

THE ORIGINS OF THE WELFARE AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES IN BOTSWANA

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Abstract

This paper examines the origins of social work in Botswana. It pays particular attention to the development of social work through the government and local authority programme delivered through the Department of Social and Community Development. Unlike Britain and America where social work had its foundation in the charitable movement government departments were the primary employers of social workers from the outset. This paper traces the significance of the 'Food for Work' programme, a United Nations funded drought relief scheme, in setting a 'top down' ethos for development, with a primary concern of ensuring some work efforts were given in return for food relief, rather than community development programmes per se. This absence of a grassroots development programme is tempered by a nationwide development of village development committees to ensure local involvement and decision making in development. Despite a history of problems associated with community development and social welfare, the level of service delivery and the infrastructure for local development is commendable and is making its contribution to the national development programme.

Introduction

Botswana declared its independence on September 30, 1966, from which status it has continued to grow and prosper. It boasts an impressive level of development at both economic and social levels and is fast leaving its 'developing' or 'third world' status behind.

This development has not, unlike most other countries, come through urbanization and industrialization, but through rural development, a thriving beef industry, and mining. Its stable, democratically elected government, lack of corruption, and the leadership and problem solving skills of the Batswana people enabled Botswana to take advantage of the development networks and foreign aid to good effect.

Nestling between Zimbabwe and South Africa, with Namibia on its western borders, Botswana's primary health programmes and its community development and social welfare programmes have developed throughout its rural and Kalahari desert regions in a way that challenges its neighbours. Its estimated population is one and a half million based on projections from the 1991 census (Population and Housing Census, 1987:9). Four-fifths of the population reside in a rural location, spread across its 581,730 square kilometres, an area larger than France and similar in size to Texas state, U.S.A.

Much of Botswana lies within the Tropic of Capricorn with arid conditions prevailing to the west and south of the country.

While the eastern side of the country is comparatively densely populated, the population live in rural villages in traditional mud and thatch homes across the length and breadth of the country with often untarred sandy routes being their link to larger towns and services. It is in this context that Botswana's achievements of bringing social services to the remote regions must be evaluated and commended. Primary health care, primary education, and village development and welfare programmes have all been developed at "extension" level as a priority to try to avoid the urban migration experiences of other African countries such as Zambia and Tanzania. Thus Botswana now boasts 89% of its population accessing health services; 100% of females and 94% males enrolling in primary school, with 89% completing their primary education; the best immunisation levels in the region; an under five mortality rate of 85 per 1000, and a Gross National Product of US\$ 1600. (UNICEF, 1992: 71-89). UNICEF uses the U5MR (under five mortality rate) as the most significant indicator of a nations progress in respect of its children.

These are indicators of a basic primary extension level programme. It is not an attempt to suggest that services are sophisticated or even adequate — a midwife and clinic are readily accessible to most women for childbirth, but access to emergency services is a major problem for those in remote areas. Primary school is available within travelling distance of a child's home, but secondary level education more often than not necessitates that the child move to a centre of population where boarding facilities are often not available.

Children may be fortunate to have relatives in the village — if not education comes at the cost of lack of parenting and adult supervision. However its healthy economic position, combined with improving social services suggests, that Botswana is making the transition to one of the richer and more progressive nations of the world.

Community development and social welfare programmes have not been documented internationally in a way that lends them to comparative statistics. Such programmes impact on education and health and economic development, but it is these outputs or results of service which are measured rather than the service level or inputs. However their low profile does not diminish the significance of helping services for those whose need cannot be appropriately met within the community, nor of community development programmes which harness the energies of rural people on community projects offering opportunities for skill training, income generation, and developing cooperative skills, as well as the community projects and services *per se*.

