

Urban, Elite and Professional Bias in Public Policy Formulation in Botswana: The Case of Tribal Grazing Land Policy

Latang Sechele (Corresponding author)

Department of Sociology, University of Botswana

P/Bag UB00705, Gaborone, Botswana

Email: sechelelt@mopipi.ub.bw

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Abstract

Drawing on documentary sources, and taking Tribal Grazing Land Policy formulation as a case study, this article attempts to investigate the consultative processes in public policy making in Botswana and the extent to which such takes into account the views of the masses that policies would affect and benefit. This is based on the general consensus that a holistic and therefore relevant policy should take into account the views of the beneficiaries. This research reveals that although in Botswana there are structures, such as the kgotla system, where the masses are consulted, the consultative process itself is flawed. It is meant to impose the views of the professionals and the elite (politicians and urban based professionals) on the general populace. Public policies are adopted despite protest by masses or those who closely work with them. This challenges the generally held view that Botswana is the most democratic country in Africa.

Keywords: Botswana, public policy, consultation, implementation, rural dwellers.

1. Introduction

Botswana was formally a British colony for eighty years (1885-1965). While colonialism was introduced by force in many countries in Africa, in Botswana it came by request. The Chiefs of Botswana, accompanied by missionaries, had to travel to England to request Her Majesty the Queen to "protect" them from invasion by the South African Boers (South Africans of Dutch origin) (Parsons, 1984). The Boers threatened to occupy Botswana to escape the British who had occupied the Cape and outlawed slavery which they (Boers) held with

esteem. The British were at first reluctant to occupy Botswana as they did not foresee any economic benefits that would accrue from doing so. They finally declared it part of their empire on the basis that it was located on the 'road to the north' stretching from the Cape in South Africa to Cairo in Egypt where they had some economic interests. The British thought that if they did not do so, Germany which occupied Namibia at that time would colonise Botswana and blockade their way to the north (Mogalakwe, 2006; Parson, 1984). Botswana attained self-governance in 1965 and independence on 30th September 1966 (Bhuiyan, 1987). Since colonialism was exploitative, there was very little of economic and political developments that the country could be proud of. With a per capita income of USD80 at independence, Botswana was considered one of the poorest economies in Africa. The country had to start from scratch to find means of sustaining the economy as well as developing policies that were meant to tackle abject poverty amongst the general populace. With investment in mining, it has been able to transform itself from being one of the poorest countries in Africa to an upper middle income country with a per capita income of USD7,770 by 2013 (Sechele, 2015). Despite high levels of per capita income, at the level of the individual, poverty is still rampant in this middle income country. By 2013, the proportion of the national population living below the poverty datum line was recorded as 18.4 per cent with a GINI coefficient of 0.61 showing unequal distribution of income (Sechele, 2016). The situation could be worse than what is officially recorded and published. Good (1999) questions how the poverty datum line is calculated and argues that it is set artificially low to exclude large numbers of people. Hazelton (2002) highlights how little diamond revenues have benefitted the poor, a theme also advanced by Taylor (2003). These scholars and many others also emphasize Botswana's high GINI coefficient of income inequality. This calls for a review of existing policies and strategies to ensure equity in the distribution of resources and improvement in the welfare of the majority of the population.

On the political front, Botswana's structure of government has been influenced to a very large extent by the British or Westminster type of governance. Botswana is a liberal democratic state with multi-party elections held every five years. The party that wins the majority of votes forms the government. Since 1965, Botswana has held successful and peaceful elections that have always been considered free and fair. In this way the country has been hailed as the model of liberal democracy in Africa (Somolekae, 1998). The constitution establishes three branches of government, that is, the Legislature, Executive and the Judiciary (Ministry of Finance and Development Planning, 1991). The legislature or parliament as it is called in Botswana is a law making body. The judiciary is responsible for the interpretation of the law and to ensure that government legislation does not violate the constitution. The executive branch is tasked with the responsibility of policy formulation and implementation which is the focus of this paper. The policy making machinery consists of the top civil servants and cabinet ministers whom we refer to in this paper as the elite. The top civil servants play a key role in initiating (through commissioned studies that generate proposals) and ultimately implementing public policy by virtue of the positions they occupy and their high levels of education (Osei-Hwedie, 1998; Sebudubudu, 2011).

