been imposed from above. There has been very little spontaneous development of NGOs or other institutions of civil society, and those which have begun to grow up have often been coopted or dominated by

government, leaving civil society relatively weak (Molutsi and Holm, 1989). The democratic facade hides the fact that the country has been ruled since independence by the same small elite, with senior civil servants and politicians interchanging positions in a manner very rare in western liberal democracies. Having won all the elections since independence, the Botswana Democratic Part (BDP) has enjoyed 28 years in power, which compares with 14 years for the conservatives in the United Kingdom (U.K) and 13 years for ZANU(PF) in Zimbabwe.

One indicator of the apparent relative lack of importance of NGOs in Botswana is the relative lack of references on NGOs. Until very recently there has been no published directory, but a total of only 44 registered voluntary organizations was listed by Nteta (1988). Of these only three could be called national environmental organizations, namely the Forestry Association of Botswana (FAB), Kalahari Conservation Society (KCS) and Wildlife Clubs. Recent informal estimates put the number of NGOs at national or district level with some environmental interest at around fifteen to twenty, of which perhaps fewer than half-a-dozen were operating before about 1989. These estimates probably do not include international NGOs or very local groups. However, this is clearly a rather small level of activity.

There is some indication that at local level as well the numbers are relatively low - "traditional" forms of organization may predominate over voluntary group formation, which may be seen as "alien" (Nteta, 1988 : 5), though this is a topic requiring careful study before any definite pronouncements should be made.

NGOs are of many types, and several writers have put forward typologies or suggested principles for distinguishing, say, Grassroots Organizations (GROs) from other NGOs (Uphoff, 1993). The author has suggested elsewhere (Thomas, 1992) that it is important to distinguish mutual benefit organizations, based on membership, from public benefit organizations, including charities and other NGOs set up to supply services to others as well as campaigning or research organizations which do not necessarily have a defined client group. It is also important to recognise differences in scope and scale; NGOs working variously at local, national and international levels should not be expected to work in similar ways.

In Botswana, there are important differences between NGOs in terms of their cultural background and historical development as movements. In particular, Western-style conservationist NGOs, with activities including voluntary

efforts in support of wildlife and so forth, must be distinguished from indigenous national and community-based NGOs.

Although few in number, the former type include some longstanding examples such as the Kalahari Conservation Society, the Forestry Association of Botswana and the Wildlife Clubs. These were originally expatriate-led and, although they are not identified with particular economic interests like their settler-led equivalents in, say, Zimbabwe, their concerns are still sometimes dismissed as "a white man's problem". In fact, to quite a large extent the whole NGO movement in Botswana has until recently been identified with the expatriate white community. However, with the growth of an urban salaried middle class these conservationist NGOs may be taking on new black leadership together with some of the characteristics of environmental pressure groups in Europe or the USA. One new NGO, Somarelang Tikologo (or "Environmental Watch Botswana") may be considered in this regard.

Generally speaking the question of land tenure systems and their reform is one which is difficult for NGOs to address. In Botswana, an equally difficult form of resources for NGOs to address is cattle. This third view would, in the case of Botswana, look at the distribution of cattle as well as of access to land and other natural resources. One specific point here would be the question of "dual grazing rights", where an individual with a commercial herd may retain hereditary rights to communal grazing and thus be able to move cattle between communal and commercially zoned areas, to the environmental detriment of the former. In Botswana the right to consolidate wealth through cattle is of great importance, and this applies also to urbanised members of the political elite, some of whom benefit greatly from dual grazing rights.

An Example of "Normal" Policy Development - the Fencing of Communal Lands

The Botswana state is run by a politico-administrative elite with "a high degree of reciprocity and cross-fertilisation of ideas" between the two key groupings of senior bureaucrats and politicians. The system of policy-making which has succeeded in delivering such a high rate of economic growth together with a degree of universal welfare provision over almost three decades has been termed "paternalistic developmentalism".

Under this system, there is clear political control over major policy decisions, and new policy directions may sometimes be taken quite suddenly in response

to initiatives by an opposition party. However, the general rule, particularly in new policy areas where detailed alternatives need to be evaluated, is for technical aspects of policy-making to be worked out by officials in the relevant departments in some secrecy before the new policy is announced. Typically, there will then be a period of "consultation" before the policy is implemented on a set date.