The Introduction of Welfare and Community Development Programmes in Botswana

This paper seeks to document the development of the community development and social welfare services in Botswana. As such it seeks to serve as a historical account of the development of social work in Botswana. Firstly it must be said that the Setswana culture is highly organised and cooperative with considerable supports from the community for those in need — from the wards which are the clusters of kinsmen among whom rural people still live; from close relatives; and from the elders, headmen, and chief. Thus to be homeless, without food in the home village, abandoned, abused without protection, or like such social problems were not likely to have commonly confronted government departments. Nevertheless it is significant that under the auspices of the British government as the Protectorate of Bechuanaland

only one position was created in this area — that of Social Welfare Officer under the Department of Education — until the dawning of independence. This position was first filled in 1946 and remained a single-handed post until 1964, less than two years before Independence, when six assistant grade staff were appointed (Wass, 1972: 114; Wass, 1969a). The duties of this position were:

Scouting and Guiding; Adult and audiovisual education; cases of indigence; Bechuanaland Soldiers Benefit Fund; assistance in presentation of Government point of view to the African; assistance in relationship with the Press; contribution of articles to the Press (Wass, 1972:113).

Thus began a combination of duties which ranged from supporting organised youth groups, cases of indigence or dire need, linkages between the people and government policy, public relations, to adult education which can still be found in the Department of Social and Community Development — although many development and legislative duties have been added. The social welfare officer with responsibility for youth in each district retains substantial duties for these organised groups of youths, although such groups are more commonly seen as falling within the voluntary sector. Unlike its governing nation, Britain, social work in Bechuanaland, later Botswana, had its origins in the government service rather than the charitable movements.

The area that was totally absent in this first post was any duties in relation to community development. However this was changed in 1964 when four of the new assistant grade appointments were allocated to community development work, after seventy-nine years of the British administration of the Protectorate.

Wass saw this lack of interest in social work on the part of the British administration as in keeping with their neglect in all aspects of development during their rule. Until the Economic Survey in 1959 showed Bechuanaland in a more favourable light, it had been seen as a route of passage from the coast to the Rhodesias, now Zimbabwe and Zambia. (Wass, 1969a) In the Bechuanaland Protectorate Plan 1963-1968 (1963:54) this initiative toward community development was expressed as one for self-help, "The time has come when more active steps should be taken to encourage local responsibility and initiative at village level".

A budget of thirty nine thousand pounds sterling was allocated, including the salaries of the new appointees. The community development programme was seen as being for the rural areas. No social welfare programme was instituted for the rural areas as it was felt that "the framework of tribal law and custom meets the needs of individuals and families" (Bechuanaland Protectorate Plan 1963:55). The corollary was also true that no community development was planned for urban areas, but rather the forty-five thousand pounds sterling budget allocated for Social Welfare was targeted at urban areas to deal with cases of hardship and rehabilitation in slum areas. The concept that social welfare was for urban areas, and that community development was for rural areas, was one that was established by the British administration, apparently without too much thought, but which was to have a significant impact on the development of the service.

Community Development became a growth area of social work. Published in the month of independence, the first Botswana development plan, The Transitional Plan, acknowledged the importance of Community Development in Botswana and made a commitment to expanding the recently formed Community Development Department established under the Ministry of Local Government and Lands (Ramchandani, 1970:9). A figure of 100 community development staff was quoted but no target dates were given. National training facilities were to be set up for community development staff. It also made a commitment to setting up a mobile Home Economics unit with a staff of two to teach sewing, knitting, home sanitation, child care and nutrition. This report saw the community development staff as having a key role in the 'Food for Work' Programme (Transitional Plan, 1966).

1965 had been a year of harsh drought conditions and through the United Nations' wide spread aid from World Food Programme assistance was distributed free of charge to the needy. 1966 proved to be another drought year but on this occasion the Community Development Department proposed that community development project work be carried out in exchange for food. An agreement was signed in Rome in March 1966 consolidating the 'Food for Work' scheme. This scheme was to be implemented from 1 July 1966 giving only three months to travel the country to brief all districts on the implementation of the scheme. (Wass, 1969a) Volunteers were recruited to the count of 17,000 by the third week in July and 30,000 in August. By March 1967 320 projects had been completed and another 500 were under way — 250 miles of road laid, 360 acres of land cleared for ploughing and almost 100 teachers' houses, 30 classrooms, and 40 dams having been built. (Wass, 1969a)

The 'Food for Work' programme ended on September 30, 1967 and all incomplete projects became the responsibility of the Community Development Department (Hedenquist, 1990).