Although the elite in Botswana are charged with formulating public policy, this has to be in

consultation with the communities that are to be affected by developments. This is based on the general consensus that a holistic policy with a high likelihood of success should take into account the views of the beneficiaries. Poteete (2002:3) has noted that consultation and participation ‘improves the flow of information between citizens and policy-makers and increases the likelihood that the local residents would see some benefit in supporting the new policies’. If they perceive that a particular policy is likely to harm their interest or have not been adequately consulted about it, they will not take part in its implementation (Poteete, 2002). This would render development policies irrelevant to the needs and aspirations of the intended beneficiaries.

On paper Botswana has clearly laid out structures through which consultation takes place both in rural and urban areas. These include the kgotla system, radio programmes, workshops and conferences (Osei-Hwedie, 1998; Mmatli & Preston, 2000; Poteete, 2002; Botlhale, 2013). Among all these, the kgotla system is the most dominant. The kgotla system is a traditional consultation forum found in every village, wards and urban centres, headed by a Chief, where all people gather to discuss matters of public concern such as new policies (Poteete, 2002; Obasi & Lekorwe, 2014). At the end of the meeting or debate people reach consensus on the issue and inform the relevant officers. Members of parliament and cabinet ministers also meet their constituents at this forum to provide feedback on government decisions as well as get their opinions prior to a parliament sitting. Notwithstanding the existence of these structures, this paper attempts to investigate the reality of the consultative processes in public policy making in Botswana and the extent to which such actually takes into account the views of the masses that policies would affect. The paper takes the Tribal Grazing Land Policy (TGLP) formulated in 1975, and which still applies today, as a case study.

2. Data and Discussion: The TGLP in Botswana

2.1 Origins

During the colonial era, the colonial administration embarked upon a policy of drilling bore-holes for those who owned cattle in the western part of Botswana. This policy saw the removal of cattle to the Sandveld. Before this policy was introduced cattle would be moved from one area to the other in times of drought (Hitchcock, 1982). This was in a way a strategy to curb overgrazing of communal land. However, the provision of water to cattle encouraged off-take. The result was that the land around boreholes became increasingly overgrazed. It seemed that those boreholes that were drilled by the colonial government fell in the hands of the rich few (Those who owned many cattle). When Botswana attained independence in 1966 the problem of overgrazing in the Sandveld became acute and more boreholes were being drilled in the communal areas (Jones, 1977). It happened that in 1970 the Botswana Society under the sponsorship of the United Nations Conference of Human Environment organised a conference that was held in Gaborone on Sustained Production from semi-arid areas (Picard, 1987). This conference drew the attention of the government to the degradation of land that was thought to be occurring in Botswana. It recommended that there be a land reform and new animal husbandry practices in Botswana to ensure proper management of grazing land

(Picard, 1987). As a result the government of Botswana began to think seriously about new ways of land management. In 1972 Robert Chambers and Michael Feldman, prominent experts in rural development, were invited to conduct a consultancy on rural development in Botswana and submitted a report to the government in 1973. The report became a base for the formulation of Botswana's Tribal Grazing Land Policy in 1975. The Chambers and Feldman (1973) report paid attention to the degradation of the land that was occurring in central Botswana and proposed several recommendations on rural development. The consultants saw the need for Botswana to embark upon commercialisation of land in the communal areas. They recommended that land in the communal areas should be available for rent to individuals and companies over a fifty year lease. However, the report stressed the need to protect small farmers. The consultants were aware that the welfare of the small farmers will be under the hands of the rich yet they concluded that commercialisation was the best strategy for rural development and land management. Most of the recommendations in the report were accepted by the Government and preparations for a land policy began.