In rural areas, "consultation" usually implies government officials explaining the proposals to local people at *kgotla* meetings. For example, in the area of agricultural subsidy and drought relief, the ALDEP (Arable Lands Development Programme) was introduced in 1981 following years of consultation and a two-year pilot phase; later, the ARAP (Accelerated Rainfed Arable Programme, announced in 1985, was introduced immediately having been "formulated by high-level government flat and not widely discussed or evaluated prior to being instituted" (Solway, 1994 : 489). Drought relief was an area where it was thought the opposition might make some electoral capital. However, neither in cases of consultation before implementation nor in those cases where policy is implemented for political reasons without the usual consultation is it expected that there will be changes to the announced policy.

The so-called New Agricultural Policy, including the element providing for fencing of communal lands, was typical, then, in having technocratic origins, in the planning unit of the Ministry of Agriculture. It only came to involve other parties, including the extension officers of that Ministry, in its later stages of consideration for implementation. The first consultative conference took place in 1990 and included participants from various government ministries as well as some NGOs.

Detail on the policy of fencing communal lands is to be found in Selolwane (1994). The provision for fencing of communal lands under the policy includes targeted incentives such as fencing subsidies and various enforcement mechanisms for encouraging what is seen as responsible resource management. The primary objective of the policy appears to be to expand the commercialization of beef production (Selolwane, 1994 : 12) while avoiding overgrazing and land degradation. The logic behind the policy is to improve responsibility and accountability for land resources by clearly attaching such responsibilities as far as possible to individuals or syndicates, or otherwise to defined communities. To a large extent the logic follows the "carrying capacity argument" set out above.

In fact the policy on fencing communal lands is not new. It is actually "an extension of the 1975 Tribal Grazing Land Policy" (Selolwane, 1994 : 14). However, Selolwane (1994 : 17) claims that no systematic evaluation of the TGLP was conducted before going ahead, and an opportunity to learn from the outcome of the previous policy has not been taken.

Few NGOs were present at the 1990 conference, and their views do not appear to have had much impact on the form of the new agricultural policy as far as fencing of communal lands is concerned. The role of NGOs was strongly limited by the fact that consultations began at an advanced stage, when crucial policy choices were probably already made. One NGO activist commended that, as usual, policies only open up for discussion when virtually at implementation stage.

The Botswana government apparently envisages some role for NGOs in implementation, though it is not clear how this might come about. Selolwane (1994: 22) points out that "although the policy documents give [NGOs] prominence as major partners in this development in fact these have not been involved in the planning and implementation of the programme in fact these Government structure for implementing this policy ... completely excludes NGOS".

This policy may appear rather delayed in its full implementation, perhaps partly because of uncertainty over certain aspects including some of the points raised in opposition by NGOs. However, it is still going ahead with hardly any modification despite vehement opposition from several quarters. In any case fencing is a gradual process that happens here and there, so it does not altogether need a clear new policy to be implemented, whereas to halt the process would need a very clear commitment to a policy change from government. We can conclude that, as with most normal policy development in Botswana, NGOs have so far been more-or-less unsuccessful in attempting to influence policy on this question of the fencing of communal lands.

An Example of Forced Policy Change - the Southern Okavango Integrated Water Development Project

The Southern Okavango Integrated Water Project (SOIWDP) was a planned large-scale engineering project involving dredging one of the main waterways of the Okavango Delta, in the north-west of the country. The Okavango Delta is one of the world's greatest wetlands, described as "the world's greatest

oasis". The Okavango River, having arisen in Angola, spreads out over the Kalahari sands.