This was an impressive contribution to the development of the physical infrastructure of Botswana and gave the role of community development workers quite a boost. However, it was a very rushed impetus, giving no time for group mechanisms to be developed within communities or clear community objectives to be established. This may have been a case of astute professional opportunism, which established some national return for international help, but it meant that voluntary community efforts toward developing the infrastructure were motivated by the reward of food aid rather than any commitment to development of itself, or the long term advantages to the community (Ferguson-Brown, 1991:48).

This proved very significant in that community development made a beginning in Botswana by establishing an expectation of return in kind for the efforts of the community. The motivation to do the work was not the project and its benefits to the community per se, but the food at a vital time of drought (Ramchandani, 1970:28). That the poor might receive some return for their labours has merit. However this was actually the reverse of the intended perspective — that the nation's poor give their services in return for much needed food aid during the drought crisis. This set a pattern for the future of which social workers are now very critical. They believe the 'Food for Work' scheme eroded the self-help spirit of the nation and see a lack of self-help among communities as endemic (Ferguson-Brown, 1991:186-188).

It could certainly be said that such schemes introduced the potential for a 'top down' rather than 'bottom up' approach to development. Food for Work schemes or payment for work schemes are currently used in South Africa by national programmes trying to tackle both the nation's poverty and development needs (programmes such as the Independent Development Trust, and National Nutrition and Social Development under the Department of Primary Health). In the ideal situation this means that development in the form of roads, water schemes, schools, clinics, comes to rural villages hand in hand with nutrition and health benefits. People have been able to eat as the services grow and develop. Such schemes however mean that the people are motivated to accept the projects whether they are the priority at grass roots level or not. Such schemes require a very careful democratic process to ensure that the benefits of return for labour in community development does not skew the

'bottom up' approach to development. Returns for labour can easily 'buy' the consent and approval of rural people.

An evaluation of the 'Food for Work' scheme carried by a United Nations team found the Community Development component of the associated projects to be lacking and criticised the work output and the technical supports such as equipment and tools (Community Development in Drought Stricken Areas, 1971:2-4). The rushed efforts to get a 'Food for Work' scheme off the ground were evidenced in the lack of expertise of the development workers and in the ambiguous nature of the programme — food relief versus community development; 'top down' versus 'bottom up' development. The philosophy of the programme was unclear, the groundwork of training and an organisational and management infrastructure were not in place and the beginnings of community development in Botswana were, to say the least, shaky.

Criticism of the community development programmes remained a common theme in subsequent evaluations (Fortmann, 1983; Picard and Endresen, 1982; Hedenquist, 1990; Report of the Community Development Review Committee, 1977; Zuffrey, 1983). The problems faced by the Community Development Department for a further 25 years following independence were greater than mere inexperience and lack of training of the early staff. The foundation was unsure and the heritage of ambiguity about objectives meant that a sound 'bottom up' approach was largely absent. On the contrary a review of the national policy statements suggests that a 'top down' approach was actually the government objective for community development, although there was desire to foster self-help in the sense of ensuring minimal dependence on government resources for sustenance and development.

Community Development in Botswana had been a single-handed one man job from 1946 to 1964, but by 1971 there were 60 Community Development Assistants and 13 Assistant Community Development Officers. Community Development Assistants were basic appointments of untrained and inexperienced staff. The Assistant Community Development Officers were expected to supervise these staff on the basis of having completed a short certificate course in Tanzania (10 months) or Zambia. Social welfare services experienced no such growth, but remained at one Social Welfare Officer with two assistant staff. In contrast some social welfare staff were actually incorporated into the role of community development staff. The British administration's theme of self-responsibility was re-echoed by the independent government "the development which can take place with little outside aid is

that based on self-help" (National Development Plan, 1968: 114). The focus was not on identifying need and hardship for the delivery of service, but rather emphasising economic independence from government and grant aid in the household and village situation. However, cultural change was targeted within the gambit of community development at that time. "The population needs to change traditional attitudes and practices for a more modern and scientific mode of life" (National Development Plan, 1968: 61).