2.2 Formulation

The Tribal Grazing Land Policy in Botswana represents a transformation from traditional practice to modernity. It is a way of developing livestock and managing the land in a productive way. But tradition and modernity are often in conflict and quite often ordinary people tend to lose what they already got in the past. Traditional practices are viewed as backward and unproductive by those in favour of modernity. The crux of TGLP was contained in the statement made by the late President Sir Seretse Khama, the father to former and fourth President Seretse Khama Ian Khama, on his announcement of the policy in 1975 that:

In commercial farming areas groups and individuals will be given exclusive rights to specific areas of grazing land. The areas include much of the existing Sandveld cattle posts areas where bore-hole cattle owners pay nothing for the land they use. Ranches will be encouraged including fencing and piping of water. The land will cease to be held in a traditional way. A lease will be given and rent will be payable to the local authorities in return for exclusive rights. (Picard, 1987:243)

In this speech Sir Seretse Khama pointed out two major areas that concerned government at that time. These were deterioration of the country's grazing land and the increasing gap between the rich and the poor. He pointed out that the only way to address these two burning issues would be the formulation of a new system of land tenure that would ensure good management of the land (Hitchcock, 1982). The aims of the newly formulated Tribal Grazing Land Policy were (1) to stop overgrazing of the land through grazing control and range management, (2) to promote greater equality of incomes and (3) to allow growth and commercialisation of the livestock industry on sustained basis (Acquah, 1995). These objectives were to be achieved by dividing the land into commercial, communal and reserved areas. Communal areas were lands set aside for the community where customary land tenure would continue to exist. Under customary land tenure the land is owned by the community and cannot be rented or sold. Chiefs used to allocate such land for communal use. Everyone

here has the right to the use of land. But after independence, the elite embarked upon a process of dismantling traditional ways of land allocation on the basis that they were inefficient. Instead, Land Boards which represent modern and efficient institutions were formed in 1968 to take responsibility of land allocation from Chiefs (Hitchcock, 1982). In communal areas the rearing of cattle was supposed to be limited to those with few cattle while those with many were expected to relocate to commercial areas. In commercial areas leases were to be granted to individuals and rents payable to District Councils. It was assumed that, as a way of reducing income differentials, rents collected from these commercial farms would be used for the benefit of those people who resided in communal areas (Good, 1993). Reserved areas were not to be allocated but set aside for future use as well as serve as 'safeguards' for the poor. But in the actual allocation process, reserved areas were not given much attention. They were dispensed with in the process of land zoning and mostly became commercial. Many years later, some of these became wildlife management areas and not safe guards for the poor as was originally proposed. Kenneth Good (1993:222) has noted that 'The zoning and land-use planning which accompanied the T.G.L.P. saw big gains being made by animals, since 20 per cent of the land was gazetted as new wildlife management areas'.

2.3 The Consultative Process

The announcement of the policy followed consultation with some officials, some of whom were in the districts and with the rural dwellers through the kgotla and the radio. Such radios were distributed all over the country by the government (Government of Botswana, 1977). The government formed small groups whereby each would listen to a special radio programme to explain the policy to the general public. Thereafter, members would express their comments to government officials who served as moderators who then would send them to Gaborone (Poteete, 2002). The specific objectives of the consultation were to; (a) provide information on the policy (b) stimulate public discussion (c) provide information to land boards, district councils and central government on how people felt the policy should be implemented locally and (d) to start a long process of helping people how they could benefit from the policy (Government of Botswana, 1977).

On the official side, officials of the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning who are responsible for formulating development programmes differed with those of the Ministry of Local Government, especially district officials located in the rural areas. District officials did not see how the policy would help reduce income differentials between the rich and the poor (Picard, 1987). On the other hand urban based officials in the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning felt that it was the best rural development strategy. The urban based officials sought to impose the policy on the general populace and make it acceptable rather than allow a process where its intended impact would be investigated. This is in line with the consultative objective 'to start a long process of helping people how they could benefit from the policy' and inconsistent with the objectives 'to find out how people felt the policy should be implemented locally' as well as 'stimulate public discussion about the policy'. They explained to the rural officials that their debates on the policy would not change it in any way, but that they had to think of ways of selling it to the public. In one of the consultative

meetings an urban based official was quoted as having said:

You must not persist in discussing a policy that has already been decided. These decisions were made two years ago...whatever we may talk about here, these things should not be discussed at the district level. These are ticklish subjects and they must await cabinet and presidential clearance. All decisions of land development policy have been concluded. We have the green light to go ahead with the land policy as it is presented. We must give this land to those people who can afford to develop and get on with it (Picard, 1987: 248).