Plans for engineering projects to utilise the water of the Okavango go back to the 1950s. It was developed in greater and greater detail from 1982 to 1990 under a special interministerial committee with the Department of Water Affairs (DWA) the lead agency. SOIWDP was to be "a multisectoral project to meet a wide range of goals" (Scudder, 1993 : 19), with water to be provided for commercial irrigation, village-based flood recession agriculture, and communities and livestock throughout the area, but particularly for the domestic use of the population of the town of Maun and surrounding areas, and for the De Beers diamond mine at Orapa. Apart from dredging and banding 42 km of the Boro river (one of the main Okavango waterways), the scheme included building two reservoirs each 100 km long one providing mainly irrigation and the other water for the diamond mine and a number of communities. An Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) was done, but by the same company that had undertaken feasibility and design studies (Snowy Mountains Development Corporation), on the grounds that this made it easier to build the findings of the EIA into the project design.

It was only when earth-moving equipment began to arrive in Maun in late 1990 that local opposition to the scheme began to mobilise. There was no strong opposition from Botswana's main conservation NGO (KCS). However, a new local community-based environmental action group was formed (TOCT), which mounted a very effective campaign in collaboration with Greenpeace International, which at one point threatened to add a "Diamonds are for Death" campaign to their anti-furs work and also to lobby within the European Community for a reduction in Botswana's beef quota.

Whether as a result of this campaign or simply in response to general local opposition, the Botswana Government suspended the scheme and commissioned an independent study through IUCN, who got together a team of 13 under an American expert, Ted Scudder. To the surprise of the DWA, the report was negative. In fact it made some positive proposals for alternative developments of the water resource of the Okavango, which amounted to a combination of several small-scale improvements mostly aimed at supporting the livelihoods of local people. However, although there was no official response the project was "terminated".

There are at least three alternative interpretations of the events leading up to the SOIWDP being shelved in this way. One is that the government's open

and democratic approach includes local consultations and sensitivity to local opinion and led it not only to suspend the scheme but also to "terminate" the project and this was quite irrespective of any activities by NGOs. A second is that the anti-SOIWDP campaign was led by expatriates in Maun with interest specifically in wildlife conservation and connections to safari companies. In this view the local NGOs such as TOCT that became involved were not really representative of local opinion and the international NGOs such as Greenpeace took up the issue without really understanding the local situation. Nevertheless the threat from international lobbying was sufficient that the Botswana government had to drop the project, at least for the time being.

The reason for not adopting or responding to the IUCN/Scudder study was in order to preserve the freedom to reopen the issue at any time without being tied to particular solutions.

The third interpretation is that TOCT, though having some expatriate leadership, did represent local opinion, its alliance with Greenpeace and Conservation International did force the government to think again, and the project really is "terminated". However, this does not really explain the government's failure to respond to the IUCN/Scudder study.

Conclusion

More detailed "stories" of the two cases discussed above is still being collected for analysis. This should allow a more definitive view on why NGOs appear to have had some success in the SOIWDP case and virtually none on the policy on fencing communal lands.

In the meantime, my conclusions are necessarily speculative. The following brief remarks are written under four headings.

Comment on the Hypotheses

NGOs' attempt at influencing policy on fencing was partly through the collaboration route and partly via indirect campaigning. Neither has been successful. We can speculate that in the former case this is because the policy network in Botswana is very tightly closed around the politico-bureaucratic elite - which is perhaps another way of saying that the national political culture is not very participative with respect to any interests outside that elite. The

latter strategy may be feasible to some extent in Botswana in so far as the political context clearly allows at least a limited amount of indirect campaigning - but the NGOs have limited capacity and consciousness-raising is a long process so results cannot be expected in terms of short-term policy changes.

NGO influence on the SOIWDP was clearly via an opposition campaign. The IUCN/Scudder study could be seen as part of an attempted collaboration - which was not accepted on the government side. It still needs to be checked in detail to see how far the campaign was actually successful. However, to the extent that the campaign did work, this appears to have been partly because the government is wary of tarnishing its democratic credentials and has to pay attention both to local opinion and to clearly expressed interests in a multi-party democracy, and partly because the opposition campaign could play on alternative power centres - in this case, mainly external ones such as the EC quota system. Thus Hypothesis 3 should probably be modified to refer to "alternative power centres (internal or external)" or possibly modified even further to point out how oppositional dimension - in this case several: wildlife; the global importance of the Okavango as a wetland ecosystem; tourism; and the diamond industry.