The government's means of achieving this was seen as through the community development staff and the Village Development Committees (VDCs) in particular, and through women's clubs and youth clubs. VDCs were established by Presidential directive in 1968 and were to be elected at the village Kgotla every two years (Fortmann, 1983: 29). Membership was usually about twelve villagers, and the councillors and headman were co-opted members. The Community Development Assistant or the Assistant Community Development Officer were to facilitate and oversee the functioning of the Village Development Committee through which the support of the people for development projects could be sought. The committees were a feature of development in other parts of Africa colonized by Great Britain (Vengroff, 1977:150).

By May 1968, 70 VDCs had been formed and over 300 projects were under way under the auspices of these new committees (Report of the Commissioner for Community Development, May 1968). Another mixed message was now entering the community development field. There already the dichotomies of relief and development and top-down and bottom-up approaches. Now entered the dichotomy of modernization versus tradition. On the one hand the 1968 National Development Plan declared that changing the traditional way of life as an objective while the 1970 Biennial Report of the Community Development Department stated that:

...the advent of industrialisation and urbanisation has made it impossible to employ the traditional way of doing things... there is vagrancy on a large scale in all groups.

Despite the social cost, the Community Development Department accepted its brief of development as one of modernization and of changing traditional attitudes, although such terms were not further broken down. What is clear is that despite loud messages from government in favour of self-help, the principle was one of the government dictating development rather than one of a local spirit of self-determination..

This top-down approach to development — of trying to change attitudes to suit national plans rather than identifying community needs at a community level — suggests that community development in Botswana has a historic alienation from the people. This belies the fundamental social work concept of self-determination, whether in the form of felt needs of the community or of the individual's personal goals for change (Ferguson-Brown, 1991:52).

The Village Development Committee ensured local representation in the decision taking process and in the management of the projects. It kept the headman central in this process despite the declared objectives of changing traditional attitudes. This framework has set up an admirable national infrastructure for development and provides a significant opportunity for the coordination of community and government effort. It should not however replace community meetings, and negotiations with villagers about priorities for development. In some areas the Community Development Officer and the headman and the local councillor involve the villagers by public meetings (Kgotlas) but often decisions about development are taken for the people, even at a local level, rather than by the people.

The term self-help, or lack of it, has been used in a negative way in national review documents (United Nations World Food Programme, 1971; Report of the Social and Community Development Training Review Committee, 1983:40; Fortmann, 1983:69-74;). It implies criticism of people who could not support themselves and who needed charity or government aid, rather than focusing on individual and community needs - including the need to earn a living and support dependent family members. Sadly this attitude has remained predominant among social workers that something has been lost among the Tswana people which they call self-help (Ferguson-Brown, 1991:186) and that the 'Food for Work' scheme is to blame.

In an arid country with unpredictable rains subsistence agriculture is, to say the least, precarious. The investment in ploughing and sowing is often a waste. Peasant farmers lose their cattle in the drought periods. The key to survival in colonial times was to have at least one family member working in the mines or farms of South Africa. One wonders what self-help spirit exactly has been lost? That governments want development to come as cheaply as possible is a worldwide phenomenon — hoping that the poor of the nation will invest their time and energy in the hopes of improving things, at least for the next generation. That citizens are concerned to improve their state in the present is

equally common. The spirit of self-help may not actually have been destroyed by the 'Food for Work' scheme. However there seems little doubt that an opportunity was lost in the introduction of the 'Food for Work' scheme for a better beginning to a grass-roots involvement in the development process.

Despite the imperfections, the development infrastructure is very commendable, and like the primary health care service, the village extension programme for service delivery has ensured a nationwide network for community development and social services.