This statement shows an urban bias in decision making. The views of those who resided in the rural areas and who knew a lot about what was taking place there were ignored. Robert Chambers (1983) sees urban and professional bias represented in this manner of decision making. This manner of consultation is the norm in Botswana. Government officials and the government itself never expect any criticism on the policy that has been decided by the elite and senior government officials in the capital city (Gaborone).

Consultation was also held with those who resided in the rural areas through kgotla public addresses. Although consultation was done in the rural community, their (rural dwellers) acceptance of the policy could be regarded as having been influenced by official bias. In fact it has to be noted that in many of the areas where the policy was to be implemented it was even opposed by cattle owners. In the Kweneng region for instance, a strong protest was considered by government as unnecessarily hostile against a good husbandry policy and the same was opposed by the Kgatla people (Molutsi, 1988). The government report on the consultation process also clearly shows that many people without cattle and the poor were not satisfied with social justice statements in the policy and were questioning the government about what was going to happen to them (Government of Botswana, 1977).

The consultation was based on the false premise that the rural people are ignorant about development. In the paper that announced the consultation it was stated that:

The purpose of the public information campaign must be made clear. It is not intended to steamroller public opinion. Most members of the public know nothing about land development policy. We have now reached a stage of deciding how to implement the grazing land policy... (Government of Botswana, 1977:132)

This is in line with Robert Chambers's views that groups that are worst off, the poor and uneducated are never consulted. Chambers (1983:6) clearly notes that 'superior knowledge and status are assumed with the professional regarding the rural poor as ignorant, backward, primitive, and as people who have only themselves to blame for their poverty'. He further notes that if by any chance the rural dwellers are consulted about development issues, it is quite often the rich who are given attention by urban professionals. Urban bias here combines with elite bias. It is a well known fact that the Basarwa, known elsewhere as Bushmen, are the poorest people in the country. Two years after the launching of the grazing land policy it was found that only 8 per cent of the population of the Sandveld where much of the policy was to be implemented, and where most of the Basarwa were living, had ever heard of the

policy (Murray, 1988). The country wide programme did not reach the people who were to be mostly affected by the policy. Since the kgotla remained the dominant method of consultation, it is also apparent that the Basarwa might have been missed as usually they are discriminated against at this institution (Mmatli and Prinse, 2000).

2.4 Implementation Outcomes

At the time of drafting and ultimately announcing the TGLP, the Central statistics Office (CSO) published a report on the socio-economic conditions in the rural areas- the Rural Income Distribution Survey. The findings of the report were that 45 percent of households in rural areas had no cattle. The report went on to show that cattle ownership was highly skewed with a few people owning most of the cattle (Parsons, 1981). It was established that it was the rich and middle income farmers who obtained income from cattle. Their percentages were 64 and 36 respectively (Reynolds, 1977:10). The general picture was that about 5 percent of rural households had a share of income which was equal to 70 percent of rural income and mostly accruing from the sale of livestock in the form of cattle (Reynolds, 1977). These figures show the severity of poverty in rural areas coupled with inequalities of wealth which was mostly cattle based. The implication of a policy that sought to commercialise livestock with heavy subsidies on the part of government to farmers who established ranches was to worsen inequalities that existed amongst the rural people.

Government policy on the establishment of commercial ranches was such that farmers were to pay rent for the use of the land. The revenue collected this way would be used to finance development in the communities established outside these ranches. In this way it was believed that those without cattle and those who could not afford ranching would in one way or the other benefit from livestock development. However, the government was very lenient on this as the rent was sub-economic. For instance, each farmer was to pay four thebe per hectare of land or 256 Pula (£175) for a 6400 hectare ranch with a five year grace period (Good, 1993). The net effect of this was to give land free of charge to those who were well off and could afford to establish ranches. Government has therefore not managed to obtain enough income from this sector to finance development of communal areas. To date cattle ranchers continue to enjoy dual rights to the land as there are no byelaws to bar them from grazing their cattle on communal land.