The International Dimension

Local-international NGO linkages appear to be of particular importance to local NGO campaigns. In this case, the linkages were *ad hoc* - what my colleague Bernie Eccleston (1994) calls a *coalition* (a "single event joint campaign ... among fairly diverse NGOs [with] division of labour [and] limited life") rather than a permanent *network* (with "emphasis mostly on information sharing rather than joint campaigning" or *alliance* (with "long term allegiance to common ideals").

However, as Eccleston also points out, international collaboration can be a two-edged sword, having the potential at times to diminish the influence of NGOs on policy makers as well as to widen the political space in which they work (Eccleston, 1994 : 1). The SOIWDP campaign certainly shows how issues are perceived differently as international issues from how they are perceived locally. It remains to be seen whether summoning international assistance will cause a backlash over the longer term or whether it will continue to be a powerful occasional weapon for the relatively weak Botswana NGO movement.

Short-and long-term: NGO Influence at Different Stages of the Policy Process

A new SOIWDP could conceivably be announced any time and forced through. Although schemes for fenced ranches are likely to go ahead, there could conceivably be a change of the government's position on the general desirability of fencing more of the remaining communal lands. Whether or not there are specific future changes, policy in general is something that develops as a process rather than being implemented as a one-off.

Potter (1994b) has suggested looking at NGO influence on policy in terms of three stages in the policy process, viz: agenda-setting, policy choices and implementation. Agenda-setting can itself be thought of in the relatively short and then the longer term.

Arguably, it is with respect to agenda-setting over the long term that NGOs generally have most influence, although it is enormously hard to document and evaluate. With respect to the stories described here, there has been a global shift in attitudes (some might say a paradigm shift) on environmental issues, which has brought in its wake both a general scepticism around large-scale water development projects and a willingness to confer increased importance on indigenous knowledge and techniques (the traditional cattle-post system in Botswana might come into this category). (Government policy, however, is still following a previous paradigm shift, that towards neo-liberal economics, including the importance of privatisation - which tends to work together with the individual interests of members of the elite).

NGOs in Botswana have not been able to utilise these shifts in global opinion to impact on agenda-setting amongst policy-makers in Botswana. This may largely be because of the closed policy network referred to earlier, as well as the continuing relative weakness of the NGO sector. However, there are signs of increased NGO activity of the indirect campaigning type.

Policy formulation is perhaps the area where NGOs have least influence of all on environmental policies in Botswana. This is the province *par excellence* of the politico-administrative elite.

Once policies reach the implementation stage then there is some chance of NGO involvement even in Botswana. This is the only stage at which the

government officially sees a role for them, though that role would preferably be one of helping to explain policies and helping local government officials to make the details of policy work, rather than actually making any changes in response to NGO representations. It is also the stage at which policies become public, so that there is opportunity for opposition, which, as we have seen, occasionally succeeds in preventing certain projects from going ahead as planned.

Implications for NGO Strategy Choice

NGOs cannot choose opposition as a constant strategy - their interests often coincide at least partially with those of decision-makers in government and elsewhere. However, if there is clear conflict between policy stated as about to be implemented and interests represented by NGOs, the above stories tend to show that outright opposition may be more likely to get results than trying to collaborate and hoping for agreed modifications.

International links are probably essential if opposition is to succeed. They can only work if there is genuinely an international dimension to the particular issue - but then there is the danger of different perceptions of an issue from outside than within Botswana itself.

On more local issues, indirect campaigning may be more likely to succeed, though its effects are so long term, than attempts at lobbying on a collaborative basis. Real opportunities for NGO activists to enter the policy networks are likely to remain very few and far between, and to carry very strong dangers of co-optation when they do arise for certain eminent individuals.

Up to now, international concern for environment in Africa and Botswana in particular has mostly related to issues around wildlife and bio-diversity. The desertification convention is attracting much less participation from big Northern NGOs than does the bio-diversity convention, for example. However, the desertification convention is now signed and includes reference to community-based sustainable development, the importance of indigenous knowledge and techniques, and the need for independent EIAs on big engineering projects. It may then become possible for NGOs in Botswana to invoke this international convention and gain international support at the policy formulation or even agenda-setting stage for a broader, more participative approach to environmental issues such as these.

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