By 1973 the Community Development section had an operational component of thirty-six field officers, based in villages of a population of less than 6000. Most were community development assistants and eight district based officers mainly at Assistant Community Development Officer grade (National Development Plan, 1973). Advisory sections were also set up for Women's Activities; Social Welfare; Home Economics; and Youth Activities. Operational staff were also extended to include two new units — Training and Audio-Visual Aids. The latter was to be concerned with information dissemination and public relation and to stimulate interest in self-help and village development, through reports, radio programmes and demonstrations. The Woman's unit was to be concerned with the special problems and needs of women. The Social Welfare unit was to advise and assist in general casework, destitution, child welfare, industrial and hospital work, prisons and probation. The Home Economics unit was to concern itself with advising on methods of educating women, particularly in rural areas, in more modern methods of food production, utilisation and preservation and storage in order to "improve nutritional standards in Botswana and make better use of food resources" (National Development Plan, 1973:298). At the time of this plan 200 VDCs had been established with projects worth over six hundred thousand rands (the rand was the unit of currency in Botswana at that time).

A certificate course, of a duration of one year, was set up at the Botswana Agriculture College to train the Community Development Assistants — fifteen in the first year. This remained the only centre for training within Botswana until the programme was transferred to the University of Botswana in 1985, when a Certificate in Social Work and a Diploma in Social Work was offered.

A year later a four year degree programme was instituted. This hierarchy of training for different levels of practice provides a useful model for the delivery of social work services throughout a large rural expanse. Highly qualified staff are not only expensive to train but are usually unwilling to work in remote

regions. People in remote areas who have low levels of literacy are usually distrustful of well-educated people as they feel they will be exploited by them.

This model of service delivery and training is in sharp contrast to South Africa, where social work is delivered by graduates, and where a comprehensive extension network for service delivery in rural areas is not yet in place. The remedial approach has predominated in social work in South Africa until the time of writing. By contrast in Botswana these beginnings laid a firm foundation for community development taking a central role in social work services.

The Consolidation of Government Programmes

April 1975 saw a reorganisation of community development and social welfare services and division of Social and Community Development established within the Ministry of Local Government and Lands (National Development Plan 1976-1981, 1977:233).

Its primary objectives were to:

develop management systems in councils in relation to Social Welfare and Community development; review policies regarding VDCs and Ward development Associations; develop systems of non-formal education (radio); develop welfare services — day care centres, distress relief, child and juvenile services; and encourage communities to help themselves and to rely less on government (National Development Plan, 1977:233).

In this report a need for legislation which would include juvenile courts and a probation scheme were identified (a Children's Act came into being on 24th April, 1981), and a fund was specifically targeted to prevent the removal of children and juveniles from their homes. Social and Community Development, S&CD, staffing levels were targeted for growth, as were other primary health care services with an expectation that there would be 201 staff by the year 1978/9 and 354 by 1984/5. In fact posts were not filled at the planned rate, and the actual establishment of staff (not including those released for long term training programmes) was still less than 300 by 1987 — 289 government field and management staff in social work and development posts including the prison service and services to the handicapped (Ferguson-Brown, 1991).

Hedenquist records 448 posts in S&CD in local government employment by 1989, but this figure includes administrative and support staff. Accessing social work training (in terms of meeting university entrance requirements and in the bureaucratic process for release for training on salary) slowed the target figures - meantime there was some loss of staff in post. Commonly thought by S&CD managers to be due to the isolation of remote postings and the lack of experience of staff in these positions.

By the 1985 National Development Plan (1985-1991) four fields of activity were consolidated as areas of activity in S&CD and for specialist appointments at district level (i.e. the local authority/ district council headquarters). These were Community Development, Social Welfare, Home Economics and Youth.