The TGLP resulted in land grab by the elite and the dispossession of the poor of the land which was originally theirs. This struggle was noted by Jack Parsons in 1981 as he described it this way:

...in rural Botswana there is a land grab with many of the earmarks of an enclosure system. More strongly, it has many of the characteristics of the capitalist 'primitive' accumulation, a dispossession of direct producers. This process has centrally involved a capitalist class in ownership of cattle and in positions in the state, using the state to advance the process against the interest of the majority of rural dwellers. And it is the state, through its control of social resources (financial, regulatory and coercive) which has been central to the whole movement despite its rhetoric to the contrary (Parson, 1981:238)

Giving exclusive rights over the control of land to commercial ranchers had the effect of having people driven away from those areas to create a way for development. Although many suffered it was the Basarwa who mostly suffered. They are amongst the despised of the Batswana communities as noted. They have suffered in that even people who held high positions in government thought that they had no rights to land (Mogwe, 1994). For instance on the issue of land and the Basarwa, the Attorney General who is responsible for adjudicating matters that deal with rights of individuals once noted:

As far as I have been able to ascertain, the Basarwa have always been true nomads, owning no allegiance to any chief or tribe, but have ranged far and wide for a very long time over large areas of the Kalahari in which they enjoy hunting rights, which they enjoy today...Tentatively however, it appears to me that (a) the true nomad Basarwa can have no rights of any kind except the right to hunting (cited in Hitchcock, 1982:22)

The dispossession of people of their land and claiming that they do not have land rights is totally against the spirit of social justice. In this way this has helped to exacerbate social inequalities between the rich and the poor. Basarwa today continue to lose land and suffer from torture by wildlife officials despite the fact that they have rights to hunting. Alice Mogwe (1994) notes that the torture of the Basarwa has even resulted in one of them being killed by police officials in 1992.

Failure to listen to the masses and dissatisfaction with the consultative process did not end with the TGLP but came to be evident in other land reforms, such as the 1991 agricultural fencing component, that took place at national and district levels many years later (Poteete, 2002; Manatsha, 2010). In the North East District, Manatsha noted similarities between the TGLP and the Tati Land Board policy of distributing land that it had purchased from the Tati Company that holds most of the land in the area since the colonial period. Prior to implementing the policy government consultations were undertaken with residents in kgotla meetings. The residents suggested that since they do not own the land, it should be given to the community rather than being commercialised and sold to the individuals. Despite these consultations, the bureaucrats in the end decided that the land should not be free but sold and allocated to those who can afford to develop it. This resulted in a land grab by the syndicates of big farmers at the expense of the small farmers who did not have the necessary capital to access and develop it. This was contrary to the sentiments expressed during the public gatherings. Manatsha (2010) further explains that the civil servants might have been coerced by the politicians to implement the policy in the manner that would serve their interest and not those of the masses.

3. Conclusion

The livestock policies represent an elite and urban bias that is persistent in Botswana's development planning and policy formulation processes. This is shown by the fact that most decisions about the sector and development in general are decided by the top civil servants (mostly economists) and politicians whose interests lie in the urban areas and who are interested developing those areas in the rural economy which favour their advancement, that

is, livestock development. For instance, the democracy project conducted in 1988 has revealed that most of the politicians at that time were cattle ranchers (Molutsi, 1989). All these people reside in urban areas where they formulate policy. This is done with very minimal input of the rural people themselves. On consultation, views of the rural people are always confined to how the policy is to be implemented and not on whether they want the policy at all (Holm & Molutsi, 1990; Molomo, 1989). Policy formulation and the initiation of development strategies and programmes in Botswana are not client-driven in that the priorities of the communities, especially rural dwellers, are overpowered by outside interventions. In this way livestock development policy and particularly Tribal Grazing Land Policy has tended to favour the advancement of the rich at the expense of the poor and thus leading to increase in income differentials in the rural economy. It is very important for researchers to undertake studies that provide a theoretical basis of why practitioners fail to take into account people's views. It is also important to interrogate the existing consultative structures to establish if they encompass all stakeholders including the intended beneficiaries.

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