Problems of destitution came under the remit of the social welfare officer and a National Policy on Destitutes was drawn up in 1980. Assistance was usually given in kind — a set allowance of food, candles, soap, matches — or redeemable coupons from distribution points and associated benefits could also be approved (medical care, school uniforms, repatriation fares or rehabilitative travel expenses, school fees until their abolition in 1988, funeral expenses and so on). Under this policy permanent support could be given to the aged and disabled, but for the able bodied only temporary assistance should be given in circumstances of disaster or temporary hardship. Community Development on the other hand was concerned with processing projects for grant aid, much of which was funded by foreign aid but which was channelled through the Ministry of Local Government and Lands. The management and supervision of such projects was a continuing responsibility along with the Village Development Committee.

Identified Problems in the Development of Welfare and Development Programmes

By 1985 government social work programmes were extensive and S&CD was the largest social work employer. The Prison Welfare Service was initiated under the National Development Plan 1968-73 with a budget of eighty four thousand rands and a programme for the disabled under the Special Services Unit for the Handicapped (SSUH) was set up under the Department of Health in March 1976. Both had a preventive brief — SSUH in the prevention of disability and minimising its impact, Prison Welfare to encourage employment on leaving prison to prevent recidivism. In 1973 home loan schemes were set up in some urban councils, called Self Help Housing Agencies, and plots were allocated for building in municipal areas. Although meeting housing needs,

these programmes proved problematic with 50% being in default of payment by 1983 (An Evaluation of Self Help Housing Associations, 1983:20) Small numbers of social workers were also attached to religious and non-government organisations engaged with the poor, in community development and skill training, in work with refugees, and in organizations such as YWCA.

The development of social work was commendable but problematic. It was commendable because it was delivered in a national network programme and also because development was a major component of the service delivery, parallel with relief and welfare services. Review boards and commissions continued to be critical — critical of the lack of a clear policy about the objectives of the work, critical of the VDCs, critical of the information flow from government to communities through the community development extension workers, and critical of the structural and organisational and management problems which impeded good service delivery (Report of the Community Development Review Committee, 1977:21; Report on a Study of Local Government and District Administration Training, 1978:53; Report of the Social and Community Development Training and Review Committee, 1983; Report of the Presidential Commission 1983:11; Fortmann, 1983) Problems beset the VDCs. Many did not have the literacy skills to establish a constitution and to keep minutes. Division and disagreement manifested as elected leaders and traditional leaders vied for power, and as councillors saw social workers as stealing the credit for welfare programmes such as national destitutes policy. Social work service delivery was crippled by dependence on limited government vehicles. Senior staff were cut off from field officers for weeks at a time, with only a monthly postal service or more recently a radio phone for contact and supervision. The service to the disabled (SSUH) became increasingly an occupational/physiotherapy role, using social workers to teach the family basic manipulation and exercise programmes to strengthen weak limbs (Report of the Botswana National Commission for the International Year of the Child, 1980).

At a development level, persistent drought and the harshness of the environment and increasing cost of living meant that rural people continued to depend heavily on drought relief and destitute allowances, although (through community development projects) schools and clinics community halls and water projects were a common feature in rural villages. Perhaps some of the criticism weighed at the S&CD in these reports was associated with the government's disappointment that social work was not bringing development cheaply and painlessly to rural people — to ensure that everyone could somehow earn a living and that the family structure would not be damaged by

development (while, of course getting rid of "traditional practices and attitudes". Perhaps it is unrealistic expectations which leads to such constant criticism and disappointment.

Conclusion

There are many lessons for social work from the Botswana historical perspective. Sadly, that problems of ambiguity about objectives can persist for decades; that a top-down task oriented approach can persist, despite social work training for a bottom-up process approach; and that personnel training is only one aspect of service delivery which must be supported by organisational resources such as transport and supervision.

However the service has grown and become established and development has been an integral part of it — local efforts harnessing foreign aid for the local and national benefit. Urban migration, while not avoided, has not to date occurred on a large scale. The hierarchy of social work training on offer, while somewhat unwieldy for those in employment, is a practical, pragmatic approach to service delivery. It is one which might be viewed with interest by a new dispensation in South Africa seeking to deliver a more comprehensive welfare and development programme.

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